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*Les ombres noires de Saint Domingue: The Impact of Black Women on Gender
and Racial Boundaries in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century France*

by

Robin Mitchell

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Gender, Women and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Tyler Stovall, Chair

Professor Carla Hesse

Professor Darcy Grigsby

Fall 2010

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Abstract

Les ombres noires de Saint Domingue: The Impact of Black Women on Gender & Racial Boundaries in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century France

by

Robin Mitchell

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Tyler Stovall, Chair

There were few black women on French soil in the nineteenth century, yet images of and discussions about them are found in political, artistic, scientific, and various social milieus. This paradox is explored for its symbolic and nationalistic significance by investigating how public discourse about them fostered specific aspects of French national identity. The loss by revolution of the black colony of Saint Domingue (Haiti) created an influx of refugees that haunted France. Specific types of representations of black women helped mitigate this national trauma.

Using data collected from archives, art, literature, and legislation, as well as social, scientific, and political discourse, the lives and public representation of four very real black women from late eighteenth-century Saint Domingue through the abolition of slavery in 1848 – including the *ancien régime*, the Napoleonic era, and the Restoration of monarchy – are examined for their role in the construction of French social, sexual and racial identity.

The opening overview examines racial policies important for keeping whites and non-whites legally distinct – exacerbated by the loose control of mores in colonial Saint Domingue. The legal case of Henriette Lucille tested the claim that slavery did not exist on French soil, exposing how individual attitudes were undermining royal authority. Sarah Bartmann, *the Hottentot Venus*, was used by the scientific community to quantify race, as well as by the white French public to witness its superiority over blacks. Ourika was a very young black girl given to an aristocratic woman as a house pet. She was, however, raised in the household as an aristocrat. Though she died young, her reputation became the subject of literary and theater works that emphasized the impossibility of her marrying a white French man of her own class. Last, Jeanne Duval, common-law wife of Charles Baudelaire is seen through the record of her life left by him and their contemporaries as well as his later biographers – an ugly portrait of a mulatto of base behavior unworthy of the poetic genius whom she inspired.

Exposed is the way that race was utilized – along with gender, sexuality and class – to encourage unity amongst white French men and women, highlighting why these black women were such important tools in that national quest. Regardless of who they were or where they came from, the overarching narrative was the reinforcement of the inauthentic Frenchness of black women. Yet the representations of them also reveal the fissures in the definition of what it meant to be French that challenged existing gender and racial boundaries within white French society.

DEDICATION

This is for my parents, Edward and Loretta Mitchell, who sacrificed everything for this and never made me feel like it was one; who sent money they did not have so I could work, encouragement when it was needed, hope when I had none, and most importantly, who *never for a moment* doubted.

And to the black women – *les femmes noires* – whose names appear in this project, women I could not yet write about, and those whose names are lost to history, who had these often horrific representations foisted upon them and yet still managed to leave enough evidence so we could find them – I hope you all are proud.

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LIST OF ARCHIVES / ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Archives nationales de France, Paris
BNF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
BSG	Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris
CAOM	Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence
MDH	Musée de l'Homme, Paris

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PREFACE

In “Gender, Race and Nation: the Comparative Anatomy of Hottentot Women in Europe I: 1815-1817,” Anne Fausto-Sterling makes an eloquent argument regarding her decision not to include any illustrations of Sarah Bartmann in her essay, stating to do so “would continue to state the question as a matter of science and to focus us visually on Bartmann as deviant.” While I agree with her reasoning, I find myself deconstructing representation in ways that Fausto-Sterling does not. Because of this, I believe that it is crucial to include sometimes objectionable prints of black women, not to focus on any of them as deviant (which is how they are often portrayed), but to highlight the lengths to which the French would go to prove that black women were aberrant. In showing these prints, it is my intent to direct the gaze away from the objectification of black female bodies and back against itself, in an effort to examine the motives behind the gaze. Race, gender, sexuality, and other social markers are as highly charged in today’s societies as in times past. I have attempted to be sensitive in the choices I made, though the line still remains precarious. I hope I have successfully walked it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A robbery in Italy (the last trip before coming back to America) resulted in the loss of two years of research: notes, pictures, and archival documents, along with everything else I owned, save my beloved computer. It truly seemed that all was lost. Unfortunately, one of the most precious things taken was the running list of people to thank I began accumulating almost ten years ago. That was at the beginning of writing this dissertation. At the end of the journey, an accident left me unable to walk for many months. It is easy to see why I thought this journey would never come to fruition. Yet, here we are. So please forgive me if I have forgotten to thank you personally here, and know my heart thanked you constantly. And believe me when I say that these pages – however long they end up – are as important to me as the document that follows them.

First, and foremost, I convey my gratitude to my committee at Berkeley: Tyler Stovall, who, when I was an undergraduate promised my parents and me that I would get my doctorate. You have kept your promise, and I am forever grateful. It's been a long road and I thank you truly for taking me on this amazing trip. Susanna Barrows, who died before she saw the finished product: words fail me. They truly do; walking the streets of Paris was never as much fun as when I was with you, thank you for making it come alive for me. I miss you with all my heart. Carla Hesse, who stepped up time and time again; I can't begin to tell you how much you have meant to me. The women who grace this work are here because of what you taught me. And last, but certainly not least, the wondrous Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby. I thought about you with every image and hope that they make you smile. Thank you.

To the professors who have guided me through this maze: From Berkeley: Waldo Martin (who never forgot to tell me to breathe), James Vernon (who made me forget to be nervous), and the late Reggie Zelnik (who growled at me with a smile and said, "oh just get on with it!"). From Santa Cruz: David Anthony, who never forgot to check on me; and from Mills College: Melinda Micco; and, Bert Gordon, who has always treated me like a colleague (and kept me well fed in Paris). I send my profound thanks to you all. As most of us know, graduate students do not function without benefit of an amazing department. Thank you to Mabel Lee, Barbara Hayashida and Ellen Thompson. Thank you also to Sandy Richmond (who kept me in coins!). Saving the best for last, Deborah Kerlegon, who was the most amazing boss, hand holder and ardent believer that I would get to this moment. You better know how much I adore you.

To my Berkeley friends and colleagues Karen O'Neill, Amy Aisen, Christine Quinan, Lowry Martin, Anastasia Kayiatos, Blake Johnson, Nimisha Barton, Nadege Clitandre, and Murat Dagli – thank you all for the encouragement, the all nighters, the extra push and the love. The Gender and Women's Studies department provided teaching opportunities, funding, and much support in writing two chapters (thank you for your amazing feedback, Mino Moallem!); Charis Thompson was (and still is) an inspiration; and a shout out to Althea Cummings for taking such good care of me! I would also like to thank the Office of Diversity, which provided me with the fellowship to begin my studies at CAL.

To my friends and colleagues at SUNY College at Oneonta: It is impossible to overstate the benefits of the dissertation fellowship; it has allowed me to gain valuable teaching experience and also to finish this project. More importantly, it has offered mentorship (I'm looking at you, Gretchen Sorin and Susan Bernardin); much needed encouragement (thanks, Chris Keegan); and the type of friendship and guidance that was a gift from the ancestors (love to Caridad Souza and

Kathleen O'Mara). Thank you also to the women's writing group (WAMP forever!) for listening to the work (special thanks to Gina Keel and Cynthia Klink); and thanks to my students at Oneonta, who have been amazingly patient and wonderful during this process (special thanks to Rebekah Cramer!). Finally, to my friend Mette Harder, who translated the German, who kept me sane, and who became my closest friend: my most ardent gratitude.

Merci beaucoup to the Paris brigade: Eric Saugera for making Bordeaux and Nantes unforgettable; Philippe Mennencier at the *Musee de l'Homme* for his gracious assistance and kind friendship, and for making me believe that "*tout est possible*;" thank you also to the staff. To the Malbrands, especially Mme Malbrand and Alex, for giving me a family in Paris. I adore you all.

Paris friends who made it possible for me to not only live in Paris, but to thrive: Hernan Cortes, who deserves an entire page for himself, Kerry James (who made Paris SING!); Sarah Horowitz, my friend, guide, helper and encourager (who embraced "no money fun" and showed me how to just sit down and write); Mori Benjamin, my partner in crime and the best person alive to experience Paris with! Sheryl Kroen for always believing I could do this, and to Leana and Josh, for just making Paris so much fun. To Claire Garcia and the Colorado College Fall 2005 class abroad, *The New Negro and Négritude Movements in France, 1900-1960*, thanks for letting me present my work and for offering such amazing feedback (Homer's sirens, indeed!); Trica Keaton, who became my friend; Monique Wells for encouraging me and keeping me in hot chocolate, all the people who came on the walking tours and experienced "Black Paris" with me. And finally, Robin Bates and Kat St. Thomas for being the most amazing Black Paris Divas on the planet. I bow down in your presence.

My friends in California and places far away: Nicola Place, who will not be happy that I thank her for all that she has done for me financially, psychologically and every other way imaginable (ha, you're not the boss of me!); Carroll Johnson at the Library of Congress; John Wecker (who showed me Europe!); Anneke Hogeland and Cynthia Turner (for making me sane enough to write); Erin Carlson for reading and reading and reading; Kristina Del Pino and Corey Capers (the smartest man I have ever known); my sister girls Rosetta Saunders, Noliwe Alexander, Tammy Sanders, Brinda Mehta, and Unique Holland, for more than my heart can tell them; Steven Martin; and Sunny McFadden (for being my closest friend). And to David Carr, who made me laugh, who is a genius, and who, quite simply, saved my life. You have a friend for life, Mr. Carr.

Finally, to my family: my little brother, Guy Mitchell (I beat you!), Sherri Ellerbe, Sharon Youmans, Andrei-Ioan Marinescu Cazacu, and to Stephanie Li: you all have been my toughest critics, my most ardent supporters, and my best friends. I love you.

This is for all of you. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

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- Mentored Research Fellowship, Office of the President, UC Berkeley, 2007-2008.
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- Graduate Opportunity Dissertation Fellowship, UC Berkeley, 2005-2006.
- Honorable Mention, Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, 2005, 2006.

- Dean's Normative Time Fellowship, UC Berkeley, 2004-2005.
 - Ehrman Travel Fellowship to Paris, France, UC Berkeley, 2004-2005.
 - Ehrman Fellowship, UC Berkeley, Fall 2003.
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 - Marion Long Stebbins Prize for outstanding promise in Dramatic Arts, Spring 1998.
 - *Reaching Beyond Award* for excellence in the field of Ethnic Studies, Spring 1998.
 - Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities - Inducted Spring 1997.
 - Mills Undergraduate Grant: Field Research in Paris, undergraduate thesis, Winter 1997.
 - Irvine Fellowship for Future Ph.D.'s, Stanford University, 1997.
 - Palladium, Mills College Honor Society - Inducted Spring 1997.
 - Semester Honors/Dean's List - 1995-1996; 1996-1997; 1997-1998.
 - Mary Atkins Endowed Scholarship for Academic Excellence, 1997-1998.
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-

PUBLICATIONS / PRODUCTIONS

- "Another Means of Understanding the Gaze: Sarah Bartmann and the Development of Nineteenth-Century French National Identity," *They Called Her Hottentot: The Art, Science, and Fiction of Sarah Baartman*, eds. Deborah Willis and Carla Williams (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).
 - *Past & Present: The Journey*, a play in three acts. Original premiere Mills College Drama Department, Oakland, California, Spring 1997.
-

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- "A Foreign Wonder: A Black Venus in France's Royal Court." To be submitted to the *French Historical Studies* Journal.
- "Would you like pubic hair with that?: Sex, Race, Gender and the 'Real' Real Doll in *Lars and the Real Girl*," co-author, Christine Quinan. To be submitted to the *Journal of Popular Culture*.

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 - Sole course responsibility; Course designer
 - Fulfills upper-division History Department requirement
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 - Discussion Section Leader; Grader

- Graduate Student Instructor (GSI), Gender and Women's Studies 10, "Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies," Susan George, Lecturer, UC Berkeley, Fall 2006.
 - Discussion Section Leader; Grader
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- Teaching Assistant (TA), "African American Women's History," Mills College, Spring 1998.
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- Teaching Assistant (TA), "Contemporary Women Writers of Africa," Mills College, Fall 1997.
 - Tutoring; Examination preparation
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 - Tutoring; Examination preparation

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- Invited Speaker, Ralph R. Watkins Africana Studies Lecture Series at the SUNY College at Oneonta, "*La Blanche Nègresse: Ourika and the Re-Assimilation of Colonial Elites in Post-Haitian Revolutionary France*," March 17, 2010.
- Invited Speaker, Women's and Gender Studies "Gender out of Bounds" Faculty Speaker Series at the SUNY College at Oneonta, "Chocolate-Covered Cherry: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Making of Nineteenth-Century French National Identity," October 20, 2009.
- Conference Presenter, "In/visible Presences: Race, Culture and the Construction of Identities," *Society for French Historical Studies* Conference, Rutgers University. Conference Paper: "Another Means of Understanding the Gaze: Sarah Bartmann and the Development of Nineteenth-Century French National Identity," April 2008.
- Invited Speaker, Ethnic Studies Department, "Workshop on Applying to Graduate School and Law School," Mills College, November 13, 2007.
- Guest Lecturer, "Representations of *La Belle Hottentote* in Early Nineteenth-Century Paris," Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies, UC Berkeley, Fall 2006.
- Guest Lecturer, "Africans and African Americans in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Paris," for Colorado College, Paris, France Semester Abroad Program, Fall 2005.
- Guest Lecturer, "African American Artists: Primitivism in the Paradigm Parisian," Mills College, Spring 1998.
- Guest Lecturer, "Harlem Renaissance & Négritude: Diasporic Representations in Problematic Paris," for College 10EE: African American Perspectives in Contemporary Art, Culture & Politics, Mills College, Spring 1998.
- Invited Speaker, Critical Resistance Conference Panel, UC Berkeley, Winter 1998.
- Guest Lecturer, "Harlem Renaissance & Négritude: Diasporic Representations in Problematic Paris," for Paris in the 20s, Mills College, Fall 1997.

RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Lectureship, Women's and Gender Studies, SUNY College at Oneonta, 2010-2011.

- Research Assistant. Research and administrative support for Thomas Lacquer, Professor of History, UC Berkeley, for his upcoming book on Death, Spring 2009.
- Research Assistant. Conducted archival research for Donna Murch, Assistant Professor of History, Rutgers University, for her forthcoming book, “The Black House: Race and the Struggle for Power in Postwar Oakland,” Summer 2007.
- Research Assistant. Conducted primary source research for Thomas Metcalf, Professor of History, UC Berkeley, for his work entitled, “Gurkas and the Military, 1860-1920,” Summer 2004.
- Research Assistant. Conducted interviews for Julia Sudbury, Professor of Ethnic Studies, Mills College, in preparation for her book, “Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex,” Fall 2000.
- Researcher, *School of Public Health*, University of California, Santa Cruz, and University of California, Berkeley. Conducted independent research on social movements in six major cities; responsible for writing case histories and status reports for grant organizations; analysis and qualification of case evidence, January 2000 to December 2001.
- Consulting Associate (Temporary), *The Permanente Company*, Oakland, California. Comprehensive research for development of new business and supplement for current business projects; Consulting Associate on medical campaigns, from conception to execution; independent project management on various assignments, January 1999 to August 1999.
- Researcher / Assistant to Exhibit Directors, *Library of Congress*. Primary and associative research for *The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship* exhibit; researcher for the *Thomas Jefferson* exhibit; supplementary research for the *American Treasures of the Library of Congress* permanent exhibit; preliminary research for the *Margaret Mead* exhibit; directed research and exhibit staff, *Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture* exhibit (see credits/acknowledgement pages for individual exhibits on-line at Library of Congress Exhibitions website: <http://loc.gov>), August to December 1998.
- Intern, Exhibitions, *Library of Congress*, Summer, 1998.

ACADEMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Second Reader, Museum Studies Master’s Candidate Thesis, SUNY College at Oneonta (Cooperstown), Spring 2010.
- Participant, Oneonta Safe Space Program, 2009-Present.
- Mentor to undergraduates, SUNY College at Oneonta, 2009-present.
- Mentor to undergraduates, UC Berkeley, 2002-present.
- Board Member, Mills College Board of Trustees, 2000-2003.
- Co-President, Mills College Black Women’s Collective, 1996-1997.
- Student Representative, Mills College Committee for Admission & Financial Aid (COAFA), 1995-1998.
- Participant, Mills College Public Safety Search Committee, Spring 1997.
- Mentor Program Coordinator, Upward Bound Program, Mills College, October 1995 to May 1998.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION SERVICE

- Member, Gender and Sexuality Resource Center Advisory Committee, SUNY College at Oneonta.
- Student Participant, Mills College Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Panel, Spring 1998.
- Student Representative, Mills College Interview Panel - Multicultural Director Search, Fall 1997.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Member, *Society for French Historical Studies*, 2007-Present.
- Member, *The Coordinating Council for Women in History* (CCWH), 2006-present.
- Member, *Association of Black Women Historians*, 2003-present.

INTRODUCTION:

THE BLACK MARIANNES: RACE, GENDER, AND THE IMPACT OF THE
HAITIAN REVOLUTION IN FRANCE, 1802-1848



Fig. 0.1: Marie-Guillemine Benoist (1768-1826), *Portrait d'une négresse*, 1800, oil on canvas, 81 x 65.1 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre

If skin is the only difference then the Negro might be considered a black European. The Negro is, however, so noticeably different from the European that one must look beyond skin color.¹
 Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring, *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Negers vom Europäer*

Eugene Delacroix's 1830 painting, *The 28th July Liberty Leading the People* (fig. 0.2) immortalized the iconic representation of the French nation as a female figure, and linked womanhood with a seminal moment in French history: the revolution of 1830. A bare breasted and pale Marianne carries the nation's flag, leading French subjects of many classes into citizenship – or at the very least, increased agency.² Her Phrygian cap and the French tri-color flag that she carries signify liberty and remind the viewer of the days of the not-so-distant French Revolution of 1789. In the political climate of 1830, Delacroix intended Marianne to stand as an allegory of France's momentous past as a Republic, as well as renewed hopes for its future.³ Though the depiction of Marianne has changed over time,⁴ she remains a white woman who personifies liberty.⁵ And yet, she is not the sole representation of womanhood in France. Indeed, Marianne has a doppelgänger that precedes Delacroix's painting by several decades: the black woman.⁶

¹ Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring, "Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Negers vom Europäer" (1785), quoted in Londa Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 80.

² In a letter to his brother Charles, dated October 12, 1830, Delacroix wrote that "I have undertaken a modern subject, a barricade, and although I may not have fought for my country, at least I shall have painted for her. It has restored my good spirits." *Eugene Delacroix Selected Letters, 1813-1863*, edited and translated by Jean Stewart, introduction by John Russell (Boston: MFA Publications; illustrated edition, August 2, 2001), 162. Page 13 of the same volume states the letter was written on 18 October. According to the *Musée du Louvre*. "This powerful, innovative painting caused an uproar at the Salon of 1831. The freedom of the artist's brushwork depicted the Republic not as a symbolic image but as a real woman — dirty, half-naked, and hirsute. Only smooth-skinned, allegorical nudity was acceptable! This forceful work also heralded the critical function of contemporary art. Louis-Philip grasped the message only too well: he purchased the painting to commemorate his accession to the throne, then hid it away so that its subversiveness could not turn against him."

http://www.louvre.fr/llv/activite/detail_parcours.jsp?CURRENT_LLV_PARCOURS%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198674098115&CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198674098179&CURRENT_LLV_CHEMINEMENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198674098179&bmLocale=en (accessed July, 2010).

³ Given the explicitly revolutionary tenor of the painting, I do not believe Delacroix envisioned a constitutional monarchy as the result of the Revolution of 1830.

⁴ Since the painting was first rendered, many of the most famous and beautiful faces of France have been used to symbolize Marianne, including Brigitte Bardot, Mireille Mathieu, Catherine Deneuve, Inès de la Fressange, Laetitia Casta and Evelyn Thomas.

⁵ See Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Maurice Agulhon, *Liberty, the Republic and the Goddess: 1789-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Maurice Agulhon, Annette Becker, and Evelyne Cohen, *La République en représentations: autour de l'œuvre de Maurice Agulhon, Histoire de la France aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006); Maurice Agulhon and Pierre Bonte, *Marianne dans la cité*, Collection Espaces urbains (Paris: Dexia, 2001); Jean-Michel Renault, *Les fêtes de la République* (Paris: Créations du Pélican, 2003); and Robert Marty, *Marianne fille de Puylaurens, ou, Comment fut baptisée la République!* (Terra de cocanha, Puylaurens: IEO, 2006).

⁶ James Smalls, "Slavery is a Woman: Race, Gender, and Visuality in Marie Benoist's *Portrait d'une négresse* (1800), <http://www.lithgalleries.com/arthistory/Slavery-is-a-Woman.html> (accessed July 7, 2010). I find several problematic issues in Smalls' otherwise excellent essay. He writes that the painting can be seen "as a voice of protest," but there is little which suggests it should be in that vein. He also suggests that the painting is a link in a long line between white women and slavery. While this is correct, he neglects to mention that white women (particularly feminists) easily discarded this analogy when it no longer suited them (for instance, Olympe de Gouges's use of slavery to depict the servitude of women was abandoned after she wrote a very strong response against blacks after the Haitian Revolution).



Fig. 0.2: Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, 1830, oil on canvas, 260 cm × 325 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

Hanging in the *Musée du Louvre* – along with Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* – is Marie-Guillemine Benoist’s painting « *Portrait d’un négresse* »⁷ (fig. 0.1). Painted in 1800, the unnamed black woman faces her audience with her breast exposed, as does Marianne. The similarity, however, ends there.⁸ Though Marianne’s breast is on display, her primary concern is “leading her people,” not her own self-presentation. The viewer may perceive it as either erotic or incidental. In contrast, the breast of the negress is exposed in an explicitly sexualized way.⁹ Her arm hugs her dress in a gesture that seems to keep her other breast from also being revealed. Surrounded by the accoutrements of

Finally, Smalls assumes that Benoit “assumed sympathy toward the black woman,” but again, offers no proof of said sympathy. This seems problematic in the face of his argument that Benoit places herself in a position of power, and that she did not concern herself with even the name of her subject. See also James Smalls, “‘Race’ As Spectacle in Late-Nineteenth-Century French Art and Popular Culture” *French Historical Studies* 26:2 (2003); Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-revolutionary France* (London: Yale University Press, 2002); and Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁷ Marie-Guillemine Benoist was born into the aristocracy; she was a professional painter who studied under Jacques-Louis David (one of three women chosen to receive instruction). Some critics of the painting stated that she did not paint the canvas, believing its style to be more suited toward David’s “masculinist” style. Others believed the race of her subject in her painting “tainted” Benoit – a point developed throughout this study. See James Smalls’ “‘Slavery Is a Woman: ‘Race,’ Gender and Visuality in Marie Benoist’s *Portrait D’une Négresse* (1800).” *NCAW* (Spring 2004), especially pages 6-7 and 10-11.

⁸ Griselda Pollock in *Differencing the Canon* writes that the “negress” was either African or African-Caribbean whom “her sailor brother-in-law had brought back from France from the Antilles,” 297.

⁹ Marilyn Yalmon, *A History of the Breast* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Maura Spiegel and Lithe Sebasta, *The Breast Book: An Intimate and Curious History* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2002); Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Cristelle Louise Baskins and Lisa Rosenthal, *Early Modern Visual Allegory: Embodying Meaning* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007); and Smalls also devotes some pages in his essay on Benoit on the breast in Western art.

luxury – the sumptuous shawl, the beautiful chair – the plainness of her own white dress, her lack of a name and, most importantly, her skin color, show “the negress” to be merely an ornament of her owner’s wealth. Her direct and somewhat intimate stare at the viewer is enigmatic. The negress also wears those exalted colors of revolution, in the form of her blue shawl, red sash, and white dress – but for her they hardly signify revolution.¹⁰ Finally, while male comrades-in-arms surround Marianne, it is she who leads them into their future. The negress, in contrast, is alone. Moreover, unlike Marianne’s Phrygian hat, the *tignon* atop the negress’s head – a colonial marker of her enslavement – confirms her subjugated status. Her passivity (or resignation) invites a sustained and sexualized gaze. She is eroticized and touchable, as much a product for consumption as the accessories surrounding her.



Fig. 0.3: Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), *Portrait of Madame Emilie Seriziat and her Son*, 1795, oil on canvas, 131 × 96 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

Benoist’s *Portrait* of a black woman is not an anomaly. In fact, there were significant moments where images of and discourse about black women appeared in early nineteenth-century

¹⁰ Griselda Pollack, *Differencing the Canon*, 297. There is an elegance to Benoist’s painting and the negress’s facial appearance which brings to mind Jacques-Louis David’s 1795 portrait of Madame Seriziat (see fig. 0.3). However, in his painting, Madame Seriziat is named, completely covered up, and with her towheaded son. Her serene expression and dress represent purity in a way that the sheet-like garment covering the negress does not.

France.¹¹ They were not limited to paintings, but also occurred in performances/ethnographic spectacles, such as Sarah Bartmann's 1814 tour as the Hottentot Venus, and popular novels such as *Ourika* by the Duchesse de Duras in 1823. Victor Hugo even included these two iconic black women in his masterpiece, *Les Misérables*.¹² But were such representations of black women simply Orientalist window-dressing?

The discursive presence of black women that appeared in early to mid-nineteenth-century France was fueled, and continuously haunted, by a singular occurrence: the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803. The loss of this important colony was seen and felt as a major defeat by France, the first modern European power to suffer a loss of this magnitude at the hands of blacks. The failure in Haiti, taken as a defeat at the hands of black *men*, facilitated a solidification of French national identity via the black *female* body. Representations of black women as savage, hypersexual, and a threat to the purity of the French nation were a way for the French to digest the ramifications of a population suddenly more racialized by the arrival of colonial refugees.

The trauma of Saint Domingue was displaced in a manner and onto a body that made it seem safer to discuss. In reality this was not the case at all, for the use of the black female body is not insignificant. This female body – through which the suddenly more racialized society could be manipulated – may have *seemed* safer, but was in fact just as problematic, exacerbating both Negrophobia and Negrophilia in France.¹³ The context for explaining cultural representations of black women can be found not only in high art and scientific discourse, but in the racial anxiety first experienced in France's black colonies, and later in the social and political disorder that the Haitian Revolution intensified in France proper.

Historians such as David Bell have addressed French national identity in the eighteenth century, and there is scholarship on nationalism in the late nineteenth century, specifically affected by the trauma of the Franco-Prussian War.¹⁴ Yet there is nothing for the period following the Haitian Revolution through abolition of slavery in France in 1848. This is particularly curious given the collective hand-wringing and self-examination that normally follows a loss of such magnitude – especially since the military, political and cultural loss came at the hands of so-called racial inferiors. What, then, did it truly mean to be French? To be a citizen? To be modern? In what ways did race, as an ideology, and blacks and blackness, specifically, make their way into a French construction of self? How do gender and class intersect with race as a means to construct national identity?

My work, then, highlights the symbolic and nationalistic significance of black women in France, as well as asks how these images and discussions about them helped foster specific forms of

¹¹ As I speak about more fully in the section on “methodology,” my use of imagery under the aegis of “discursive” is meant inclusively to incorporate, in this case, paintings. I do so to highlight important cultural perspectives and to also expand notions of what should be included under the aegis of “discourse” to what we see as well.

¹² Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, five volumes (Paris: I. E. Hugues, 1862). The remark about Ourika appears in vol. 1, “Fantine,” book third, chap. 1; the Bartmann reference appears in vol. 3, book first, chap. 10. I return to these two women later. Interestingly, some editions of *Les Misérables* have completely eliminated their passages. Even though the dates of Hugo's publication are outside the dates of this dissertation, I note this to show that he felt that these women (and their stories) resonated, and should be discussed within the dates appropriate to their lives in Paris.

¹³ William Cohen contends that the loss in Haiti fueled an existing Negrophobia; see William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 120. For a discussion on Negrophobia, see Deslozières Baudry, *Les égarements du négrophilisme* (Paris: Migneret, 1802). It is this perceived Negrophilia, particularly at the end of the Haitian Revolution, that was fueled by the fear of blacks in France and facilitated a more vocal Negrophobia. Earlier works on the need (or justification) of slavery in France were also available; see also *De la nécessité d'adopter l'esclavage en France* (Paris: Chez Baillio, 1797).

¹⁴ David Avrom Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). See also Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

French national identity. To do so, it invokes the mutual impact of science and popular culture in informing and regulating cultural behavior. It considers the existing “boundaries” which separate scientific discourse from popular entertainment to illustrate how these constraints contribute to an analytical misreading about the overall significance of black women in French culture.

Art historian James Smalls remarks that « *Portrait d'une négresse* » links the institution of slavery and France's black colonies to metropolitan France, with all of its problematic elements. Smalls writes that the painting “is a typical colonialist picture in that the artist who created it made use of the racialized Other to define and empower the colonizing self. That is, the *Portrait* constitutes a visual record of white women's construction and affirmation of self through the racial and cultural Other.”¹⁵ Greg Tate puts this paradox more bluntly: “It is my belief that capitalism's original commodity fetish was the Africans auctioned here [in America] as slaves, whose reduction from subjects to abstracted objects has made them seem larger than life and less than human at the same time. It is for this reason that the Black body, and subsequently Black culture, has become a hungered-after taboo item and a nightmarish bugbear in the badlands of the American racial imagination. Something to be possessed and something to be erased.”¹⁶ Whether capitalism makes “fetishes” of commodities any more than any other system of exchange is debatable. However, what I think Tate is pointing out is the notion that these so-called living objects can be simultaneously much more and much less than the sum of their parts.

This dissertation echoes Smalls' assertion that “defining and empowering the colonial [and post-colonial] self” was of paramount importance to white French men and women. Yet it also emphasizes that the “colonial self” had just lost its most important colony. It investigates both the continued eroticization of the black female body and the simultaneous need to disavow that body. Finally, this dissertation speaks to the continuing reinforcement of the unsuitability of blacks to be part of the idea of Frenchness – and therefore the French nation – or as Smalls suggests of the *Portrait*, “the black body is put forth as a ‘foreign’ element within an upper class cultural and domestic space.”¹⁷ Clearly the negress does not belong there. I argue that in early nineteenth-century France, a time of tension and uncertainty about both race and gender, a study of black women – the Other in both aspects – permits us to explore how France grappled with both issues in general. This dissertation shows how the use of the black female body allowed white French women to discuss issues of race and gender, while white French men could use the black female body to discuss white women, black women, *and* black men – layering many social and political tensions onto one “body.”¹⁸ For instance, as chapter one highlights, while white French men were legally forbidding people of color from wearing certain items, white French women took it upon themselves to adopt that new clothing in the belief it would make them more sexually appealing to white men than their non-white counterparts. White women writers, as addressed in chapter four used the black female body to elevate their own validity for Frenchness, while white French men used that same body, as shown in chapter three, to show French whites – both men and women – the risk of non-normative behaviors.

Understanding the ways that French society coped with the unpredictability and contentiousness of the era reveals new and unexplored avenues through which French national

¹⁵ Smalls, “Slavery is a Woman,” 4.

¹⁶ Greg Tate, “Nigs R Us, or How Blackfolk Became Fetish Objects,” in *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*, ed. Greg Tate (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 4.

¹⁷ Smalls, “Slavery is a Woman,” 10.

¹⁸ Gustave d'Eichthal, secretary of the Société Ethnologique wrote that blacks were a “female race.” “Just like the woman, the black is deprived of political and scientific intelligence. . . . Like the woman he also likes jewelry, dance and singing.” Gustave d' Eichthal and Ismayl Urbain, *Lettres sur la race noire et la race blanche* (Paris: Chez Paulin, 1839), 15-16, 22, as quoted in William B. Cohen, *The French Encounters with Africans*, 236.

identity developed. These tensions, whether expressed in popular culture, colonial publications, or scientific discourse, were disseminated through a new discursive vehicle. By investigating the discursive presence of black women in nineteenth-century France – how they were seen, perceived, produced and represented – the intent of this dissertation is to examine how the French government and French elites were deeply unsettled by the Haitian Revolution, and how this disturbance contributed to an unclaimed and ignored racialized national identity. In doing so, it gives, in a manner previously unexamined, a means of seeing how race and gender functioned within in the metropole during the Restoration.

* * *

Before proceeding, it is important to note that two of my dissertation subjects are black Africans (one from Senegal, the other from South Africa). While there is historical specificity in their actual site of origin, I look at the ways that their blackness dictated a conversation not about Africa, but about Saint Domingue, and the Haitian Revolution specifically. In addition, although some of the black women in my study were of mixed race, in my work I conflate them all under the category of “black.” It is critically important to understand that people of color in Saint Domingue saw themselves as socially, economically and politically distinct from “full” blacks.¹⁹ These distinctions continued upon French soil. Clearly, whites were not the only ones who deployed racial categories, though how one was classified did not always match up with the categories in which one would self-identify. As such, conflating all non-white individuals as “black” under any type of communal rubric would certainly have been immediately and widely contested by the very women my dissertation examines.²⁰ Yet, the importance of defining and understanding racial difference in early nineteenth-century France was uncontested, as was the shoring up of racial policies through key debates and laws that relegated those with any amount of “black blood” into the category of blackness, whatever the degree. The usefulness of “black” as an analytical category, and not simply as a racial one, therefore allows for those acknowledgements, even while also giving space to confirm the inadequacy of these racial categories.²¹

I began this introduction with an epigraph from German scientist Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring who remarked that something other than skin color needed to be examined in order to find out what was so different about blacks in order to exclude them from Europeaness. Far from being a particular problem of Germany, race, racism and the racial discourse were important throughout Europe.²² So before moving on to France’s particular relationship with race, a review on Western European views on race can be instructive.

¹⁹ Chap. 1 goes into detail about how race was categorized in pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue, as well as the ramifications for those racial categories. Also, what the French called *gens du couleur*, or people of color, would be what modern-day scholars would define as “people of mixed-race heritage.” I will use both of these terms, particularly when the language of the period dictates those historical distinctions.

²⁰ I do not mean to imply that whites were not “raced” or racialized; of course they were. Their refusal to see themselves as such, or to acknowledge their hegemonic position, does not make it less so. It actually strengthens my belief that Frenchness required unacknowledged whiteness as a racial identity.

²¹ See Christopher L. Miller’s discussion on “The ‘Idea’ of Blackness” in his work *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 29-32.

²² See Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870-2000* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001); George Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Issac and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Western European Views on Race

European physical anthropologists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries proposed various systems of racial classifications based on such observable characteristics as skin color, hair type, body proportions, and skull measurements. From this emerged two schools of thought: monogenism and polygenism. Monogenism advocated that all humans were descended from one set of ancestors – therefore differences could be accounted for based on such variables as environment or temperature, for example. George Buffon reasoned that climate was the “chief cause of the different colors of men.”²³ Immanuel Kant, in *On the Different Races of Man* (1775), identified the “races” and aligned peoples’ characters with their physical appearance. He claimed that “it is necessary to assume only four races of man,” which he constructed as follows: first race, very blond (northern Europe), of damp cold; second race, copper-red (America), of dry cold; third race, black (Senegambia), of dry heat; and fourth race, olive-yellow (Indians), of dry heat.²⁴ In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills asks if Kant’s classifications meant that other races had no “moral agency?” Mills answers in Kant’s own words: “He makes this clear when he claims, in his *Philosophische Anthropologie*, that ‘when a people does not perfect itself in any way over the space of centuries, so it may be assumed that there exists a certain natural predisposition (analage) that the people cannot transcend.’”²⁵ Unlike Kant, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in 1776 proposed five races: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American and Malay. Caucasians were first on his list, and all the others were lesser forms of this “premier” Caucasian stock.²⁶

Polygenism was the belief that there were separate origins for the different races, therefore nothing much can be done to produce equality amongst them, or in the words of Kant, polygenism “assumed that there exists a certain natural predisposition (analage) that the people cannot transcend.” These races formed what was called the “Great Chain of Being.” In this so-called Chain, Europeans occupied the top link; Africans the lowest. Those highest were chosen by God, and thus were closest to him. Environment or temperatures had little to do with the difference between the races. Differences therefore were biologically determined. And because race was biologically determined, any so-called deficiencies or perceived shortcomings were inherent characteristics. As such, discrimination against so-called racially inferior groups could be scientifically, as well as culturally and politically, justified. The placement of Africans as the antithesis of Europeans emerged as the site from which to contemplate these differences.

German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), one of the most influential Enlightenment intellectuals, thought that blacks represented the epitome of the “Other.” But even as Hegel rejected physiognomy (the study of judging character by facial features), he nevertheless had strongly negative opinions of blacks, grounded in nature, morality, and aesthetics:

The Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. . . . They have no Knowledge of the immortality of the soul . . . the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race. . . . This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we can see them at this day, such they have always been.²⁷

²³ Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon and Robert Bernasconi, *Buffon on Race*, The Thoemmes Library in Science, no. 6 (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2003.)

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *On the Different Races of Man* (1775), as quoted in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed. *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

²⁵ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

²⁶ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, “The Degeneration of Races,” as quoted in Eze, *passim*.

²⁷ See Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1971 and 1974), 241.

Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze contextualizes Hegel's importance most concretely: "[Hegel's] writings in philosophy of history synthesize the philosophical and anthropological perspectives of eighteenth-century European thinkers and missionaries (and paved the way for the subsequent discipline of cultural anthropology); his writings in political philosophy transformed the European historical perspectives into concrete projects of international politics and economics (imperialism, colonialism, and the trans-national corporation)."²⁸

George Mosse writes in his text, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, that racism is an integral part of the European experience.²⁹ Critically, Mosse highlights how different European countries informed each other's work. In fact, he demonstrates how France, England, Italy and Germany *mutually* fed off each other's ideas about race, informed by religion, science and nationalism.³⁰ He ultimately concludes that eighteenth century Europe was "the cradle of modern racism."³¹ Franz Fanon and Edward Saïd remind us that European constructions of normative behavior and national expectations do not arise out of a bubble, and should be looked at in the context of how Europeans constructed themselves in relation to non-whites.³² In the context of European imperialist colonialism and racial discourse, France's discussions about normative behavior and national expectations are not surprising. Saïd's argument is that European writings, depictions, and scholarship on the "Orientals" tells us more about their own positioning than about those Muslims they were about to colonize. French national identity functioned in a similar way with regard to blacks in the metropole, thereby revealing some of those constructions.

Race in Eighteenth-Century France

The nobility had long used the idea of race to distinguish them from the rest of society. In fact, Marie Antoinette was seen as racially different because she was born in Austria, and her detractors often referred to her place of origin in their complaints of her behavior and the inept monarchy.³³ Henri de Boulainvilliers sought to justify aristocratic positions of privilege on the basis that they (he was of course included here) were descended from the warrior Germanic Franks (a Nordic race), whereas the peasants were descended from the more sheep-like Celtic Gauls (an indigenous people) who had been conquered. This justified subordination of the Third Estate.³⁴ As

²⁸ See Eze, 7.

²⁹ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, 2nd ed, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), xiv-xv. To this end, he explores the relationships between the Enlightenment, the new sciences and the nature of man, and the aesthetic ideal of physical beauty, identified as Greek. More than simply a pull between proponents of either secularism or Christianity, Mosse posits that even while professing a movement away from religion, Christianity remained a powerful force for propagating racist ideologies for so-called scientific research.

³⁰ Emphasis mine. On its most problematic level, the text assumes that European racism was somehow moving toward the "final solution" – extermination of the Jews. As Mosse states, "[a]ny book concerned with the European experience of race must start with the end and not with the beginning: 6 million Jews killed by the heirs of European civilization, by a bureaucracy which took time out from efficiently running the state to exterminate the Jews equally efficiently and impersonally." Mosse, xi. Mosse's intent in studying the history of European racism is apparent from his title: *Toward a Final Solution*. It is clear that for him the history of racism is one that pertains primarily to the history of Jews in Europe. In this case, that should have been more plainly stated.

³¹ Mosse, 1.

³² See Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963). See also Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

³³ See Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

³⁴ For a more complete conversation of de Boulainvilliers politics, see Michael Dietler, "Our Ancestors the Gauls': Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe," *American Anthropologist* (1994). See also H.A. Ellis, "Genealogy, History, and Aristocratic Reaction in Early Eighteenth-Century France: The

such, the very idea of nation was always exclusive, and defined via the Other. Such notions of biological determinism – in which nobility was seen as a racially distinct caste ordained by God, versus commoners with ordinary bloodlines – further complicated the shift from subject to citizen, as confusing new definitions of Frenchness attempted to consolidate whites into post-Revolutionary citizens in contrast with new groups, such as Jews and blacks.³⁵

In general French people had an understanding of both hierarchal and racial differences. Debates on race did not concern only aristocrats, members of the bourgeoisie, lawmakers, or scientists – race was not too abstract a concept for the masses. After all, the survival of many thousands was predicated on the slave trade and its dependent economies.³⁶ Additionally, for many members of the popular classes, their religious and educational catechisms included the supposedly inherent superiority of the white French race and the need to civilize the so-called savages. Human zoos and race spectacles were attended and enjoyed by all classes, solidifying the racialized Other throughout the white citizenry.³⁷

The social and political changes caused by the French Revolution and the deposition of the monarchy resulted in elites using discourses on national identity to better establish and maintain their social control. Historians of eighteenth-century France – most notably Sue Peabody in *There are no Slaves in France* and Pierre Boule in *Race et esclavage dans la France de l'Ancien Régime* – have highlighted the ways that race found its ways into legal discourse and debates about difference in France.³⁸ As indentured servants were increasingly replaced with blacks from Africa, whites who had previously been “other” were brought into citizenship, thus conflating ideas of blackness and slavery. These writers also show how connected race was to purity, and thus to the very future of how France saw and presented itself to the world.

That slaves resided in France’s colonies impacted how race was understood and discussed within French society. Given that the number of actual blacks and people of color in eighteenth-century France was less than 1% of the population,³⁹ there was no possibility of them overtaking the

Case of Henri de Boulainvilliers,” *The Journal of Modern History* (1986). Thank you to Bert Gordon for a leading me to the de Boulainvilliers example. François Guizot believed the same thing; see William B. Cohen, *The French Encounters with Africans*, 215.

³⁵ For a discussion of Jews in eighteenth-century France, see Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

³⁶ For a discussion on slavery and the economic importance of the slave trade in the eighteenth-century, see Robert W. Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and Eric Saugera, *Bordeaux, port négrier: chronologie, économie, idéologie, XVIIe-XIXe siècles* (Paris: Biarritz: J & D éditions, 1995). Robert Stein says, “The period from 1783 to 1792 was by far the most productive in the French slave trade’s history.” Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), xiii, 42.

³⁷ See Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot,” in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). For later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century manifestation of this spectacle, see Nicolas Bancel and others, *Zoos humains. De la Vénus hottentote aux reality shows* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002).

³⁸ Sue Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Pierre H. Boule, *Race et esclavage dans la France de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Perrin, 2007). See also Boule, “Racial Purity or Legal Clarity? The Status of Black Residents in Eighteenth-Century France.” *The Journal of The Historical Society* (2006) 6:1, 19-46; and Boule, “Race: The Evolution of an Idea: Francois Bernier and the Origins of the Modern Concept of Race,” in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Edward Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

³⁹ The numbers show that there were not enough blacks in France to establish a worrisome or even potentially dangerous ratio of blacks to whites (which was often the case in the colonies) to explain this fixation. Until recently, most historians felt that the numbers of blacks and peoples of color in France in the late eighteenth century was estimated at between 1,000 and 5,000; see Shelby T. McCloy, *The Negro in France* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961). Pierre H. Boule’s groundbreaking work allows us to have much more complete information about how

metropole.⁴⁰ But that anxiety clearly held sway in the minds of legislators, as evidenced by the rash of new legislation attempting to calm fears that blacks and people of mixed race were dangerously capable of inundating, and thus contaminating, France.⁴¹ This included a host of legal separations that marked white French superiority. For instance, marriage to a non-white woman could result in loss of military commission or even title, and any priest who performed the ceremony was subject to arrest. It was illegal to address a non-white as “sir” or “madam.” Descendants of blacks, to prevent confusion with whites, were not allowed to wear certain clothing or hairstyles, and blacks were required to carry identification cards.⁴² At one point, entry into France was barred for blacks and *gens du couleur*.⁴³ This list of proscriptions is by no means comprehensive.

The particularly ridiculous caricature of the very European Madame Tallien (fig. 0.4), a Spanish Creole presented as a black woman, is instructive of one of the ways race could be utilized in eighteenth-century France to embarrass white women (or their husbands) who upset the status quo.⁴⁴ Ironically, this painting also speaks to the lack of fixity associated with race. It is not necessarily something that could be read on the body – here we see how easy it is to “impose” it onto a white body. How dangerous, if race could not be readily identified on non-whites, and that they might somehow slip into France unnoticed (and unlegislated)?

many blacks were in France at the eve of the French Revolution. Boulle has determined that as of 1777, the actual figures were approximately 765 non-whites registered in Paris, and a total of 2,239 individuals in France. See Pierre H. Boulle, *Race et esclavage dans la France de l'Ancien Régime*, 109.

⁴⁰ Eighteenth century French historians Pierre de Vaissiere, Beauvais Lespinasse and the *Procureur du roi à l'Amirauté générale de France*'s Guillaume Poncet de la Grave, to name just three such thinkers; I'll return to these men in chapter one.

⁴¹ See the Code Noir of 1685, the law of 30 June 1763 (ordering all blacks to leave France), the law of March 19 1764 (which gave them permission to remain), and the law of 1777 (which required registration), as well as several decrees in 1778 (to separate blacks from whites or return them to the colonies), to name but a few. There was also major legislation in 1716, 1738 and 1762. I will return to this legislation in greater detail in chapter two.

⁴² William B. Cohen, *The French Encounters with Africans*, 104-105.

⁴³ The law banning blacks and peoples of color into France was rarely enforced; see chap. one.

⁴⁴ The text states that “[t]his is said to represent a Creole lady from Spanish America, who was at the time a celebrated performer in the ballet, and who bore a striking resemblance to Madame Tallien, who was also a Creole.” Thomas Wright, *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Caricatures of James Gillray: Comprising a Political and Humorous History of the Latter Part of the Reign of George the Third* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851), 425-226. For information on the actual Madame Tallien, see Lucy Moore's *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France* (London: Harper Press, 2006) has large and very readable sections on Mme. Tallien; also Marie-Hélène Bourquin's more scholarly *Monsieur et Madame Tallien* (Paris: Perrin, 1987). Thank you to Tallien scholar Mette Harder for bringing this image to my attention.



Fig. 0.4: James Gillray (1756-1815), *La Belle Espagnole, --ou-- la Doublure de Madame Tallien* (1773-1835), 1796, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

Particularly after the French Revolution in 1789, non-whites in Saint Domingue took the *Rights of Man and Citizen* to heart, and challenged their own denial of freedom and citizenship with brutal intensity. The Revolution in Saint Domingue – dismissively called the “troubles”⁴⁵ by many eighteenth century French men and women – was in fact a major event, one that brought notions of citizenship and national identity into question.⁴⁶ The French Revolution destabilized France,

⁴⁵ See for instance, Claude Milscent, *Sur les troubles de Saint-Domingue* (Paris : Impr. du « Patriote françois », 1791); Boré, *Faits relatifs aux troubles de Saint-Domingue*, présentés au Comité colonial, en vertu d'un décret de l'Assemblée nationale, (Paris : Impr. du « Patriote français », 1792); Nicolas-Robert, Mis de Cocherel, *Observations de M. de Cocherel, ... sur le Mémoire du ministre de la Marine, renvoyé au Comité des douze (au sujet des troubles de Saint-Domingue)*, 1791; Larchevesque-Thibaud, *Notes sur les troubles de Saint-Domingue, présentée à la Convention nationale, par Larchevesque-Thibaud*. [14 mai 1793.] (Paris : Testu, 1793); Pierre-François Page, *Développement des causes des troubles et désastres des colonies françaises, présenté à la Convention nationale*. Paris?: s.n, 1793; Jean-Philippe Garran de Coulon, *Rapport sur les troubles de Saint-Domingue, fait au nom de la Commission des colonies, des Comités de salut public, de législation et de marine* (Paris: De l'imprimerie nationale, 1797); and Julien Raymond, *Réflexions sur les véritables causes des troubles et des désastres de nos colonies, notamment sur ceux de Saint-Domingue; avec les moyens à employer pour préserver cette colonie d'une ruine totale; adressés à la Convention nationale*, (Paris: Impr. des patriotes, 1790). Raymond was of mixed race heritage. This is only a sampling of the titles utilizing “troubles.” Many of the other writings on Saint Domingue contain letters or commentary concerning the “troubles” as well. There is a longstanding history of relegating major colonial catastrophes to relatively benign designations; for instance, similar language is used to discuss and describe the First War of Indian Independence, also known as the Indian Rebellion or Revolt of 1857, or the Indian Mutiny.

⁴⁶ For discussion on citizenship and national identity in France, see Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race' and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), especially chap. 4, “National Identity, Nationality and Citizenship.” See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, (London: Verso, 1991).

producing a legacy that historians have acknowledged as an additional crisis that would take decades for the country to come to terms with.⁴⁷

The Revolution in Saint Domingue (now Haiti), on the heels of that incomplete transition, exacerbated what was already a crippling instability in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary era. As Krishan Kumar writes, “nations are formed of national memories, of the stories of great men and great deeds. . . . But it is not just triumphs and glory but also, and perhaps more so, defeats and trials that make the nation.”⁴⁸ The defeat in Saint Domingue, where some 30,000 men from France and elsewhere perished, and the subsequent loss of the colony had both tremendous economic and geopolitical impact on France. My project explores its psychological ramifications for the nation.⁴⁹

French men and women were perceptive in understanding the changing definitions and associations of race. After the French and Haitian Revolutions, a variety of white French bodies, often from places far away, were spilling back into France with new customs, values, and cultural identities. These men and women needed to be re-incorporated under the aegis of “French,” and anxieties about the differences amongst white French men and women needed to be displaced. And now that slavery would be the law of the land again in 1802, what was to be done with free and enslaved blacks and peoples of color from Saint Domingue coming again into France as well?

Exiles, Émigrés, and Colonial Refugees

Prior to both the French and Haitian Revolutions, blacks were present (albeit in small numbers) and talked about in France. Tensions about those black bodies trickled down to the public in innumerable forms. The repatriation of white Creoles, however, involved much higher numbers – between 6,000 and 10,000, according to Darrell Meadows⁵⁰ – than either blacks or people of color in France or coming to France. Clearly the number of white returnees, most of whom landed in Paris – and who were, for all practical purposes, foreign – would be more acutely felt by the Metropolitan population than 800 blacks. Citizens (or subjects) from abroad needed to re-integrate themselves into French society on French soil. For many of these, the re-assimilation in the midst of continuous political upheavals at home was neither a simple nor a happy experience. Whether white French men from the Napoleonic Wars, die-hard Royalist émigrés, military personnel or colonial refugees from Haiti – France was in many ways strange to them all.⁵¹

⁴⁷ See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), particularly chapter two, “The French Revolution and the Invention of National Citizenship.”

⁴⁸ Krishan Kumar, “English and French National Identity: Comparisons and Contrasts.” *Nations and Nationalism* 12:3 (2006) : 3.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Popkin writes that publications were censored to prevent them from “evoking the memory of the humiliating French defeat in Saint-Domingue,” 12. Popkin’s book offers first hand eyewitness accounts, which are particularly important because the people making the recollections are almost all made-up of white colonial elites. Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 366.

⁵⁰ Darrell Meadows, *The Planters of Saint-Domingue, 1750-1804: Migration and Exile in the French Revolutionary Atlantic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertations Services, 2004).

⁵¹ There were a number of important politicians who returned to France in 1815, including Louis XVIII, Charles X, and Richelieu. In addition, there were several books that came out in 1815 that discuss what France was like in their present day and how to re-establish order. See for example, E. A. Rivals, l’aîné, *Institutions sociales, propres à assurer le bonheur des Français, ou Recherches politiques Des causes qui troublent l'ordre social et des moyens nécessaires pour étouffer le germen des passions malfaisantes, Avec des Réflexions sur les sentimens qui animent les Bourbons à l'égard de la France* (Paris, 1815); Etienne-Géry Lenglet, *Questions sur le pacte social des Français* (Douai: Imprimerie de Mme. Wagrez, 1815); G Gabet, *Projet d'un pacte social pour la France*, (Paris: Brunot-Labbe, 1815); François-Dominique de Reynaud Montlosier, *De la monarchie française : depuis le retour de la maison de Bourbon, jusqu'au premier avril 1815: considérations sur l'état de la France à cette époque, examen de la chartre constitutionnelle, de ses défauts, et des principes sur lesquels l'ordre social peut être recomposé* (Paris : H. Nicolle, 1815); Jean Charles Alexandre François de Mannoury d'Ectot, *Mémoire adressé aux deux Chambres, concernant les intérêts respectifs des émigrés*

Napoleon's newly minted French government had struggled to deal simultaneously with the aftermath of the French Revolution at home and the Haitian Revolution abroad. Now they were forced to deal with a sudden influx of hostile white refugees, many of whom felt the revolt was the fault of both the National Assembly in Metropolitan France and a clergy who purportedly sided with revolutionary blacks.⁵² Moreover, refugees were not welcomed back with open arms as émigrés would be under Napoleon's Empire or during the Restoration periods.⁵³ As a result, white Creoles largely segregated themselves from their fellow white French men and women, and France became increasingly polarized.

Returning refugees (most whom were Creole born and were considered to bear a racial taint or tint)⁵⁴ came back landless, often penniless, and with a belief that France would do what was necessary to help them regain their property – and thus their economic and social status. As they came to understand that they would not be returning to Saint Domingue, nor compensated in a way they felt appropriate, they turned to more and more racialized language to further distance themselves from their former identities.⁵⁵ In fact, according to Jennifer Pierce, while the “plantocracy” invoked several scenarios to explain their displacement, they first positioned themselves as innocent victims of race-based violence stemming from the Haitian Revolution.⁵⁶

These refugees carried their own cultural experiences back from Saint Domingue, and heightened the level of propaganda regarding the brutality of blacks during the insurrection.⁵⁷ Jeremy Popkin argues that the rape of white women at the hands of black men represented the most outrageous horror for white men (and thus by extension, the nation), and highlighted French fears of a world out of order. A man believed to be Jacques de Puech III recounted his escape from black rebels by hiding under a bed. There he witnessed “the beasts [who] began by tearing off the jewels [of a young woman] which she had on her person; then they betook themselves to satisfy their brutal lust.”⁵⁸ In another example, a Monsieur Leclerc (no relation to the General) recounted an unexpected reunion with his ex-lover, who told him that a black man had raped her during the insurrection.⁵⁹ Lost in these rape narratives by returning refugees was any discussion about what

et des acquéreurs de biens nationaux (Paris: Porthmann, 1815?); François Auguste René de Chateaubriand, *Rapport sur l'état de la France* (Paris, 1815); *Considerations sur la constitution morale de la France* (Geneve, 1815); and Challan, *Du rétablissement de l'ordre en France* (Paris: L.-G. Michaud, 1815). See also Charles Louis Le Sur, *La France et les Français, en 1817. Tableau moral et politique, précède d'un coup d'oeil sur la révolution* (Paris : H. Nicolle, 1818). While it is probable that members who had once embraced Napoleon were now showing loyalty to the Bourbon Restoration, it also suggest that France might have been really unfamiliar to returning citizens and needed to be explained.

⁵² Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection*, 10, 18. Colonists also believed that whites were behind the Revolution because blacks weren't smart enough to rebel on their own!

⁵³ Peter Davies, *The Extreme Right in France* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁴ I will return to this theme in chapters one, two and four. This also foreshadows the problems with *pieds noirs* after the war in Algeria. For a discussion on *pieds noirs*, see Jean-Jacques Jordi, “The Creation of the Pieds-Noirs: Arrival and Settlement in Marseilles, 1962,” and William B. Cohen, “Pied-Noir Memory, History, and the Algerian War,” in *Europe's Invisible Migrants*, ed. Andrea L. Smith (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).

⁵⁵ According to Darrell Meadows, colonial refugees scattered after they fled Saint Domingue. The growing realization that the final attempt to regain Saint Domingue had failed sent refugees in many different directions, including Cuba, Jamaica, and in North America, to New Orleans, Philadelphia and New York. This was often because they took the first available transportation out of the war zone. But many of them ultimately came back to France.

⁵⁶ They also claimed to be victims of the French Revolution radicals. See Jennifer J. Pierce, *Discourses of the Dispossessed Saint-Domingue Colonists on Race, Revolution and Empire, 1789-1825* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 2005), particularly chapter seven.

⁵⁷ Popkin, 9.

⁵⁸ Anon, 258, as quoted in Popkin. She was not raped, a fact that he tells her when she wakes up: “. . . ‘let me reassure your frightened heart that you came through unharmed,’” 259.

⁵⁹ Leclerc wrote: “They had been at the mercy of the insolence of unleashed animals, but less badly off than those in the presbytery, they had not been under the power of a Capucin. One of them had been saved for the caresses of Niel [the

had been the systematic rape of black women at the hands of white French men in the centuries preceding the Haitian Revolution.⁶⁰

I take Popkin's evidence a bit further. Tales of racial brutality also intersected with issues of faltering white masculinity. White men could protect neither "their" women nor their property. Not only were they powerless at the hands of the black insurrectionists, but like Peuch, they were complicit by their inaction. He had remained safely hidden under the bed while the rebels raped a young white woman. To make matters worse, some, like Peuch, took to wearing women's clothes to escape blacks who were searching for them! In short, many of these white French male refugees weren't *men* at all in the eyes of their culture.⁶¹ Their behavior suggested that they were more concerned with their own safety than the women they loudly proclaimed they were honor-bound to protect.

White masculinity was also important given that the military nature of the Saint Domingue Revolution gave the sexist impression that France had been beaten out of its colony at the hands of black men.⁶² Napoleon, in a letter to his brother-in-law, General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc (born in Saint Domingue and sent abroad to bring Saint Domingue back under French control), had this to say about the black men in Saint Domingue:

This will be the moment to forever assure the colony for France. And on that same day throughout the colony, we must arrest all untrustworthy men in positions of authority, whatever color they are, and place all black generals on ships, regardless of their behavior, their patriotism, and the services they have rendered, being careful however to maintain not to demote them, and providing assurances that they will be well treated in France.⁶³

The military was not careful, nor were black prisoners "well treated in France." Touissant L'Overture, for example, died in a French prison. Black men were definitively seen as suspect, needing to be immediately corralled and sequestered regardless of their position or prior service to France. White men would face these sanctions only if they had proved themselves "untrustworthy."

To look at black men too closely invited the risk of admitting they could take what they wanted (Saint Domingue, white women), and thus was much too delicate a topic, considering that

black commander of the post]; young, attractive, she had been his favorite sultana. . . . It was a cannibal, drunk on blood and wine, who had profaned this masterpiece of your omnipotence!" As quoted in Popkin, 102. Note the similarity to the invocation of rape with the American lynching narratives recounted by Ida B. Wells; in both cases, the graphically told accusations were designed to stamp out any semblance of sympathy for the accused or their plight. See Ida B. Wells' *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, First Edition (New York Bedford/St. Martins, May 1996). This endless recounting of the events of rape and sexual violence against white women raises an alternate and disturbing scenario, one in which white men are also somewhat titillated by these narratives.

⁶⁰ Both Popkin and Doris Garraway note that "one of the most fundamental features of prerevolutionary society had been white men's unregulated access to black and mixed-race women." Popkin, 28 and Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). No eyewitness accounts speak of white men raping black women during the Revolution, 94. I will return to this theme in chap. one.

⁶¹ Jacques de Puech III, 258-259. Peuch recounted in his memoirs, *Mon Odyssée*, that he wore women's clothes three times, including two times when he was safely in France, quoted in Popkin, 62. See Althéa de Puech Parham, *My Odyssey: Experiences of a Young Refugee from 2 Revolutions; by a Creole of Saint Domingue*, translated and edited by Althéa de Puech Parham, introduction by Selden Rodman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959).

⁶² A brief word of explanation on my use of "men" here; I have yet to find many sources that include much on black women's role in the insurrection, even though it seems ludicrous to assume that women did not militarily participate. It is more an acknowledgement that French thinking at the time visualized military space as a wholly masculine one. In addition, black women were sometimes masculinized via their actions in Saint Domingue.

⁶³ Letter to Leclerc from Napoleon Bonaparte, ed., Paul Roussier, *Lettres du General Leclerc* (Paris : Soc. de l'histoire des colonies françaises, 1937), 263-74, quoted in Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus's *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean 1789-1804, A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2006), 178.

what had just happened in Haiti was fresh in the minds of the French.⁶⁴ Therefore, France's pre-occupation with the racial implications of this setback at home (or with black men) is not surprising.⁶⁵ While an historical study of representations of "dangerous black men" in French society is overdue, here, however, I am seeking to uncover the ways that the representations of black women incorporated and re-interpreted the discourse. The process was useful for turning it back upon black men, in its effect of feminizing and rendering them impotent by association.

A major argument of this work is that the cultural visibility of blacks was not only racialized, but gendered as well. The convergence in early nineteenth-century French society of the *main à main* loss of what was now Haiti at the hands of black men, the specific reinstitution of racial discourse, and the instabilities of social and political life (including the interplay between so-called high and low culture) makes the rhetoric and representation about black women ripe for historical examination. It is precisely because black male bodies at this particular historical moment seemed a source of anxiety that black women could be thought by white French men and women to be a less threatening canvas.

Racial inequalities, as well as class conflicts, rose to the forefront in both the French and Haitian Revolutions, and these remained unresolved during continual political upheaval: Napoleon's seizure of power in 1799; the shift from Consulate to the First Empire in 1804, the Restoration of 1814/1815 (until 1830), and the July Monarchy that lasted from 1830 to 1848.⁶⁶ How did the French make sense of their new roles as post-Revolutionary citizens in the metropole after the loss of their most important colony in Haiti, and how were those anxieties formulated in opposition to specific definitions of blackness during the Restoration era? Representations of black women aid in the investigation.

Race in Early Nineteenth-Century France

It is into this political, cultural, and racialized environment that a mix of émigrés, exiles, and colonial refugees returned in 1802. William Cohen states that "in the nineteenth century, race became the main explanation of human variety. The tradition of attributing social differences between the nobility and the third estate to descent from distinctive 'racial' groups was already evident in France; it continued in the nineteenth century."⁶⁷ The influx of refugees from Haiti who had fled the "troubles" and who, by their very presence and need for assimilation, already testified to the colonial failure, brought with them their own notions of proper French behaviors and culture. As we see in chapters three and four, elite white French women were playing with racial drag – mimicking in their clothes and in some of their attitudes. At the same time, white French men were still "playing" with black female bodies, setting them at odds with many in the metropole. Meanwhile, accusations of colonial blood were discussed in elite circles, and tainted ancestry – and thus illegitimate Frenchness – became a powerful insult.⁶⁸ Caricatures, plays, poems, and novels

⁶⁴ I am not saying that France did not discuss black men. Peabody makes a strong argument that twice as many black men were coming into France than black women. See Sue Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France*. I am only stating that there were often different kinds of conversations about black men than about black women.

⁶⁵ Prior to the defeat Napoleon had reportedly suggested to General Leclerc that it was beneficial for white French men (but *not* white French women) to take a mixed-race spouse. Noblemen were even marrying black women, some bringing them (and their money) back to France. See Victor Schoelcher, *Des colonies françaises* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1842), 211 as quoted in Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, 119.

⁶⁶ See Sharif Gemie, *French Revolutions, 1815-1914, An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). See also Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times, From the Enlightenment to the Present*, Fifth Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995).

⁶⁷ Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, 215.

⁶⁸ This was a shorthand way of genetically linking whites from the colonies with blacks. For instance, Creoles like Empress Josephine and aristocrat Claire de Duras, with origins in France's black colonies, tried to ignore or brush aside

were utilized to highlight and instruct white French men and women how dangerous these behaviors were.

If the various French classes could not agree on who and what they were, they could come together around what they were not. In the case of Marianne (see fig. 0.2), it is her race that allows even the slim possibility of incorporation into the idea of citizen and thus Frenchness, something that eluded blacks, regardless of their gender. As this dissertation argues, the identification of an Other facilitated the notion that previously excluded bodies could now be (re)incorporated. The presence of individuals designated as different allowed codification of a cohesive French identity. By holding themselves up against a specially defined and racialized Other, elites could still claim cultural, racial, and political dominance, while the lower classes could throw off the shackles of a formerly perceived racial difference to be incorporated into the definition of French.⁶⁹ Coming together to rally for a common good – Frenchness – would afford greater opportunity to consolidate collective ideologies and national unities.

The rapid changes in France in the nineteenth century, with the tensions between modernity and tradition, enrich the potential for exploring the idea of blackness during this time. The shoring up of Frenchness predicated upon whiteness and maleness, concomitantly incorporating blackness and femaleness into the antithesis to that definition, is what places black women squarely in the center of my exploration. As chapter three reveals, while legislation was important in early nineteenth-century France, the importance of science as a field of expert male knowledge gave ground to scientific racism. The black female body became an important canvas with which to apply that new-found expertise, while at the same time firming up normative behaviors. Volatile political and social tensions figured prominently in the construction of self and the presentation of a French national identity. How these constructions were articulated show much about what was at stake in a unified collective identity. What differentiated France from other nations in Europe in the early nineteenth century were new types of conversation about race thrust up by the Haitian Revolution and bolstered by science.

Race and the Historiography of the Bourbon Restoration

In 1981, Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny remarked that “hardly anything has been done for the period between the two empires.”⁷⁰ And it is true that the Restoration period has traditionally proven much less “juicy” than the French Revolutionary era for scholarship, or the later nineteenth century for that matter. Happily, in the last three decades, there has been a resurgence of historians interested in the French Restoration, and it is apparent that rich stories can be found here. De Sauvigny’s canonical *The Bourbon Restoration* provides an extensive general portrait of the Restoration from politics to military excursions, as well as France’s social, political, religious, and intellectual life.⁷¹ Other historians of the Restoration and post-Revolutionary periods have addressed the gamut of concerns, from general overviews to specific topics, having focused on many arenas to highlight

innuendo that they had “impure blood.” I return to Duras and this theme in chap. 4. See also fig. 0.4 of Madame Tallien.

⁶⁹ See note 41 for some French examples. The notion of whiteness as normative has not always been a “given.” Working classes incorporated into whiteness is a good indication of this. In America, it is the notion of race that allows the Irish to “become” white, and therefore, American. See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish became White* (New York: Routledge, 1996). See also David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Verso, 2007).

⁷⁰ Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny “The Bourbon Restoration: One Century of French Historiography.” *French Historical Studies* 12:1 (Spring 1981) : 41–67.

⁷¹ Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *The Bourbon Restoration*, trans. Lynn M. Case (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1966).

these divisions: Emmanuel de Waresquiel, Stanley Mellon, and Lucien Jaume have made their arguments through the use of political histories;⁷² Sheryl Kroen, Robert Alexander, and Emmanuel Fureix have utilized political culture as their forum;⁷³ while William Reddy, Sarah Maza, Denise Davidson, Alan Spitzer and David Skuy have looked at cultural histories in post-Revolutionary France.⁷⁴

One thing historians of the period generally agree upon is that the Restoration was a period in which the life-changing issues raised during the French Revolution were incorporated (or not incorporated) into French politics and society. Kroen, for example, writes of the usefulness in using the Restoration “to turn back and think critically about the Old Regime.”⁷⁵ Robert Gildea argues that the Revolution divided the French into nostalgics wanting the Old Regime and those favoring the Republic.⁷⁶ John Hall Stewart asserts that the Restoration “divided Frenchmen even more conspicuously than heretofore, into conflicting ideological groups.”⁷⁷ Paul Austin writes that the “100 days [was] . . . a great socio-political trauma.”⁷⁸

Davidson, Jennifer Ngaire Heuer, and Reddy have more recently incorporated gender in analysis, arguing that crucial divisions surrounding class, sexuality, and gender emerged during the post-Revolutionary and Restoration eras. In doing so they have opened up a space to more clearly see how these past events impacted both the men and women living during such profound historical moments. Gender is increasing prevalent in historical French scholarship of the period; however, the analytical lens of race in early nineteenth-century France has been more problematically absent.⁷⁹

⁷² For a political approach to the Restoration, see Emmanuel de Waresquiel and Yvert Benoît, *Histoire de la Restauration: 1814-1830 : naissance de la France moderne* (Paris: Perrin, 2002); Stanley Mellon, *The Political Uses of History: A Study of Historians in the French Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958); and Lucien Jaume, *L'Individu effacé: on le paradoxe du libéralisme français* (Paris: Fayard, 1997). On the press in the July Revolution, see Daniel L. Radar, *The Journalists and the July Revolution in France* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

⁷³ See Robert Alexander, *Re-Writing the French Revolutionary Tradition Liberal Opposition and the Fall of the Bourbon Monarchy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830*, Studies on the history of society and culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Emmanuel Fureix, *La France des larmes: deuils politiques à l'âge romantique, 1814-1840* (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 2009). Fureix's thesis claims that there was “a crisis of representation a generation after the regicide, and a lack of sacredness.”

⁷⁴ William M. Reddy, *The Invisible Code Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France, 1814-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Sarah C. Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Denise Z. Davidson, *France after Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Jennifer Ngaire Heuer, *The Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France, 1789-1830* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Alan B. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Spitzer work uses what he calls a “general theory of generations to illuminate the Restoration era . . . via collective experience.” See also David Skuy, *Assassination, Politics and Miracles: France and the Royalist Reaction of 1820* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ Kroen, 20.

⁷⁶ Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1-2.

⁷⁷ John Hall Stewart, *The Restoration Era in France, 1814-1830* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1968), 10.

⁷⁸ Paul Britten Austin, *1815: The Return of Napoleon* (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), 15.

⁷⁹ The historiography on race in France, mostly in the twentieth and twenty first centuries is growing; see Tyler Stovall and Georges Van en Abbeele, eds., *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race, After the Empire*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003); Herrick Chapman and Laura Levine Frader, *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Sue Peabody and Tyler Edward Stovall, *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Pratima Prasad, *Colonialism, Race, and the French Romantic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Richard Standish Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*, New anthropologies of Europe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'race' and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London: Routledge, 1995).

I would go so far as to say that the overall historiography of the post-Revolutionary and Restoration periods in France have displayed a striking lacunar amnesia about race in this historical period. In *The Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France, 1789-1830*, Heuer rightly admonishes scholars for neglecting gender; but she argues that “women’s national and citizenship status was more urgent in the colonies throughout the nineteenth century, since racial hierarchies explicitly overlaid – and sometimes opposed – ‘national’ differences.”⁸⁰ She does not, though, speak about how racial hierarchies might have moved into France from the colonies when those women and men came back.⁸¹ Davidson makes some relevant and provocative arguments in *France after Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the new Social Order* on the “confusion about gender, class, and sexuality, as well as political and social significance of the family [that] reverberated through French society in the wake of the Revolution,”⁸² but she does not include any sustained treatment on the topic of race. This absence is curious, since she also argues that “interactions between people and ideas in urban social spaces enabled heterogeneous groups to observe each other, learn from what they saw, and thus construct notions of their own identity and how that identity differed from others around them.”⁸³ If historians of the Restoration agree that the period was where the enormous cultural and political changes of the French Revolutionary era were analyzed, and social markers such as gender, sexuality and class became destabilized, it would seem reasonable that this would also be the period in which the Haitian Revolution and the racial ramifications of that loss were being worked out as well.

Moreover, discussions about Haiti – and slavery – did not die with Napoleon’s Empire. Rather, they continued well into the Restoration period. Alyssa Sepinwell writes that the Haitian Revolution sent “shockwaves” throughout the Atlantic world, calling its effects both at home and abroad “cataclysmic.”⁸⁴ She also remarks on the historical lack of focus by France on Haiti, due in part to the fact that “race is anathema in contemporary French discourse.”⁸⁵ Popkin notes that the French government went to great lengths to suppress news of what was happening in Saint Domingue from French citizens.⁸⁶ Cohen adds that the Restoration government was “committed to colonial slavery and therefore continued the system of racial discrimination thought to be the necessary underpinning of slavery.”⁸⁷ Therefore, slavery remained one of the few political, economic, and cultural “constants” between the seventeenth century and mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ Heuer, 200. However, she does spend considerable time on “foreigners” and emigration. For a discussion on race see her article, “The One-Drop Rule in Reverse? Interracial Marriages in Napoleonic and Restoration France.” *Law and History Review*. 27:3 (2009) : 515.

⁸¹ Likewise, Heuer writes that the “dividing lines between ‘French citizens’ and men and women who were legally ‘foreigners’ because of their birthplace, familial descent, or formal ties to another state were often particularly important in working out the relationship between family and citizenship,” 11. However she neglects both returning white colonial refugees and blacks in her investigation.

⁸² Davidson, 4. She does have a brief section on Ourika, which I will discuss in chap. 4.

⁸³ Davidson, 6.

⁸⁴ Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, “The Specter of Saint-Domingue: American and French Reactions to the Haitian Revolution,” in *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, ed. David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 317.

⁸⁵ Sepinwall, 324.

⁸⁶ Popkin, see introduction.

⁸⁷ Cohen, *The French Encounter with Blacks*, 205. I am not implying that slavery was fixed. What I am suggesting is that it evolved at a slower pace than some many other governmental changes in nineteenth-century France.

⁸⁸ William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Blacks*; Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France (1802-1848)*; Robert Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979); Robert W. Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); and Eric Saugera, *Bordeaux, port négrier: chronologie, économie, idéologie, XVIIe-XIXe siècles* (Biarritz: J & D éditions, 1995).

Cohen goes on to say that not only was the Restoration Monarchy committed to the continuation of slavery, but he asserts that the government actively promoted pro-slavery scholarship and censored those who preached abolition.⁸⁹ He concludes that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the French government was still committed to colonialism and the belief that, either by concession or by force, Saint Domingue could be regained and the institution of slavery re-imposed.⁹⁰ More than a dozen essays were written in 1814 about Saint Domingue. Tellingly, the continued use of “Saint Domingue” was believed by Sepinwell to indicate a “reluctance” of government officials to acknowledge that the colony was no longer “theirs.” It was only when the Restoration government believed definitively that the island was lost that they acknowledged what was painfully staring them in the face, at which time they turned to more immediate economic concerns, demanding financial reparations from Haiti.⁹¹ However, from 1814 to 1830 the slave trade (which had been outlawed in 1815) engaged more French ships than legitimate enterprises did.⁹²

Even those historians who link the Restoration with the French Revolution fail to include the Haitian Revolution in their work. Philip Mansel writes of France’s “lost empire in Europe,” but fails to mention what that was,⁹³ while de Sauvigny includes only two paragraphs about colonial concerns.⁹⁴ Stewart’s work on the Restoration speaks of the émigrés returning to France following Napoleon’s final overthrow, but writes nothing on colonial refugees nor on the colony they were fleeing.⁹⁵ Gildea mentions slavery, but only French reaction to slavery in the United States;⁹⁶ François Furet has merely two sentences on Haiti;⁹⁷ and Munro Price the same about blacks in *The Perilous Crown: France between Revolutions* – one regarding the abolition of the slave trade (and the resultant problems between Great Britain and France), and one regarding Molé’s military trip to force Haiti to pay reparations to ex-colonists.⁹⁸ There is little on ultra-royalists or French Prime Minister Jean-Baptiste Guillaume Joseph Marie Anne Séraphin, Comte de Villèle or French Foreign Minister Louis-Mathieu Molé, who both had contact with Haiti and other black colonies. This is remarkable considering that Villèle’s wife, Gertrude, was from a slave-owning family in the East Indies and he was in power longer than anyone during this period.⁹⁹ In addition, he, like Napoleon, was pro-slavery.

⁸⁹ Cohen, *The French Encounter with Blacks*, 188.

⁹⁰ Cohen, 181.

⁹¹ Sepinwall, *passim*. This did not stop them from continuing to believe it could be re-gained.

⁹² Cohen, *The French Encounter with Blacks*, 187.

⁹³ Philip Mansel, *Paris between Empires: Monarchy and Revolution, 1814-1852* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 232. Mansel does, however, recount the story of a *Russian* officer who enjoyed the sexual favors of several women, and remarks that “I was able to resist their provocations and went to see a few of them, especially the negroes and Creoles whose nature was so different from our own and whose ways are so piquant and curious”, 47; and that “an English visitor noted that Madame de Stael ‘is not vulgar’ but had ‘a complexion not far removed from that of a white Mulatto, with her eyebrows dark and her hair quite sable, dry and crisp like a negro’s though not quite so curling,” 30.

⁹⁴ One paragraph was regarding the Treaties of 1814 and 1815 which stated that “her finest gem, Santo Domingo, remained under the control of the Negro republic founded in 1804. The treaties of Paris gave France the right to re-establish her authority on that western half of the island which previously had belonged to her, and the royal government, harassed by the loud complaints of the former colonists, thought seriously of doing so on several occasions,” 286; the second reference indicated that the king had “granted independence to his erstwhile insurrectionists” to “save face,” 286.

⁹⁵ Stewart, *The Restoration Era in France*, 34.

⁹⁶ Gildea, 214.

⁹⁷ François Furet, *Revolutionary France, 1770-1880* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

⁹⁸ Munro Price, *The Perilous Crown: France between Revolutions* (London: Pan, 2008).

⁹⁹ He had become manager of the properties of M. Desbassyns de Richemont, and married his daughter.

* * *

Much more work needs to be done to incorporate the history of race, slavery, and Haiti into the mainstream historiography of the post-Revolutionary and Restoration periods. However, in addition to the critically important works of Cohen, Popkin, and Sepinwell on reactions to Saint Domingue in France proper, there is David Geggus's *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Jennifer Pierce and Darrell Meadows have begun the painstaking work of re-incorporating race into the history of France in the early nineteenth century, via a look at returning colonial refugees to France after the Revolution in Haiti.¹⁰⁰ Doris Kadish has written about how white French women responded to the Revolution.¹⁰¹ In the realm of the issue of slavery discourse in France, Lawrence C. Jennings' *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France (1802-1848)* is notable for its writing on how the specter of Haiti fueled anti-slavery sentiment. Yves Benot has also been critical to this discussion. Other important scholarship includes Robert Stein's *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century*; Robert W. Harms' *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade*; and Eric Saugera's *Bordeaux: port négrier: chronologie, économie, idéologie, XVIIe-XIXe siècles*; all of these indicate that slavery continued to be an important part of the political culture.

Pap Nydiage writes in *La condition noire : essai sur une minorité française* that « par ailleurs, au-delà des Noirs de France, je propose une approche consistant à élargir l'analyse pour y incorporer les inégalités fondées sur la « race » – entendu au sens de catégorie socialement construits – bref à considérer que la « question sociale » ne se dissout pas dans les rapports de classe mais qu'elle doit incorporer, sans hiérarchie prédéterminée d'autres rapports sociaux, en particulier ceux fondés sur des hiérarchies raciales. »¹⁰² Martin Alexander writes that “while historians have clearly stated divisions in the period, . . . one needs to pay equal attention to elements that bring unity.”¹⁰³

Race functioned in particular ways in the early nineteenth century. One way to see this is to contrast France's extreme political instability with the constant of slavery. Every regime required that France redefine itself (as revolutionary, imperial, restored, etc.) and that as a result, French citizens redefined what liberty and equality meant. With slavery reinstated, nationality and the distinction between free whites and enslaved blacks was a way to talk about these issues in a safe fashion. This project looks at the way that race was utilized – alongside gender, sexuality and class – to encourage unity amongst white French men and women during the Restoration era, and why black women were such important tools in that national quest.

* * *

Representations of black women of this period have been not been examined as a constitutive element of national identity in general, even though rich depictions exist in some unusual and public ways throughout France.¹⁰⁴ Although there have been some studies of black

¹⁰⁰ Darrell Meadows, *The Planters of Saint-Domingue, 1750-1804*; and Jennifer J. Pierce, *Discourses of the Dispossessed*.

¹⁰¹ See David P. Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003); and Doris Y. Kadish, “The Black Terror: Women's Responses to Slave Revolts in Haiti.” *French Review*. 68:4 (1995) : 668-680.

¹⁰² Pap Nydiage, *La condition noire : essai sur une minorité française*, 23. Nydiage is currently writing a history of blacks in France from the seventeenth century to the present.

¹⁰³ Alexander 11. He also pushes back against de Sauvigny's notion that politics only concerned the upper level of the nation, 18.

¹⁰⁴ Historical studies on blacks in twentieth-century France (particularly during the inter-war years) have produced some important works, including Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Lights* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996); William A. Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story between the Great Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Petrine Archer-Straw's *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000); Dana Hale, *Races on display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Philippe Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France: 1919 – 1939* (Paris: Ed. L'Harmattan,

female representations in nineteenth century France, particularly in literature and art,¹⁰⁵ much work remains to be done to analyze these representations within a larger historical framework. Images and discourses about black women were not simply reflections of a racist, classist, and sexist society, but rather these representations and discourses played a constitutive role in the construction of French social, sexual and racial identity more generally.¹⁰⁶ In fact, my work reveals a significant paradox: there may be few black women in nineteenth-century France, yet images of and discussions about them appear in many important sectors and social milieus. This allows us to ask about what cultural work black women's bodies were doing, even though their actual number seems to belie so much attention.

French social, cultural and political upheavals in this era resulted, in part, in an emerging need for a more concrete national identity. Studying race in this period reveals how this identity was often augmented by oppositional and specific definitions of blackness. If France now had less control over black bodies, how did the French re-assert national prowess? Black women had been available in a way they would not be after Haiti was lost. As other black women were brought (or came) into France after the revolutions, some old rhetoric – and new discourses – would be utilized to account for their presence. Ultimately, this dissertation explores how, in the midst of the national trauma of the Haitian Revolution, black women came to occupy particular discursive visibility, despite the fact that their actual numbers in France were very small. Black bodies, such as Sarah Bartmann's, reincorporated lost colonies into representations of difference to prove why future French re-domination was necessary.

My project reveals the extent to which nineteenth-century France was a racialized nation with racialized citizens dealing with deep anxieties about threats to white racial homogeneity. The loss of Haiti and the end of France's military might threatened its image of masculine prowess, which was exacerbated by the reversion to monarchy. The dissertation explores the discursive processes that were working to situate and mitigate these traumas, exposing the attempts to redefine Frenchness in order to erase these anxieties.

Methodology

This dissertation is informed by the belief that colonial experiences shaped the colony and metropole equally. As French administrators declared, they were “inseparable” from one another.¹⁰⁷

1985); and Brett Berliner's *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). See also Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Theresa Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

In shifting focus to the nineteenth century, this project challenges the prevailing notion that attention (and fantasies) directed toward black women in French culture are only a twentieth-century phenomenon.

¹⁰⁵ For literature see Léon Francois Hoffman, *Le Nègre romantique* (Paris: Payot, 1973); Leon Fanoudh-Seifer, *Le mythe du nègre et de l'Afrique noire dans la littérature française de 1800 à la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Paris, C. Klincksieck, 1968); Jean-Claude Blachère, *Le modèle nègre: aspects littéraires du mythe primitiviste au XXe siècle chez Apollinaire, Cendrars, Tzara* (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions africaines, 1981); and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). For art, see Gen Doy, “More Than Meets the Eye: Representations of Black Women in Mid-19th-Century French Photography,” *Women's Studies International Forum*, 21:3 (May 1998); and Sylvie Chalaye *Nègres en images*, collection La Bibliothèque d'Africultures (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002). Art historians such as Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities* and “Revolutionary Sons, White Fathers, and Creole Difference: Guillaume Guillon-Lethière's ‘Oath of the Ancestors’ (1822).” *Yale French Studies*, no. 101 (2001) : 201-226; and James Smalls have been better than historians in seeing the importance of race.

¹⁰⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France, Volume 2: From the First Empire to the Second Empire, 1799-1871* (First published 1961 by Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex; 1986 edition), 39.

Analyzing one without including the other suggests that there was no reciprocal transformative impact.¹⁰⁸ Binaries of attraction and repulsion, whiteness and blackness, colony and metropole are helpful, but imply an either/or scenario that is reductive. After all, the rhetoric claimed that there were no slaves in France,¹⁰⁹ while at the same time its livelihood largely depended upon slavery in the colonies and at home. It is the very nature of both scenarios, often at the same time, that complicates and makes these interactions more meaningful. This awareness creates a new space for understanding how different locations in Europe constructed and reconstructed themselves and their colonial Others, and relocates this type of geopolitical thinking to a much earlier period of French history.

This dissertation focuses on a number of particularly visible representations of black women in early nineteenth-century France: Henriette Lucille, a young mother attempting to sue her mistress for her freedom; Sarah Bartmann, the infamous Hottentot Venus; Ourika, a young Senegalese girl originally purchased as a house pet for the Duchess of Orleans; and Jeanne Duval, common-law wife of poet Charles Baudelaire. These women, if they have been discussed at all, are usually viewed separately without a sustained analysis of how they historically fit together, or what they can tell us about France over a larger period of time. However, while they can illuminate a great deal, there are still things that remain hidden. For instance, rarely do we hear these women speak any part of their own stories. In the case of Sarah Bartmann, we only hear one word: “No.” We only discover this via Georges Cuvier writing that she refused to disrobe. In most of the studies, others were typically speaking for these women. So any study must be diligent, both in finding what we can uncover, and in not giving language to these women where none exists. Moreover, unlike Marianne, the women in this study were living, breathing young girls and women. Even though there are often tremendous differences between the actual women and the representations of them, all of them existed outside of the representations imposed upon them. When possible, I look at both sides of the discourse because leaving them solely as allegories dismisses their experience of selfhood. Focusing primarily on the representations of black women and not their actual lives (or the lives of most black women in France), I explore how the distortion of these representations produced their rhetorical importance to white French men and women.

Primary Sources

By the early to mid-nineteenth century, French administrators had wrestled for almost a century with fears that blacks were infiltrating their cities, leading France into a state of degeneration. But the conversations about blacks were not limited to politicians, scientists, philosophers and academics. A learned white French man might have encountered Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau’s ruminations on the dangers of miscegenation in his widely-read *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humains*. French lay peoples could go to the theater to see portrayals of blacks; to the Louvre where blacks were viewable in countless paintings; or to a long-running opera called *L’africaine*. Literate Parisians could read the *livres* of Flaubert, Baudelaire, and any number of well-known French novelists recounting or imagining life in the colonies. For those hoping for more bawdy humor, the *Théâtre du Vaudeville* had a play about a new sensation whose representations simultaneously crossed several genres – the Hottentot Venus.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ See for example, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Towards a New Research Perspective,” *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-3, 16.

¹⁰⁹ As noted by a bemused Sue Peabody; see Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France*.

¹¹⁰ Cuvier “had the honor” of presenting his findings (and her genitalia) on Bartmann to the French Académie. See T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 30-31.

Therefore, this investigation brings into simultaneous dialogue images, paintings, prints, and sculpture – sometimes satirical, sometimes not. It also examines legal cases, rulings, legislation, and key debates in Parliament, where appropriate. From the world of literature, I draw on plays, poems, memoirs and letters (both real and satirical). Fashion also plays a part in my discussion, although it is not just items of clothing that concern me, but the historical meaning they have for white French men and women. Finally, I look at various pamphlets, advertisements, scientific papers (including an autopsy), and newspapers. I have consciously attempted to weave a host of interdisciplinary scholarship (feminist studies, and cultural and social histories), noteworthy for their ability to include scholarship on colonialism, race, and gender, as well as for their aptitude in reading images as historical texts.¹¹¹ In this way, my use of “discursive” is intended to include more than just written or spoken texts. Using this wide variety of “texts” will show how these ideas reinforced and gave meaning to one another.

* * *

Because of the inter-disciplinary nature of my project, I hope that my dissertation not only contributes to cultural history in France, but to colonial and imperial history as well, particularly as seen and lived in the metropole. Because of France’s ongoing determination to separate itself from the endeavor that so contributed to its economic survival and prestige – namely slavery and the slave trade – my work also seeks to show the prevalence of race and racial ideologies as a way of mitigating a myriad of seemingly disconnected anxieties. Therefore, this project is attempting to present a fuller and more inclusive picture of post-revolutionary and Restoration France. If we are to see more fully how different social markers played themselves out in France during this period, race must be a part of that discussion. In addition, I hope that my work fills a gap in women’s histories in France, particularly in illuminating how even small numbers of black women can so affect and restructure French society. Finally, and most importantly, it is offered so that it may find a place in race and gender studies in general and, more specifically, that it may add to the growing scholarship of the African Diaspora in France in the early nineteenth century.

Chapter Overviews

How do we make sense of these cultural representations of black women and where do we need to look for elucidation? What was the conceptual impact of images and discussions about black women in France? Who is writing *la femme noire* and what story are they being made to tell about France? To answer these questions, we must first look at some of the major representations of black women in Saint Domingue. Chapter one, “*Des Souvenirs Vivants* – Creating and Managing Black Bodies in Eighteenth-Century Saint Domingue: A Brief Overview,” looks at some of these representations of black women in Saint Domingue, and it examines racial policies important for keeping whites and non-whites legally distinct. What becomes evident is that despite the continuing efforts, whites were looking to their non-white counterparts for things well beyond the realm of productive labor. White French women appropriated their fashion sense, and white French men

¹¹¹ Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove posit that “while, by definition, all art history translated the visual into the verbal, the iconographic approach consciously sought to conceptualize pictures as encoded texts to be deciphered by those cognizant of the culture as a whole in which they were produced.” See Stephen Daniels, Denis Cosgrove and Alan R. Baker, eds., “Introduction: Iconography and Landscape,” *Iconography of Landscapes: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2. See also Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, *Cultural Studies of the United States*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and *Can the Subaltern See: Photographs as History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

looked to the women for sexual relief and companionship, two things that expressly went against the official rhetoric of white French and Creole administrators.

Chapter two, “*Sang Impur: Legislating Race in Ancien Regime France*,” then investigates racial policy and legislation in eighteenth-century France, and the critical role of representations of black women in France proper as these representations shifted from Saint Domingue. I use a case study of a young black woman who in 1780 successfully gained her freedom in France. Peabody’s work clearly shows the tensions between blacks in eighteenth-century France and a government still granting them their freedom.¹¹² France may not have wanted blacks there, but it¹¹³ was still willing to free them (and sometimes even pay them back wages).¹¹⁴ I take Peabody’s argument further, showing that at the heart of *L’Affaire de Henriette Lucille* is the growing disdain of the French government towards its subjects who were flaunting the laws intended to keep blacks out of France. Its inability to do so, along with the representations produced and reinforced in France, set the stage for the icons that follow.

Chapter three, “Entering Darkness: Sex, Science and the Production of the Hottentot Venus,” focuses on Sarah Bartmann, infamously known as the Hottentot Venus. Here I question both the French preoccupation with the scientific and social need to understand the black female body, and why it could be useful for understanding the *white* female body as well. As the chapter indicates, Bartmann could be used to chastise white women who moved beyond normative behaviors. Because of Bartmann’s notoriety, this investigation benefits from enormous primary and secondary literature (including her published autopsy). When Bartmann was first displayed in London only months before her arrival in Paris, abolitionists instigated a court battle on her behalf. In Paris, her exhibitions met with no such resistance. In fact, French Surgeon General Georges Leopold Cuvier had the full support of the French government to take Bartmann’s body and study her. His examinations claimed to prove black Otherness in general, and black female hypersexuality specifically, while at the same time re-asserting European scientific dominance. As Nancy Stepan reminds us, science is intertwined with preconceived ideas of difference, and science has always been wedded to gender specificity. She asserts that “science was a powerful, authenticating instrument of reason and objective truth and the truth discovered was that, by nature, human beings formed a hierarchy of races and sexes which were not equal in the traits required for civilisation.”¹¹⁵ These beliefs, particularly foundational in sustaining and justifying the subjugation of blacks within the metropole, are also explored in the following chapter.

Chapter four, “A Vortex of Contradictions: *Ourika* and the Challenge to Racial and Gender Identities,” looks at the practice of white French women appropriating black female identity, and also the continuing unsuitability of black women for Frenchness. One way was via representations of Ourika, a young Senegalese girl purchased for the Duchess of Orleans in 1788. During what I call “Ourika Mania” in 1823-4, she was the subject of numerous plays, poems and discussions. There were also a number of clothing items and colors named after her. White French men also wrote about Ourika, exposing and perpetuating interesting stereotypes of the hypersexual black woman unable to sustain any “breeding” afforded to her by her time in France. Jewelry, different colors, hairstyles, and writings about Ourika allowed middle- and upper-class French women to take on stereotypical characteristics of “blackness” without fully transgressing French societal norms. This highlights the interconnectedness of gender and racial problems, particularly in the way that

¹¹² Sue Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France*.

¹¹³ I am purposely avoiding using gender when discussing France, Britain or any other country, a country being no more of a “she” than a boat.

¹¹⁴ Sue Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France*, 91.

¹¹⁵ Nancy Leys Stepan, “Race, Gender, Science and Citizenship.” *Gender and History* 10:1 (1998) : 31.

white Creole women attempted to exercise some agency over their changed circumstances, while white French men attempted to control both women, both black and white, and the definition of Frenchness.

How did these themes play out after 1830? Chapter five, “Erasing Jeanne Duval: Representations of a Black Woman at the End of French Slavery,” examines Jeanne Duval, common-law wife of poet Charles Baudelaire. Though a major part of Baudelaire’s life for over twenty years, both his contemporaries and subsequent biographers strove to demonize Duval, in part to elevate Baudelaire. Yet the level of vitriol towards Duval reveals something deeper. In this chapter, I attempt to re-create the world of Duval as a part-time actress, prostitute, and wife of Baudelaire, and analyze that within the realm of France at the end of its slave empire. In doing so, the need to erase Duval becomes an interesting metaphor for the historic need to rid France yet again of blacks on French soil.

What becomes clear is that Sarah Bartmann will become an “official” template for the representations that come after her, with references to her and pictures of her still being utilized decades after her death. In the case of Ourika, it did not matter that she was actually a thoroughly groomed aristocratic woman – and thus the polar opposite of Bartmann, who was a slave from South Africa. Jeanne Duval, the Paris-raised, French-speaking product of a black Haitian mother and white French father fares no better. Regardless of who they were or where they came from, the overarching narrative for black women was the reinforcement of their inauthentic Frenchness. « *Être français, cela s'hérite ou cela se mérite,* » chillingly exclaimed the mouthpiece of the *Front National*, Jean-Marie Le Pen.¹¹⁶ Birthright will not serve these women, nor will they ever merit inclusion. It is their excessiveness, the instability of their character, compounded by their race, which excludes them. It excludes them all.

¹¹⁶The *Front National* is a twentieth century extreme right-wing political organization in France, well known for its racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

CHAPTER I:

DES SOUVENIRS VIVANTS – CREATING AND MANAGING BLACK BODIES IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SAINT DOMINGUE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Fig. 1.1. Jean-Jacques Lequeu (1757-1825?), *Femme noire, d'après nature*, 1779-1795, plume, lavis, en coul. ; 19 x 31,2 cm (f), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Bnf: IFN: 7703785.

*Tomber 'dans le tafïa et dans la n egresse' est un proverbe du terroir qui exprime la plus compl ete d egradation de l'homme.*¹¹⁸
Proverbe

Jean-Jacques Lequeu worked as a draftsman in eighteenth-century France. After his day was over, he went home to his room, which was allegedly located within a brothel, and continued to draw. According to Philippe Duboy, Lequeu was a complicated man.¹¹⁹ During his lifetime he produced a rather stunning collection of architectural drawings (only two structures were ever built). In addition, he sketched several self-portraits depicting himself as a proper gentleman, a maiden (complete with veil), and a debased and half naked woman with extremely perky breasts. He also created a fairly large collection of pornographic drawings.¹²⁰ One such, *Femme noire, d'apr es nature* (fig. 1.1) is striking for its anatomical interpretation of an eighteenth century black “woman.” The title suggests that Lequeu made the drawing “from life,” but there is no definitive proof of this. On top of the body itself, Lequeu wrote instructive legend. What he wrote is itself instructive: near what should be the breasts, he notes “*mammelle;*” near the hip, “*hanche;*” and on the inside of her thigh, “*les parties sexuelles en action*”¹²¹ – as if on a black body, the basic composition was so different that basic body parts had to be labeled and explained. His vocabulary, more suited to animals than humans (*mammelle* and *hanche*), further distances his subject from her humanity.

Based on his other drawings, Lequeu did seem to enjoy extreme close-ups of white female genitalia. Their bodies were, in fact, traditionally rendered “women.” The same is not the case for the *femme noire* sketched above; her body is hyper-masculine, with a thick waist, calves, and thighs. Her color is much closer to a Caucasian, not “*noire*” as he indicates. And the black sheet “she” lies upon emphasizes this color differential. What is most disturbing *is* that in Lequeu’s estimation, a black woman is her open, willing, and tempting vagina (with what appear to be two clitorises). Little is known about whether or not Lequeu had access to any of the subjects he drew, or if they were just part and parcel of his vivid imagination. Moreover, it is unclear whether his study of naked bodies was for scientific purposes or his own sexual gratification. Perhaps both? Or was his

¹¹⁸ See Xavier Eyma, *Les peaux noires: sc enes de la vie des esclaves* (Paris: Michel L evy Fr eres, Libraires- diteurs; rue Vivienne,   bis, 1857), 148. Taf ia was cheap, lower quality rum from the West Indies. Its lack of “refinement” meant it was given to slaves to drink. At times, owners tried to replace food rations with taf ia (which violated article 23 of the *Code Noir*); at other times, rum was prohibited to sell or give to slaves. Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 53. The epigraph makes a connection here about choosing (or being forced to settle for) the two lowest forms of drink and woman as a sign of the most complete degradation to which a white man can sink.

¹¹⁹ Philippe Duboy, *Lequeu: An Architectural Enigma* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986). For a discussion on Lequeu’s architectural drawings, see Jean-Claude Lemagny, *Visionary Architects: Boull e, Ledoux, Lequeu* (Houston: University of St. Thomas, 1968) and Emil Kaufmann, *Three Revolutionary Architects: Boull e, Ledoux, and Lequeu*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 42, part 3, 1952. Architect Alexander Trevi’s amusing writing on Lequeu include reasons why Lequeu’s life story is ripe for cinematic adaptation. <http://pruned.blogspot.com/2005/10/enigmatic-jean-jacques-lequeu.html> (accessed August 1, 2010).

¹²⁰ Lequeu was an aspiring architect who worked as a government bureaucrat. He was also a cross-dressing artist of pornography. His drawings, listed in the Biblioth eque nationale de France as the *figures lascives* portfolio, look at physiognomy via extreme close-ups of male and female genitalia. He appeared to have a preoccupation with sexual organs, and his drawings have numerous writings on the bodies. The BNF first displayed Lequeu’s work in a 2007-2008 exhibit entitled, *Eros au secret*, which showed several items from their *L’Enfer* collection. Many of Sarah Bartmann’s drawings, which I will discuss in chap. 3, are housed there. Unlike the renderings of Bartmann, Lequeu’s work can be viewed online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/Search?ArianeWireIndex=index&p=1&lang=EN&q=jean-jacques+lequeu> (accessed July 31, 2010).

¹²¹ I have made the decision to leave intact pre-standardized spellings throughout this dissertation, including all quotes and titles, English as well as French.

representation of the black woman simply to fix on paper what he believed to be a non-normative racial and gendered body?

Based upon the equally fantastic depictions of black women in Saint Domingue, one could ask the same thing: were representations of non-white women part of a growing need to manage dangerous bodies? Or was it equally important to produce those bodies in a particular fashion, fixing them as “living memories”? Nineteenth century discursive narratives regarding black women in France drew upon and tied into critically important descriptions first developed in the colonies. This chapter looks at representations and myths of black women in Saint Domingue and explores how those representations dominated public perceptions of both white and black womanhood and sexuality on the island. Since the bulk of this chapter concerns the rhetoric about their so-called overt sexuality, it may seem incongruent that a majority of non-white women in Saint Domingue worked as field laborers. But it is not. It is the fact that so much of the conversation could be centered on black female sexuality that reveals a great deal about the larger issue of French fears of racially impure blood. No matter the guise or face of those representations – black women as murderers, temptresses, or slaves – the overwhelming sentiment was that the black female body was a living arena of danger.

This chapter and the ones that follow seek to uncover the ways that the Haitian Revolution necessitated the simultaneous incorporation and disavowal of blackness into the definitions of citizen, Republicanism, universal rights, and thus, national identity in France proper. Prior to 1802, dominant representations of black women and women of color came from France’s black colonies. In the case of white French men and women in Saint Domingue, the representations of black women that had been so carefully nurtured and maintained in the colony were not so benign once they were illuminated alongside a broken white populace limping back to France from their former homes. Since this project argues that the myth and memory of Saint Domingue haunted France after the Haitian Revolution, this is a logical point of entry into this research.

* * *

Historians of Saint Domingue and modern-day Haiti have provided compelling histories detailing the importance of the Haitian Revolution in the history of France. They have illuminated how the Revolution redefined and restructured notions of citizenship as well as France’s part in the larger Atlantic World. Scholars have shown the reciprocal impact of metropole and colony and tracked the history of enslaved blacks and people of color reasserting their power and overthrowing a repressive French regime.¹²² Furthermore, historians have used the insurrection to debate universal rights and the essence of the Republican idea.¹²³ In doing so, all scholars of France have

¹²² Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 2-3.

¹²³ There are numerous studies, particularly over the last decade or so, that have beautifully discussed Saint Domingue, both as its own entity and how it related to the larger Atlantic World. Carolyn Fisk’s important work, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990) positions blacks in Saint Domingue not as lemmings directed by others, but as active agents in their own historic revolution; and C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Overture and the San Domingue Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963). For additional general histories, see Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*; *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture Williamsburg Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois, *Les Esclaves De La République: L’histoire Oubliée De La Première Émancipation, 1789-1794* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1998); and Joan Dayans, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995). For accounts on the intersection between race and citizenship see John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); “Color, Class and Identity on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Saint-Domingue’s Free Colored Elite as Colons Americains” *Slavery and Abolition* (April, 1996); “Sons of the Same Father: Gender, Race and Citizenship in French Saint Domingue, 1760-1792,” in *Visions and*

ample resources with which to form a more complete view of French society. This work builds upon and incorporates this scholarship, asking how knowledge of Haiti can tell us something more about France itself, especially via the attitudes and knowledge that returning refugees brought back with them from the colony, and how they incorporated those sentiments into their own self-identification once home.

Cohen writes that distinct patterns of interaction existed between French whites and blacks, depending on location: the West Indies, Senegal, and France. Through a comparison of these locations, Cohen shows that manifestations of racial prejudices and policies toward blacks were specific to the locale and the differing objectives of the French. In the West Indies, Cohen writes, it was dictated by the institution of slavery. The preservation of that slave system facilitated a policy of “racial exclusivism.”¹²⁴ The colonies both represented France’s economic success in the commodification of blackness and embodied its fears about diluting the purity of French blood with the presence of blackness. Gwendolyn Hall maintains that, through a comparison of slave plantation systems in Saint Domingue and Cuba, both systems needed to establish and maintain social control in order to preserve social order.¹²⁵ Hilliard d’Auberteuil stated that “the very spectacle of free blacks was dangerous for slaves, since color should be absolutely identified with slave status.”¹²⁶ D’Auberteuil insisted that the contradiction of free and black would lead to vulnerability on all sides: confusion for whites, and the potential danger of giving ideas of freedom to blacks. The fundamental assumption was that whiteness was always tainted by the inclusion of so-called black blood, though blacks could be uplifted by the inclusion of white blood.

To prevent this vulnerability, racial laws were designed to keep blacks and whites (and then people of color) separate. They did not completely work: white women ignored them, wearing fashions that were designed to racially separate in order to “compete” with their non-white counterparts. This activity exposed their sexual jealousy (as the rhetoric by both white and non-white men claimed), jeopardized the notion of pristine and chaste white womanhood, and confirmed

Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France, ed. Jack R. Censer and Lisa Jane Graham Christine Adams (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Colwill, “Sex, Savagery, and Slavery in the Shaping of the French Body Politic,” in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001). For scholarship on the Haitian Revolution, see David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering, eds., *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009); David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); David Patrick Geggus, *The impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, The Carolina Lowcountry and the Atlantic World* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 2001); David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery: War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006); and Doris Lorraine Garraway, ed. *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008). See also Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); and Doris Lorraine Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹²⁴ Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, 100 and 128. According to Cohen, France’s attitude in the West Indies was fear and hostility toward so-called foreigners, while in Senegal it was more accommodating. Thus they enjoyed better race relations, 100.

¹²⁵ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba*.

¹²⁶ Hilliard d’Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l’état présent de la colonie française de St. Domingue*, 2 vols., (Paris 1776-1777) vol. 2, 84, as quoted in Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies*, 137. For an overview on d’Auberteuil and this important work, see Yvonne Fabella, “‘An Empire Founded on Libertinage’: the *Mulâtresse* and Colonial Anxiety in Saint Domingue,” in *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*, ed. Nora E. Jaffary (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007).

the need of white men to dominate them. White men continued to sexually desire the non-white female body, which complicated notions of white racial superiority and self-control. The rapidly developing *gens de couleur* population was proof that blacks and whites were coming together for more than just enriching France's economic base. These failings had to be accounted for. This chapter argues that representations of black women were an important way to elucidate this ongoing breakdown in racial hierarchy.

While they could be effective beasts of burden, thus enriching French coffers, black women were also a threat to the body politic. As such, the risks of black women upsetting that delicate balance were far-reaching. They could literally kill French subjects with poison – pages and pages of writing by officials and scared plantation owners attested to the bloodlust of the black slave. In addition, their sexual excess posed a threat to the racial purity of white French blood, and thus the French nation. Their general “otherworldliness” rendered those in their grasp unable to resist them. Ironically, this also made white French men less culpable for what happened while ensnared. Though alluring, these black bodies were also threatening – because they raised questions about the lack of French will and self-discipline. No matter how that danger, with the threat of miscegenation, manifested itself – black women's ability to exercise a supernatural hold of French men's minds and bodies, or in the inordinate amount of time that the citizens spent on contemplating their Otherness – what was not in doubt was that the racialized body was unsafe. However strong the attempts at sequestering the so-called races, it was not enough to keep bodies – black or white – apart from one another.

France's Colonial Empire: Saint Domingue as the Jewel in France's Crown



Fig. 1.2. P.C. Varle et autres, *Carte De La Partie Françoise De St. Domingue* (A Map of the French Part of St. Domingue) 1814, engraving, 17 ¼” x 22”, San Francisco, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection¹²⁷

¹²⁷ “Outline color with towns and parishes noted. It stated that ‘Places burnt by the Negroes are coloured Yellow.’ ” Reference: P722-31, 1372-31. <http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~640~50079:Carte->

France occupied Antigua in 1666, and Hispaniola (later named Saint Domingue) came under French authority officially in 1697 via the Treaty of Rhyswick.¹²⁸ Laurent Dubois writes that sugar was an “economic miracle.”¹²⁹ In the 1780s, Saint Domingue produced two-fifths of the world’s sugar, as well as more than half of the world’s coffee.¹³⁰ David Geggus and John Garrigus have also shown the importance of indigo in Saint Domingue.¹³¹

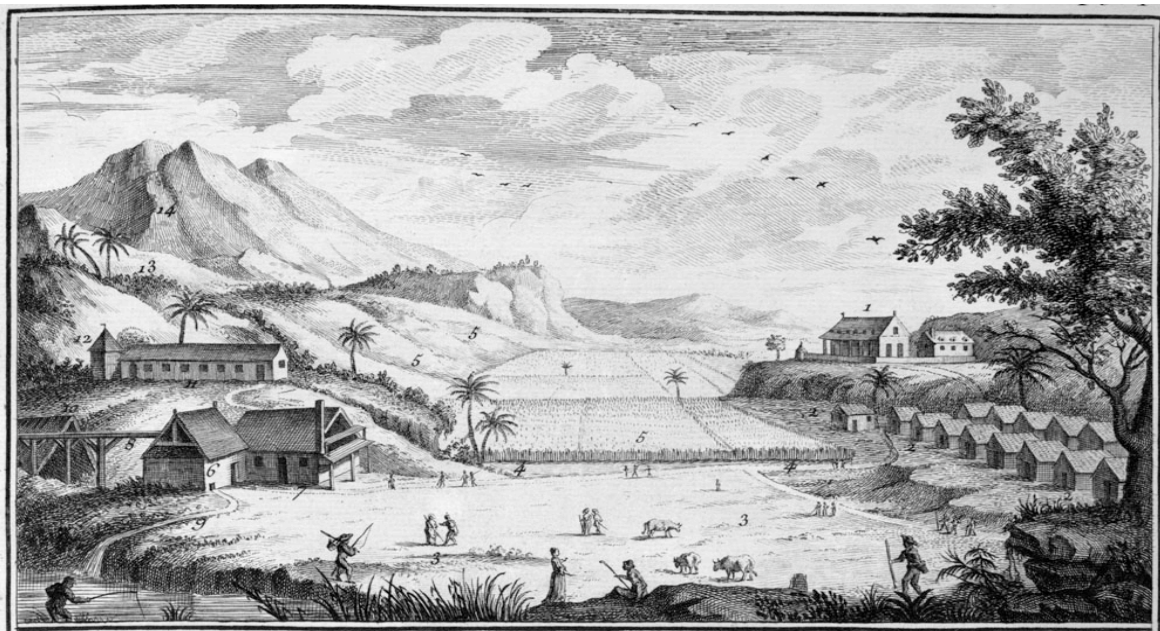


Fig. 1.3. *View of a Sugar Plantation, French West Indies, 1762*, Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library¹³²

De-La-Partie-Francoise-De-St- (accessed May 1, 2010). Author’s note: unless otherwise indicated, “notes and comments” that accompany images are the writings of the website, or the curator, not the author’s own.

¹²⁸ Christopher Columbus came upon the island in 1492, naming it La Española. Santo Domingo ultimately became its capital.

¹²⁹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 18. For more on sugar, see Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

¹³⁰ According to David P. Geggus. See Diana Paton and Pamela Scully, “Introduction: Gender and Slave Emancipation in Comparative Perspective,” in *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, ed. Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 10.

¹³¹ David Geggus, “Indigo and Slavery in Saint Domingue,” *Slavery without Sugar: Diversity in Caribbean Economy and Society Since the 17th Century*, ed. Verene A. Shepherd (Tampa: University of Florida Press, 2002) and John D. Garrigus, “Blue and Brown: Contraband Indigo and the Rise of a Free Colored Planter Class in French Saint-Domingue,” *Americas* 50 (1993): 233–63.

¹³² “This illustration is a generalized view of what is supposed to be a typical sugar plantation in the French West Indies. Details of the illustration are given in Diderot, section on Agriculture, p. 11. For example, on the upper right (1) is shown the houses of the owner and overseers (surrounded by a fence); on the lower right, the houses of the slaves, “forming one or two or more streets,” depending on the size of the plantation (2); sugar cane fields in the center and left (5); the water mill for grinding canes is on the lower left (6) and the boiling house (7) next to it; the curing house, where the sugar is dried in pots is on the upper left (12), and fields devoted to food crops such as manioc and bananas are on the upper slopes to the left (13). A slightly altered and reversed version of this image is in M. Chambon, *Le commerce de l’Amérique par Marseille* (Avignon, 1764), vol. 1, plate V, facing p. 382,” <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/details.php?categorynum=8&categoryName=&theRecord=81&recordCount=84> (Accessed June 22, 2010).

Christopher Miller asserts that “Saint Domingue (which doubled its production between 1783 and 1789) alone accounted for two-thirds of France’s overseas trade and was the most profitable colony the world had ever known.”¹³³ Popkin calls Saint Domingue an “absolutely central part of the world” and “a site central to the entire Atlantic economy.”¹³⁴ By 1789, “nearly two-thirds of France’s foreign commercial interests were centered in St. Domingue,”¹³⁵ and “15 percent of the 1,000 members of the National Assembly owned colonial property, and many others were probably tied to colonial commerce.”¹³⁶ Cap Français, first settled in 1676, with a Catholic Church immediately established,¹³⁷ was the largest urban area in the colony. Although Port-au-Prince was the capital, Cap Français was considered the most cosmopolitan area in Saint Domingue.¹³⁸

The opulence and rapid expansion of production required bodies to service the colony. Miller states that “between 1640 and 1700 the French took 75,000 slaves into their colonies; from 1700 to 1760, 388,000.”¹³⁹ Saint Domingue’s slave population grew from approximately 2,000 bodies in 1681 to over 480,000 by 1791.¹⁴⁰ The majority of enslaved Africans purchased by France were ending up in the West Indies, with Saint Domingue receiving a lion’s share. Dubois writes that 685,000 slaves were brought into Saint Domingue during the eighteenth century.¹⁴¹ According to Robert Louis Stein, the eighteenth century saw more than 3,000 French ships involved in transportation of Africans (see fig. 1.4) and more than one in ten jobs in France were dependent upon the slave trade.¹⁴² In 1788, free people of color in the colony numbered 21,813, almost half of the total free population, while whites accounted for 27,723.¹⁴³

¹³³ Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 26.

¹³⁴ Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 5-6.

¹³⁵ Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies*, 9.

¹³⁶ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 21.

¹³⁷ King, 21.

¹³⁸ King, particularly Chapter Two, for an overview of Cap Français.

¹³⁹ Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, 22.

¹⁴⁰ These are Philip Curtain’s figures. See Moitt, 25.

¹⁴¹ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 39.

¹⁴² Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), xiii.

¹⁴³ King, xv-xvi.

ÉTAT GÉNÉRAL DES NAVIRES NÉGRISERS,
Armés dans divers Ports de France, pour la Côte d'Afrique, en 1785, dressé à Nantes, par MM. J. & B.

ARMATEURS.	NOM DES NAVIRES.	CAPITAINES.	DESTINATIONS.					DÉPART.		NOMBRES DES NOIRS.	NOIRS			LIEUX	ÉVÉNEMENTS.
			Sénégal.	Angole.	Côte-d'O.	Kalabar.	Mozambique.	Jour.	Mois.		Traité.	Morts.	Invalides.		
DUNKERQUE															
Jacques Pol & Compagnie.	L'Union	Jacques Perre						13	Février	100					
Dominig, Couvignat & Compagnie.	Le Reven	Mais						15	Avril	150					
SAINT-MALO															
Maison Bretonne & Marion & Co.	La Duch de Polignac.	Lefer de la Meur						1	Avril	600					
Grandjean-Mathé	Le Saint-Espoir	Dufresne Lagot						14	Septem.	500					6 Janvier 1786
Grandjean-Mathé	Le Maréchal	Oyer						18	Déc.	600					
HONFLEUR															
Premard & fils	L'Alexandre	Heblin						13	Janvier	400					
Lacoussais, pere & fils	Le Prince-Noir	Leprevot						13	Février	400					
Bernon & Compagnie	La Bonne-Sophie	Falouard						12	Mars	400					
Mangon-Lafont	L'Adèle	Jaslon						4	Juin	100					
Baud	La Foudre	Lefevre						8	Juillet	100					
Bernon & Compagnie	Les deux Saints-Union	Barabé						21	Déc.	500					
LE HAVRE															
Begouen de Meaux & Compagnie.	L'Agamemnon	Lemaçon						13	Janvier	650			126	Cap St. D.	perdre au départ.
Clouet Bouvier, fils	Le Mentor	Edinger						12	Déc.	400					
D. Chauvet & fils	Le Phaton	Mungat						13	Février	400					
D. Chauvet & fils	L'Amiral-Lafont	Lecuyer						13	Mars	400					
Veuve Homberg & Homberg, fils	Le Roi-Marin	Thibout						8	Avril	650					
J. Billaud, Allard & Compagnie.	Le Maréchal	Lemolle						11	Déc.	450					
D. Chauvet & fils	L'Alexandre	Erêt						11	Déc.	450					
D. Chauvet & fils	La Belle-Artiste	Duval						10	Déc.	600					
Fausche, pere	La Saine	Metochières						10	Jan.	380					
Mangon-Lafont	L'Adèle	Samson						4	Déc.	650					
Begouen de Meaux & Compagnie.	Le Fantasme	Lyonnet						11	Déc.	440					
L. Legend & Compagnie.	L'Alexandre	Haguenon						1	Juillet	450					
Veuve Drabaire & L. Louis, fils	Le Jéhu	Ferret						11	Déc.	450					
Veuve Homberg & Homberg, fils	L'Atlas	Océan						13	Déc.	650					
Bouillon & Pouchet	Le Jéhu	Quével						21	Déc.	400					
Bouillon & Compagnie.	Les quatre Cousins	Corbillat						22	Août	750					
L. Legend & Compagnie.	L'Amable-Nouveau	Bertot						10	Septem.	450					
Blanchet	Les Bons-Amités	Pignol						18	Déc.	550					
Breton & Caronville	Le Marché de Cuffin	Lachèvre						10	Déc.	450					
Fausche, pere	L'Alcazar	Dagnis						14	Novem.	550					
Bachelot & Fassinin	Le Prince-roi	Rudeval						10	Décem.	400					
Bouillon & Compagnie.	Le Dauphin	Rachet						10	Déc.	350					
LA ROCHELLE															
P. J. Van Hoogwerf.	L'Amable-Suzanne	Dabois						3	Avril	350					
M. Girardin	L'Eber	Leveufier						11	Déc.	450					
Alouin	Le Rocher	Goyet						11	Déc.	450					
M. Girardin	Le Concorde	Bertrand						27	Déc.	400					
Dumoussier de Frenin	Le Jéhu	Troch						18	Juin	450					
Compagnie	Le Marquis de Voyer	Papin						18	Déc.	500					
Dumoussier de Frenin	Le Prince-roi	Banquetier						9	Juillet	400					
Dumoussier de Frenin	Le Ponceau	Baudouin						11	Août	500					
Dumoussier de Frenin	Le Prince-roi	Frenin						15	Déc.	400					

Fig. 14. *Etat Général des Navires Négriers*, Nantes, 1785, Bordeaux Municipal Archives¹⁴⁴

Legislating Race in France's Colonies

Arguably, the French slave trade began in the 1540's with the first identifiable French slave ship – *L'Espérance* of New Rochelle – setting sail in approximately 1594. French involvement in the Antilles was in full swing by the beginning of the eighteenth century, Guadeloupe and Martinique having been annexed in 1635. In 1664, under the ministry of Colbert, Louis XIV began granting exclusive rights to transport slaves.¹⁴⁵ This remained unchanged until a royal decree in 1670 opened up the slave trade to independent shippers.¹⁴⁶ By the late seventeenth century, France began regulating its expanding colonies and its growing slave population, with the plantocracy an integral part of the project. Louis XIV's Royal Edict of March 1685 (60 articles more commonly known as the *Code Noir*)¹⁴⁷ articulated guidelines for the behavior of both whites and non-whites.¹⁴⁸ The document attempted to set forth "humane" treatment for slaves¹⁴⁹ and establish rules for the appropriate handling of blacks in the French colonies. Mostly it succeeded in making apparent how far the Kingdom's authority had reached as far legislating all aspects of life in the colonies: « *et leur faire connaître qu'encore qu'ils habitent des climats infiniment éloignés de notre séjour ordinaire, nous leur sommes*

¹⁴⁴ « *Etat Général des Navires Négriers, Nantes, » (1785), C4383, 31, Les Archives municipales de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France.*

¹⁴⁵ Miller, 19-20; Peabody, *There are no Slaves in France*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century*, xiv.

¹⁴⁷ See chapter two of Shelby McCloy's *Negro in the French Indies* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966) on the *Code Noir*.

¹⁴⁸ Even as early as 1685, whites operating outside of social mores dictated a legislative response.

¹⁴⁹ The law required that slaves be adequately clothed and fed; no excessive beatings could take place (it does not specify what was excessive) and owners had to care for old and/or ailing slaves. *Code Noir*, article 22: those not provided with food as mandated could notify the authorities (article 31). It was not allowed to substitute brandy in lieu of food (article 23). *Code Noir*, article 42 allowed the use of rods and straps but not mutilation or torture. Under article 43, officers could prosecute a master or foreman who killed a slave that was being punished. Article 38 stated that runaways could have their ears cut off and be branded with a *Fleur de Lys* on one shoulder. Multiple escapes would result in another brand. After that, the penalty was death (article 16).

toujours présent, non seulement par l'étendue de notre puissance, mais encore par la promptitude de notre application à les secourir dans leurs nécessités. »¹⁵⁰

The *Code* declared Roman Catholicism the only morally and legally acceptable religion. In fact, article 1 “chase[d] from our islands all the Jews who have established residence there,” declaring them “enemies of Christianity.”¹⁵¹ The *Code* required Catholic religious instruction for all blacks,¹⁵² as well as allowed observation of religious holidays for slaves. Slaves were forbidden from carrying weapons, could not gather in large groups, could not sell goods for their own profit, and could not have property of their own.¹⁵³ As we will later see in the case of Henriette Lucille, they could not be either litigants or defendants in court.¹⁵⁴ In fact, had the *Code* been applicable in France – which it was not – under article 31 Henriette Lucille’s case, which I discuss in chapter two, would have been legally prevented from going forward in the first place. Woe to the slave who raised his or her hand to a white person: the penalty was death.¹⁵⁵ And article 44 made the overall status of slaves clear: they were property.¹⁵⁶

The *Code Noir* charged slaveowners with their own set of responsibilities. In addition to indoctrinating their slaves with the Catholic faith, they had to ensure that their slaves had proper days off, and that slave families remained intact. The edict also left room for at least the possibility for manumission.¹⁵⁷ Most importantly (at least for slaves), the edict stated that “we grant to freed slaves the same rights, privileges and immunities that are enjoyed by freeborn persons. We desire that they are deserving of this acquired freedom and that this freedom gives them, as much for their person as for their property, the same happiness that *natural* [my emphasis] liberty has on our other subjects.”¹⁵⁸

In addition to regulating the treatment of blacks, the *Code* implied appropriate conduct for whites. With the legal status of slaves in the colonies as property, the fact that white French men could marry their non-white slaves merits conversation. Even as early as 1685, whites operating outside social norms dictated a legislative, though paradoxical, response. The law frowned upon concubinage between slaves and owners (married masters or free men could be fined for inappropriate behavior), yet it provided opportunities for single owners to marry their slaves and, thus, free them and their children.¹⁵⁹ While tacitly permissible for white men to marry black women, it is important to note that nothing was stated (or even hinted at) for white women to marry black male slaves.¹⁶⁰ In fact, Doris Garraway writes that anti-miscegenation laws were directed at black

¹⁵⁰ Louis Sala-Moulins, *Le Code Noir ou le calvaire de Canaan*, 90. There are several English translations. See for example, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/335/ETC>. See also *Le Code Noir ou recueil des relements rendus jusqu'a present* (Paris: Prault, 1767), translated by John Garrigus at <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/peabody/codenoir.htm> (Accessed February 2009).

¹⁵¹ *Code Noir*, article 1. The importance of Catholicism is immediately apparent. In fact, out of 60 articles, 8 deal with religion, either directly or indirectly. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 22 October 1685, made Catholicism the law of the land, both in the French Kingdom and its territories.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, According to Alistair Horne, between 1657 and 1685, Louis XIV had “more than 587 Protestant Churches destroyed throughout France. See Alistair Horne, *La Belle France, A Short History* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 167.

¹⁵³ *Code Noir*, articles 15, 16, 18, 19.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, articles 30, 31.

¹⁵⁵ *Code Noir*, article 33: if the slave drew blood on his/her master or his family, or hit them in the face, the penalty was death.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, article 44.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, articles 55, 56, 57, 59.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, article 59.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, articles 9, 11, 12, and 13.

¹⁶⁰ When Napoleon attempted to recover Saint Domingue, he reserved a special hostility for white Frenchwomen who had had sexual contact with black men, regardless of their social or economic standing. In fact, when Napoleon sent Leclerc to Saint Domingue in 1803 to re-establish French rule, he demanded that “White women who have prostituted

men wishing to marry white women, not the other way around.¹⁶¹ As further control, priests needed a master's permission before officiating at a slave marriage.¹⁶²

In 1695, there were already discussions about intermarriage between white men and black women at Saint Domingue. In fact, Governor Pontchartrain (the governor of Saint Domingue at the time) wrote Paris asking for one hundred white women to be sent to the colony, stating that because of the shortage of white women, colonists were "obliged to take black women as wives."¹⁶³ The implication was that white men only married black women because there was nothing more suitable for them to choose from, not because they might find these women desirable. What is also interesting in this scenario is the idea that all women, regardless of their race, were being regarded as commodities to be imported to the colony. As more and more enslaved Africans were brought to the colony, and more white French men came to make their fortune, all of these bodies threatened, so that more legislative decisions would need to be made to manage them all.

Mapping of Race in Colonial Space

Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de St. Méry, arguably the best-known chronicler of politics, geography, law and social norms on Saint Domingue, had this to say about all aspects of life in the colony, warning that:

In Saint Domingue everything takes on a character of opulence such as to astonish Europeans. That crowd of slaves who await the orders and even the signals of one man, confers an air of grandeur upon whomever gives the orders. It is in keeping with the dignity of a rich man to have four times as many domestics as he needs. The women, especially, have the talent of surrounding themselves with a useless lot of their own sex. And what is difficult to reconcile with the jealousy caused to them sometimes by these dark-skinned servants is the care given to choose pretty ones and to make their costumes elegant. How true it is that vanity can take charge of everything!¹⁶⁴

Several issues of concern become apparent, but first, notice the conflation of white Creole women with the city itself. Moreau de St. Méry devoted several pages of his text to the self-indulgent white Creole woman, known for her opulence, (attributing jealousy and uselessness also to white women). Vanity was of particular concern, be it the vanity of a slave owner whose overabundance of slaves was merely a way of highlighting his wealth and indulging his passions ("care given to choose pretty ones"), or the white women who willingly put themselves in with slave women, only to become jealous of them. The slaves (distanced from the institution of slavery by the term "servant") were depicted as passive while awaiting instructions to work, yet sexually predatory in searching for men.

* * *

It is evident that the colonies were concerned about interracial relations and a growing population of peoples of various degrees of African descent since 1685 – both in the colonies and in France. Moreau de St. Méry's list of racial classifications and lengthy descriptions of each category attest to the amount of governmental thought that went into making sense out of this new racial

themselves to *nègres*, whatever their rank, will be sent to Europe." See Letter from Napoleon to Leclerc in Paul Roussier, ed., *Lettres du General Leclerc* (Paris: Soc. de l'histoire des colonies françaises, 1937), 263-74, quoted in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean 1789-1804, A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Napoleon's sister, Pauline, Leclerc's wife, was well known for having violated this rule, allegedly with both Toussaint L'Overture and Henri Christophe.

¹⁶¹ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, note 50, 344.

¹⁶² *Code Noir*, article 11.

¹⁶³ Moitt, 10.

¹⁶⁴ Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de St. Méry, *A Civilization that Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti (1797-1798)*, 2 volumes, translated, abridged and edited by Ivor D. Spencer (Boston: University of American Press, 1985), 22.

landscape.¹⁶⁵ These classifications were predicated upon the idea that a person's ancestry was based on 128 parts.¹⁶⁶

PARTS WHITE	PARTS NON-WHITE	DISTINCT TITLE BASED ON RACIAL MAKEUP
128 parts	0 parts	White
127 parts	1 part	Sang Mêle
120 parts	8 parts	Mamelouque
112 parts	16 parts	Metif or Octoroon
96 parts	32 parts	Quadroon or Quarteron
64 parts	64 parts	Mulatto
48 parts	80 parts	Marabou
32 parts	96 parts	Griffe
16 parts	112 parts	Sacatra
0 parts	128 parts	Negro

Fig. 1.5. *Categories of Race*¹⁶⁷

Concern with the implications of these myriad categories was growing. It meant there were less “pure” white French men and women. Lieutenant Thomas Phipps Howard, a participant in Britain’s invasion of Saint Domingue, stated that “I have seen many Mulattresses as white, if not whiter, than the generality of European women.”¹⁶⁸ For Howard, racial distinction should have been clearly “written” on their bodies. The fact that it was not made correct identification difficult, if not impossible. It also made the possibility of transgressing acceptable racial boundaries highly probable. The increasing difficulty in legislating race (the skin color of some mixed-race *colons* made it increasingly difficult to identify them by looking), and the economic success of non-whites on the island found many in the position of needing more definitive distinctions between whites and non-whites.

Blood was already a mysterious entity: past generations had believed that evil lurked in the blood, others that disease was hidden there. So there could be “good” blood and “bad” blood. Bad blood needed to be removed for the survival of the patient (or the nation). Leviticus 17:11 states that “the life of a creature is in the blood.”¹⁶⁹ So it is perhaps not surprising that early doctors and scientists thought that blood could be contaminated in specific ways and that only bloodletting could cure their patients. Nor is it a large leap to think, with the advent of anthropology and other

¹⁶⁵ It was first published in Philadelphia in 1796 and in France in 1797. Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de St. Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle de Saint-Dominque*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Schetz L'arteur, au coin de front a de Callow-Hillstreet, 1797).

¹⁶⁶ 128 parts meant the inclusion of parents, grandparents, etc. for eight generations, on both sides of the family.

¹⁶⁷ “Kate Chopin: Creoles” (Loyal University of New Orleans), <http://www.loyno.edu/~kchopin/Creoles.htm> (accessed January 2009). See Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de St. Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle de Saint-Dominque* for an additional eleven pages of racial hyperbole.

¹⁶⁸ *The Haitian Journal of Lieutenant Howard, York Hussars, 1796-1798*, edited, with an introduction by Roger Norman Buckley (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 77-78, 110. Buckley has edited the version of Howard’s journal; his additions are in the quote above. Given that the remainder of the changes would be spelling, I have elected to leave them as Howard wrote them.

¹⁶⁹ Leviticus 17:11, NIV. For a discussion on blood and the law in America, see David L. Faigman, *Laboratory of Justice: The Supreme Court's 200-Year Struggle to Integrate Science and the Law* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2004).

sciences, that this argument could have become racial in nature. Hence it could be racially “proven” that the infusion of so-called non-white blood could cause degeneration, or that the excess of “black blood” could lead to bloodthirsty slaves hell bent on vengeance. Both arguments reveal the belief that purity/non-purity – even emotions themselves – lie in the blood. Therefore, in this matter, blood became a social construct.

Not only was the amount of European vs. non-European blood important, but many inhabitants on the island subscribed to locational and color hierarchies based on these distinctions. As I previously mentioned, both whites and non-whites were affected by and sometimes complicit in the racial structure on Saint Domingue, with free peoples of color distancing themselves from poor whites (*petits blancs*) and attempting to align themselves with the planter class (*grands blancs*). Given the status of slaves on the island, and often their own economic standing (people of color on the island owned several profitable plantations as well as slaves), it is no revelation that they would attempt to distance themselves racially from both poor whites and enslaved blacks.¹⁷⁰



Fig. 1.6. L.F. Labrousse, *Négresse et femme mulâtre de Saint-Domingue*, 1796, grav. sur cuivre: coul. ; 18 x 12 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ The tensions between race and class are most clearly seen via an examination of the free people of color in Saint Domingue, and their desires to want their status evaluated based on their economic standings vs. their racial classification. For works dealing specifically with these issues see for instance, Susan M. Socolow, “Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color of Cap Français,” in *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). See also John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*; John D. Garrigus, “‘Sons of the Same Father’: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in French Saint Domingue, 1760-1792,” in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*; and Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig*. This discussion about solidarity via class or race becomes increasingly important for returning refugees from Saint Domingue after the revolution. Their reincorporation into Frenchness used race as the distinctive marker, eliminating non-whites from citizenship.

¹⁷¹ Plate 16 en reg., (Paris : Grasset Saint-Sauveur, Deroy, 1796), 4, Bibliothèque nationale, cote Réserve F 24 G76 1796, notice n°: FRBNF38495383.

I attempt to be mindful of how people represent themselves, even while I make some broad observations on the imposition of other types of depictions. In fig. 1.6, depictions of the two black women indicate their differences by class as well as race. The paler *mulâtresse* is fully and elaborately dressed, her topless and shoeless counterpart carrying tools of labor. Free, possibly rich, mixed-race women “looked more like” white French women, than darker African women, thereby posing an even greater threat. Class status similarly contributed to an increase in their desirability.

Black Women in Saint Domingue

In order to establish a baseline of the various representations at play in Saint Domingue, it is important to understand both the work that black women did there, and what meanings were associated with that work. The following chapters give a more detailed analysis of the impact of these representations on French identity. There was a hierarchical structure among black women in Saint Domingue predicated upon a number of interlocking issues: their status as slave or free, their economic status, and the amount of African “blood” they had. Economic status was often predicated upon whether they were free agents or belonged to another. Women of color were more likely to be free. At the highest level were those who were not enslaved at all: first free women of color, and then free black women. Free women of color may have owned land or homes, and run retail shops; some of the more affluent owned property, including slaves whom they bought and sold.

The majority of black women in Saint Domingue were field slaves engaged in cane cutting, weeding, distilling rum, and cultivating gardens.¹⁷² The work was back breaking, and mortality rates were high. Cooks, seamstresses, house slaves, midwives, and washerwomen were considered more advantaged than those relegated to the cane fields or the physically dangerous arena of rum production. House slaves who disobeyed their masters or mistresses were often threatened with removal from the home and reassignment to the fields.

¹⁷² See David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996). See also Arlette Gautier, *Les soeurs de Solitude. La condition féminine dans l'esclavage aux Antilles françaises du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: éditions caribéennes, 1985).



Fig. 1.7. Nicolas Ponce (1746-1831), *Blanchisseuses*, 1791, Illustrations de Recueil des vues des lieux principaux de la colonie Française de Saint-Domingue, grav. en taille-douce, 42,5 x 59,2 cm et moins, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library¹⁷³

Even though historian Pierre de Vassière felt that domestics were a “fortunate lot,”¹⁷⁴ each position was fraught with its own specific types of tensions. All of these issues spoke both to the status that whites enjoyed if they could afford the services of multiple slaves, as well as to the heightened levels of paranoia that came from deeply intimate contact between unwilling slaves and their owners, which led to long-lasting representations of black women as lazy, duplicitous, sexually insatiable, and as murderers and thieves. Field slaves were accused of work slowdowns and stoppages, washerwomen of purposely damaging clothes of their owners. It is difficult to extrapolate what was true sabotage and what was merely suspected. Midwives lived in fear of being accused of facilitating abortions and – more frightening – intentionally causing infanticide, exacerbating already low birthrates on the island. If they were found guilty of intentionally causing harm to a baby, the penalty was death. Black women were also accused of being sorcerers and of practicing witchcraft.¹⁷⁵

Whites were terrified of being poisoned, and especially unnerved by their cooks. Slaveowners were afraid – and with good reason. There are dozens of episodes of slaves poisoning

¹⁷³ Nicolas Ponce, *Recueil des vues des lieux principaux de la colonie Française de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1791), fig. 26; / Phelipeau Ponce, grav. ; (Paris: Mérédic Louis Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, aut. du texte; image fixe; 28 est. : grav. en taille-douce : n. et b. ; 42,5 x 59,2 cm et moins; Reference NW0150-a, as shown on www.slaveryimages.org, sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library. <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/details.php?categorynum=9&categoryName=&theRecord=40&recordCount=58> (accessed August 15, 2010).

¹⁷⁴ Moitt, 58.

¹⁷⁵ See for instance, Pierre Pluchon, *Vaudou, sorciers, empoisonneurs de St. Domingue à Haïti* (Paris: Karthala, 1987).

food, water, other slaves, and animals. Attack at the hands of black woman would hit very close to home for the Imperial family in 1806, when a black slave named Émilie attempted to kill Empress Josephine's mother in Martinique by feeding her food that contained crushed glass.¹⁷⁶ However, scholars like Hall question if poisoning was as widespread as claimed by the plantocracy – nor unreasonable, since owners were not above torturing their slaves to obtain confessions.¹⁷⁷

* * *

Historians of slavery agree that one of the main differences between how men and women experienced slavery was the added burden that women shouldered in the arena of sexual exploitation. It was no different in Saint Domingue. Bernard Moitt writes that “the fragility of the black woman's position can be gauged from the sustained attack on her character and womanhood. She is held responsible for the existence of mixed-race individuals, as if reproduction was a one-way affair.”¹⁷⁸ That analysis is borne out by Pierre de Vassière's comment that “one can thus see scions of the great names of France—a relative of Vaudreuil, a Chateauneuf, a Boucicaud, last descendent of an illustrious marshal of France pass their lives between a bowl of raw rum and a Negro concubine. Neither age nor absence of good looks is often an obstacle to these half-savage unions. Often these women are the most repulsively dirty and ugly that the negro race can produce.”¹⁷⁹

Geggus writes that “the paucity of females in both the white and black communities in Saint Domingue evidently put the sexual favors of slave women at a premium.”¹⁸⁰ A concubine's status was often mitigated by other social markers, for a domestic slave would more likely be in a straightforwardly forced concubinage than a free woman.¹⁸¹ Yet residents had much to say about the so-called sexual propensity of non-white women in Saint Domingue. Lucien Peytraud wrote that black women “were women of easy virtue who had no control over their person.”¹⁸² Beauvais Lespinasse wrote of the potential dangers of black women in Saint Domingue, stating “the white man transported to St. Domingue in a burning climate the influence of which upon the

¹⁷⁶ The attempt was unsuccessful; she was caught and subsequently sentenced to death. During the trial, when asked why she did it, Émilie replied that Madame de la Pagerie did not like her. She added: “I did not like her either.” The original documents for this case, and the trial that followed the incident, can be found at les Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Inventaire de la série Colonie C8A, Martinique, tome II, folio 210-220; also 163-176.

¹⁷⁷ Dubois questions whether poisoning was as widespread as planters believed; see *Avengers of the New World*, 55-56. There was also paranoia about poisoning at Versailles, partly because political rivals (all vying for the king's favor) were locked in together in quite a small space. Women were especially suspected of poisoning. And yes, it seems that there is a parallel issue there, which has to do with intimacy with “subordinates.” See Cissy Fairchild, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1983).

¹⁷⁸ Moitt, 15.

¹⁷⁹ See Pierre de Vaissiere, *La société de la vie Créole sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1909), 65, 76, 77, 215-16 in J.A. Rogers, *Sex & Race: A History of White, Negro, and Indian Miscegenation in the Two Americas: The New World*, (Helga M. Rogers, 1967), 104. Rogers is notoriously unreliable as a scholar; however, from time to time, a rare gem of information appears in his work about black women. I have not cited him in this dissertation unless I have found additional confirmation from other sources.

¹⁸⁰ David Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue,” and *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, 265.

¹⁸¹ I am not suggesting that a domestic slave would have considered herself a concubine; given the circumstances, she would most likely have considered herself a victim of rape. I delineate here only to discuss that these types of sexual relationships were complicated. Peabody writes that “many of those women who did escape slavery through manumission did so at the high price of making themselves sexually available to their benefactors,” see “Nègresse, Mulâtresse, Citoyenne: Gender and Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1650-1848,” *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, 70.

¹⁸² Moitt, 16.

temperament cannot be denied, could not resist the charms of the young African woman.”¹⁸³ White men leaving the safety of “civilized” France apparently needed to be armed with the information that something as arbitrary as heat could cause the decidedly inappropriate behavior of miscegenation.¹⁸⁴ Lespinasse’s passage, tellingly, also admitted that African women had “charms.” Like Homer’s sirens luring men to their deaths, fault was ultimately mitigated by causes – like the weather – beyond one’s control.¹⁸⁵ Or as Moreau de St. Méry wryly suggested: « *on est même en quelque sorte autorisé à dire, que la chaleur du climat qui irrite les désirs, et la facilité de les satisfaire, rendront toujours inutiles les précautions législatives qu’on voudrait prendre contre cet abus, parce que la loi se tait ou la nature parle impérieusement.* »¹⁸⁶

French men living in the colonies offered first-hand knowledge of what was happening there between whites, blacks, and people of color, and there was much discussion on how to handle the growing population. Many white French men (and a few women) headed to the colonies to make their fortunes. Saint Domingue was by no means the only choice, but it was France’s most lucrative colony. Much to the chagrin of “true Frenchmen” in the metropole, however, subjects were continually doing more than just making money abroad – much more. Far away from prying eyes, conventions often fell by the wayside. One could partake in behaviors that, while still looked down upon in the colonies, benefited from certain codes of silence, especially for men. Out of sight from more rigid social structures in France, white French men and, more problematically, French women engaged in sexual relationships with blacks.

Journals, travel guides, plays and letters reveal deep angst over interactions with “natives” both in the colonies and in France proper.¹⁸⁷ But the discourse coming from France’s colonies about black women there (like Lespinasse’s statement) suggests that the problems could be contained there. Particular colonial discourses also intimated that black women and women of color were either willing recipients of white male attention, or aggressive participants in pursuing white men, therefore complicit in their own exploitation. Conversely, colonial discourses attempted to hide this sexual behavior from view under various guises, absolving white French men from responsibility while recognizing their problematic susceptibility, thus revealing the deep internal conflicts present. Writing about French colonial Mauritius, Megan Vaughan addresses the complex sexual relationships between white men and black women, noting the amount of mental hopscotch necessary to justify these oft-exploitative interactions:

¹⁸³ Beauvais Lespinasse, *Histoire des Affranchis de St. Domingue*, vol. 1, 1882, 143-144, as quoted in J.A. Rogers, *Sex & Race: A History of White, Negro, and Indian Miscegenation in the Two Americas: The New World*, 103. Note: this quote is actually found on page 201, not 143-144 as he states; also, the English translation is Rogers’, not mine.

¹⁸⁴ Fabella writes that “environmentalists regarded Europeans who moved to the Caribbean colonies as physically, mentally and morally altered. Following this logic, white creoles would degenerate even more than relocated Europeans.” See Yvonne Fabella, “‘An Empire Founded on Libertinage’: the *Mulâtresse* and Colonial Anxiety in Saint Domingue,” 115.

¹⁸⁵ “When on another journey Odysseus’s ship passed the Sirens, [he] had the sailors stuff their ears with wax. He had himself tied to the mast for he wanted to hear their beautiful voices. The Sirens sang when they approached, their words even more enticing than the melody. They would give knowledge to every man who came to them, they said, ripe wisdom and a quickening of the spirit. Odysseus’ [sic] heart ran with longing but the ropes held him and the ship quickly sailed to safer waters.” *The Odyssey* by Homer XII, 39, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/sirens.html>, (accessed May 1, 2007).

¹⁸⁶ Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de St. Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile politique et historique de la partie française de l’isle de Saint-Domingue*, vol. 1, 107. Moreau de St. Méry is necessarily cited over and over again in scholarship about Saint Domingue. This work is more concerned with the importance of his representations of life and people in Saint Domingue to his fellow Frenchmen and women, than whether or not his portrayals were accurate.

¹⁸⁷ See for instance, Baron de Wimpffen’s infamous letters concerning the supernatural power of negresses and mulatresses, in Alexandre de Wimpffen, *Haïti au xviii^e siècle: Richesse et esclavage dans une colonie française*, édition présentée et annotée par Pierre Pluchon, Paris: Édition Karthala, 1993).

Sex between the master and the slave woman was in a sense sex within the family, incest within the fantasy family of slavery, nominally transgressive, but largely undistruptive of the colonial order of things. The woman slave, unlike the ‘free black’ woman or her male counterpart, was not a desiring subject – her sexuality had no separate existence, it was part and parcel of the labor she performed.¹⁸⁸

In any case, black women’s sexual availability to white men was not in question. Moreover, an interesting dynamic emerged pitting black and mixed race women against their white counterparts, especially with regard to “winning” of the white French male body. This was perhaps even more problematic, because in “competition” for white French men, white French women were sorely lacking in the requisite charms.



Fig. 1.8. L.F. Labrousse, *Bouquetières de Saint-Domingue*, 1796, grav. sur cuivre : coul. ; 18 x 12 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 171.

¹⁸⁹ L.F. Labrousse, (graveur), *Illustrations de Encyclopédie des voyages, contenant l'abrégé historique des mœurs, usages, habitudes domestiques, religions, fêtes...*, plate 14 en reg., (Paris : Grasset Saint-Sauveur, Deroy, 1796.), 4, Bibliothèque Nationale, cote Réserve F 24 G76 1796, notice n°: 38495383. At least one of the women depicted here is clearly of mixed race. Although both have the trappings of ladyhood (long skirts, elaborate madras headdresses), they are selling flowers. Their beauty is highlighted even as their status as laborers is affirmed.

Chocolate-Covered Cherry

The “temptress,” one of the most common archetypes of black female representations, was the easiest to utilize and the most complicated to analyze. Why? Because fact and fantasy inextricably intertwined, producing dialog that, while clearly incorrect, was uttered with confident authority: « *Je le répète, la fidélité en amour n’est le caractère du nègre dans aucun des deux sexes, et c’est le moment du dire que Saint-Domingue a offert des exemples de superfétation d’au tant plus certain, qu’un individu se trouvait nègre et l’autre mulâtre.* »¹⁹⁰ Moreau’s definitive assertion that blacks lacked the character for fidelity (he claimed to have many examples as proof) informed his opinions; he consequently devoted numerous pages to his description of both African women and women of color. Given his supposed authority regarding the people of Saint Domingue, it is his detailed descriptions that dominate these representations.¹⁹¹ The Negress, according to Moreau, got pregnant early and easily, something that contributed to her overall lack of morality, but it did not detract from her maternal prowess: she loved her children. She was prone to jealousy and obsessed with two things: cleanliness – as shown by her compulsive teeth cleaning – and attention to her clothes.¹⁹² Yet naturalist Michel Etienne Descourtilz called black slave women “animated machines.”¹⁹³

The Mulatress, on the other hand, has characteristics that combined traits of white Creole (I will return to this point) women with the vices of her own “race.” Given the inordinate amount of attention Moreau de St. Méry gave to the over-glamorized women of color on Saint Domingue, his view of Saint Domingue – mediated through this racialized and gendered lens – takes on new meaning.¹⁹⁴ Moreau found her to be nonchalant, charming, sensible, and needing to be surrounded by luxury. Because of her sexual insatiability (he believed not even the most potent partner could keep up with her), she contracted sexual diseases more than any other group on the island. She claimed only to want white men, but secretly desired other mulattos – yet was kind to the poor and the sick.¹⁹⁵ Like Negro women, she was hyper-clean, but favored cold water baths, which gave her « *a fraîcheur et la dureté du marbre.* »¹⁹⁶ The connection of black sexuality with an inanimate object – marble – is telling: it facilitated the representation of black women as cold, emotionless, detached, and possessing non-human elements, further marking her as different. Ironically they were, in his estimation, too human and too inhuman simultaneously. Yet marble also linked her with luxury and elegance.

¹⁹⁰ Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de St. Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile politique et historique de la partie française de l’île de Saint-Domingue*, vol. 1, 70.

¹⁹¹ According to Dubois and Garrigus, Moreau de St. Méry had a daughter by his free mixed-race mistress. See “Une fille naturelle de Moreau de St. Méry a Saint Domingue”, *Revue de la société haïtienne d’histoire et de la géographie* (March 1989): 51, in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean 1789-1804, A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006), 57. He gave her (and their? daughter) money and slaves before his proper marriage to a white woman. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 68.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 57-77.

¹⁹³ Michel Etienne Descourtilz, *Voyages d’in naturaliste, es ses observations*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1809), 2:51-52, as quoted in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 69.

¹⁹⁴ See Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, chap. 1 for a nice bibliographic overview of Moreau de St. Méry.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-109.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.



Fig. 1.9. L.F. Labrousse, *Nègre et Nègresse de Saint-Domingue*, 1796, grav. sur cuivre : coul. ; 18 x 12 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France¹⁹⁷

Non-white women – whether as slaves, concubines or free women – were presented as full of vanity and depicted as lazy moneygrubbers only interested in elevating their status. Instrumental in these representations was the straightforward callousness with which black women obtained their riches – often to the social, financial, and moral desolation of their so-called victims. Black women were represented as deeply attached to luxurious displays of their beauty, so the fact that many women of color had white lovers who paid for their baubles must have intensified tensions. Lieutenant Thomas Phipps Howard, a participant in Britain’s invasion of Saint Domingue, consolidated many of these tensions in his description of the duplicity of black women who used their bodies to display lavish quantities of jewelry designed to ensnare white men, while their true motives remained focused on financial gain:

Another Luxury amongst them is shewn in Neck Laces, Rings & Bracelets which are all of Gold & of the most beautiful workmanship, So that one of these Women when dressed, with Taste, which is by no means wanting, looks a very desirable Object. With all these bodily perfections, the greatest part of them, to their Inferiors and Slaves—for many of them have several to wait on them—are Proud, disdainful & cruel. Unfortunate is the

¹⁹⁷ L.F. Labrousse, (graveur), *Illustrations de Encyclopédie des voyages, contenant l'abrégé historique des mœurs, usages, habitudes domestiques, religions, fêtes...*, plate 13 en reg., (Paris : Grasset Saint-Sauveur, Deroy, 1796), 4, Bibliothèque Nationale, cote Réserve F 24 G76 1796, notice n FRBNF38495383. Unlike the other engravings, this one depicts black Africans with the type of trappings normally associated with free people of color. Perhaps the intention was to show their own free status?

poor wretch who is doomed to be their property, for as many of them have felt the Lash themselves, they repay it in their turn with liberal Interest.¹⁹⁸

Black women were also presented as sexually duplicitous. There was the belief that their affections were not quite genuine: « *passer la nuit chez celui qu'elles aiment le plus ou qui les payé le mieux.* »¹⁹⁹ This disdain surrounding interracial relationships between black women and white men can be seen through the absolute reluctance to step beyond the existing rhetoric. Howard stated that:

There may be more female People of Colour free than Males, the reason of which is obvious: I'll not say Love, for that would be disgracing the Passion, but all powerful Passion itself frequently leads a Master to Emancipate his handsome female Slaves. These for the most part, when their former Owner is clyed with Possession, enter into a Scene of perpetual debauchery untill from the promiscuous Embraces of every comer, they in the end fall a Prey to Discease & Poverty, for disgrace is scarcely known in St. Domingo.²⁰⁰

Howard assumed that love between black women and white men was impossible, relegating any activity between the two as lust or passion run amok. The narrative of disease and debauchery added to his story, as did the duplicity of the women and the damage of miscegenation that they wrought. Also of concern to him was how black women used their charms to lead their powerless masters astray. Portraying black women as using their sexuality and their bodies to ensnare unwitting white French men set up a convenient excuse for white men: if they were tempted – or God forbid, fell in love – it was not their fault. After all, they were being manipulated.

Little distinction was made between women in concubinage and those who were depicted as prostitutes. The French Government dealt with issues of concubinage in the *Code Noir* of 1685. Article 8 stated that those not Catholic could not enter into a marriage regardless of their race. Here it was religion, not race, that was used to determine concubinage.²⁰¹ Article 9 decreed that free men who have children from their slave concubines – as well as masters who allow such unions – would be fined 2,000 pounds of sugar and face loss of that slave. In addition, if the freeman was not married, he could marry her, thus freeing her and their children.²⁰² Not surprisingly, many greeted this possibility with horror. D'Auberteuil had this to say about Negresses who married their masters:

How many Negresses have profited from it [the *Code Noir* allowing marriage] and appropriated the entire fortune of their masters, brutalized by libertinage, and incapable of resisting their power over feeble and

¹⁹⁸ Howard, 104-105. Howard discusses negresses being beautifully dressed, and uses this to suggest that these women were not inordinately mistreated under slavery. See page 107 as well.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 104-107.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ The *Code Noir*, article 8: “We declare our subjects who are not of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion incapable in the future of contracting a valid marriage. We declare bastards the children born of such unions which we desire to be held and considered, we hold and we consider to be truly concubinage.”

²⁰² The *Code Noir*, article 9: “The free men who will have one or several children from their concubinage with their slaves, together with the masters who permitted this, will each be condemned to a fine of two thousand pounds of sugar; and if they are the masters of the slave by whom they have had the said children, we wish that beyond the fine, they be deprived of the slave and the children, and that she and they be confiscated for the profit of the [royal] hospital, without ever being manumitted. Nevertheless we do not intend for the present article to be enforced if the man who was not married to another person during his concubinage with his slave would marry in the church the said slave who by this means will be manumitted and the children rendered free and legitimate.” As in the United States, children followed the condition of their mother. <http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/peabody/fcolonial.htm#code> (accessed June 2008). See also Moitt, 152-160, for his discussion on “The Code Noir, Concubinage, and Manumission.”

seduced souls. . . . The wealth of families has been sacrificed to passion, has been the price of debauchery, and respectable names have fallen, along with the best lands, to legitimized mulattoes.²⁰³

The blame lay with black women's superhuman ability to assert their power over "feeble and seduced souls," who then suffered for their "debauchery." This ability, said d'Auberteuil, had caused the ruin of many a French man's spirit, reputation, and fortune. An officer wrote "that women of color in Saint Domingue were 'idols' at the feet of which European men deposited their fortune. Such women were made themselves the 'absolute masters of their conquests.'"²⁰⁴ The fortunes of these European men, both in their semen (their legacy) and their money, were literally and figuratively "deposited" into women of color. As a result, women of color became the "masters" – not mistresses – of their victims. As the Old Testament warned, the consequences could be the wrath of God. This also subverted a natural order by shifting economic prosperity out of the hands of whites and into the grasp of mulattos.

Sumptuary Law

It is not surprising that one way to demonstrate financial success was through the clothes one chose to wear and the ornamentation that accessorized that attire. If imitation is considered the greatest form of flattery, legislation sometimes made it illegal. Sumptuary laws throughout Europe prohibited the wearing of certain clothes or colors based on status and/or rank. Commoners were prevented from putting materials on their bodies that might allow them to be mistaken for nobility.²⁰⁵ What was critical to this prohibition was the need to make sure "upstarts" were held within their proper place, particularly in the *public* arena. Though they might eventually have the economic means to purchase certain attire, they were still expected to remain within the proper class station. These laws were ostensibly designed to protect the social order and prohibit anyone from slipping unnoticed outside rank, class, and gender boundaries.²⁰⁶ Given the often-perilous financial situation of commoners under the Monarchy, it is surprising that this needed to be legislated so often. Yet, between 1495 and 1660, eighteen decrees were issued in France to ensure the clear demarcation of class, including two under Louis XIII – in 1629 and 1633 – stating that precious jewels and gold could not be worn on commoners' clothing. The slightest item did not escape scrutiny. Valerie Steele remarks that "in medieval France, a prince might wear a shoe with a point up to twenty-four inches in length; an ordinary gentleman was restricted to twelve inches."²⁰⁷ Louis XIV restricted the use of brocade to himself, the princes in his immediate family, and only those to whom he gave direct permission.²⁰⁸ Jews were also singled out under existing sumptuary legislation,²⁰⁹ the impetus being to make sure that Jews would not be confused with their Gentile neighbors. They were made to wear a distinctive yellow hat. It was not until 7 September 1781 that this was legally abolished.²¹⁰ These laws inadvertently confirmed that status, position, or even

²⁰³ See Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'état*, vol. 1, 80-81, as quoted in Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies*, 145.

²⁰⁴ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 69.

²⁰⁵ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1997), 21, writes that these laws were also based on commerce, something that the ban of luxury items for people of color and blacks adversely affected.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁰⁷ Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*, Second Edition, revised and updated (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 17.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰⁹ Garber, 224 (and also her introduction).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

gentility were not inherent – not written on the body, but discernable only through dressings *on* the body.²¹¹

Louis XIV also regulated dress, as did Louis XVI in the colonies, where sumptuary laws became racialized, serving to further influence the (mis)perceptions of black women and women of color embraced by French society. I have already spoken about two of the more persistent representations – the temptress and the money-grubbing concubine.

Saint Domingue and Sumptuary Laws

France dealt with the fact that slavery was such an integral component of its society and welfare, as well as with the concomitantly growing population of non-whites, by increasingly more stringent legislation. It makes a certain sense that sumptuary laws would be utilized to mitigate some of the tensions previously discussed. Beauvais Lespinasse stated that:

Determined to humble the mixed-bloods still further, some of whom were very wealthy, the white plantation owners went on to enact laws against all of Negro ancestry that could be paralleled only by the caste system in ancient India. Among the things they were forbidden to do were: Not to use any French name or surname for their children but only African ones, under heavy penalty—those having such names were given three months in which to change them; not to wear the same color of clothing as white people nor to be as richly dressed—those who wore jewelry in public ran the risk of losing them; and not to dress their hair in the same style as white people.²¹²

Such precautions, on the one hand, prevented the troubling inability to read race on the body. On the other hand, needing such obvious separation highlighted that inability – a very problematic notion indeed, given the “scientific” theories of the eighteenth century that cited clearly discernable differences. Furthermore, this potential misreading had the power to allow non-whites to slip unnoticed into the “persona of French man or woman,” further increasing the possibility of an impure France.²¹³

Combining racial ideology with issues of class and status, the *ordonnance* of 9 February 1779 sought to restrict the ability of wealthy people of color from dressing more luxuriously than their station warranted, to stem the anxiety and anger that such displays were causing white society. It is worth quoting at some length:

Si la simple monition que nous croyons devoir nous contenter de faire pour le moment a cette classe des Sujets du Roi, dignes de la protection du Gouvernement lorsqu'ils se contiennent dans les bornes de la simplicité, de la décence et du respect, appanage essentiel de leur état, ne les ramenoit pas d'eux-mêmes a ces principes de modestie que plusieurs d'entr'eux semblent avoir oubliés. . . .

. . . exclut tout ce qui seroit excès ou voisin de l'excès; c'est sur-tout l'assimilation des Gens de couleur avec les personnes blanches, dans la maniere de se vêtir, le rapprochement des distances d'une espece a l'autre dans la forme des habillemens, la parure éclatante de distendieuse, l'arrogance qui en est quelquefois la suite, le scandale qui l'accompagne toujours, contre lesquels il est très-important d'exciter la vigilance de la Police, et de mettre en œuvre les moyen de coercion qui sont en son pouvoir, en laissant a la sagesse de prévenir aussi soigneusement toute inquisition minutieuse, qui tout relâchement encoure plus dangereux.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Garber, 26, see also Philippe Perrot *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²¹² Lespinasse, vol 1, 202-286 in Rogers, 102.

²¹³ It had to be presented as a persona, since blackness and citizenship were so incompatible.

²¹⁴ Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et constitutions des colonies françaises de l'Amérique sous le Vent* (Paris, 1784-1790), vol. 5, 855-6. Notice n°: FRBNF30977497 ; Cote : NUMM-109953.

This legislation illuminates how people of color in the colonies possessed the ability to present themselves in a manner they felt appropriate to their economic station, from which others felt that their race must exclude them.

Article 1 of the sumptuary law stated that failure to adhere to the ordinance would result in confiscation of said luxurious items, a fine, and the possibility of imprisonment. The offender could also permanently lose his or her freedom.²¹⁵ Article 3 reinforced the incompatibility of blackness and luxury: « *Leur défendons pareillement tous les objets de luxe dans leur extérieur, incompatibles avec la simplicité de leur condition et origine.* »²¹⁶ It also pointed to the tensions between whites and non-whites that permeated colonial life. Lieutenant Howard had much to say about black women, women of color, and their vanity. Nevertheless, he was quite taken by them:

Their method of Dress [is] infinitely becoming. The mode of wearing Handkerchiefs about the Head is in universal Practice Amongst the people of Colour. Those that can possibly get them wear *Madrass Handkerchiefs*, the beautiful Colours of which contrast in a very lively Manner with the Teint [tint] of their different Complexions; & those who are really handsome are generally coquets Enough to chuse those [who are] the most becoming. The manner of putting them on also is another Circumstance by which the pretty Black or Mulattos shews her taste in a very eminent Degree. These Hankerchiefs, forbid in England, & I believe, France, forms a considerable Branch of Commerce . . . in the West Indies. Their dress is generally white, loose flowing Robes, training on the ground a considerable Length behind, which gives them a certain Air greatly in their favor. Those who can afford [these] spare no money to have their Muslins & Linnen of the very finest Texture. & the admirable whiteness they give it by washing, contrasted with the darkness of their Skins, has generally a very striking Effect.²¹⁷

The manifestation of their charms is rendered in fig. 1.10. In the foreground are women of color in all their finery buying more clothes, if we believe Howard, to add to their already ample wardrobes. We see them apart – in more ways than one – from the blacks who do manual labor behind them.

Lest a scene such as the painting just discussed give the impression that slavery was in any way problematic, in his observations Howard is able to further the rhetoric that slaves were not inordinately mistreated, while simultaneously admonishing them for their attire: “It would surprise an European to see some of these Negress Slaves come to Market in Petticoats of Muslin of fifteen & eighteen Shiling a Yard, Handkerchiefs on their Heads that have cost them from three to four Pounds a peice, Gold Earings, & the very finest Linnen.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Articles 1 and 3, 856. I see nothing in this law that specifically states covering the head. It does mention, however, hairstyles that mimic those of whites are forbidden.

²¹⁶ Article 3, 856.

²¹⁷ Howard, 100-105.

²¹⁸ Howard, 107.



Fig. 1.10. Agostino Brunias (1730-1796), *The Linen Market at St. Domingo*, 1804, Barbados, Barbados Museum²¹⁹

Similarly, in New Orleans, Spanish Governor Don Estevan Miro enacted the “tignon law” of 1786, which prohibited Creole women of color from excessive displays of wealth through their dress. It also required headscarves (the *tignon*) as a symbolic way of linking women of color more closely with the African slave class than their own social and economic class. Women of color, while seemingly adhering to the law, used elaborate materials and jewels to cover their heads, thus undermining its spirit. The same process occurred in France’s black colonies, making it yet another potent symbol of black female sexuality.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Image Reference NW0009; Engraved print of painting by Agostino Brunias, published by John P. Thompson (London), October 6, 1804; print held by the Barbados Museum. “Comments Titled “The Linen Market at St. Domingo,” shows free “colored” women and men; slaves in background. Some of the background features and human subjects in this scene are also found in the Brunias oil painting, “Linen Market, Dominica,” held by the Yale Center for British Art (see image reference Brunius-Yale). Agostino Brunias (sometimes incorrectly spelled Brunyas, Brunais), a painter born in Italy in 1730, came to England in 1758 where he became acquainted with William Young. Young had been appointed to a high governmental post in West Indian territories acquired by Britain from France, and in late 1764 Brunias accompanied Young to the Caribbean as his personal artist. Arriving in early 1765, Brunias stayed in the islands until around 1775, when he returned to England (exhibiting some of his paintings in the late 1770s) and visited the continent. He returned to the West Indies in 1784 and remained there until his death on the island of Dominica in 1796. Although Brunias primarily resided in Dominica he also spent time in St. Vincent, and visited other islands, including Barbados, Grenada, St. Kitts, and Tobago. See Lennox Honychurch, “Chatoyer’s Artist: Agostino Brunias and the Depiction of St Vincent,” for what is presently the most informative and balanced discussion of Brunias and his romanticized and idyllic paintings of West Indian scenes and slave life (Jl of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, vol. 50 [2004], pp.104-128); see also Hans Huth, Agostino Brunias, Romano (The Connoisseur, vol. 51 [Dec. 1962], pp. 265-269), as shown on www.slaveryimages.org, sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the humanities and the University of Virginia Library (Accessed August 12, 2010).

²²⁰ See Joan M. Martin, “*Plaçage* and the Louisiana *Gens de Couleur Libre*: How Race and Sex defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color”, 62, and Violet Harrington Bryan, “Marcus Christian’s Treatment of *Les Gens de Couleur Libre*”, 47-48,

La Blanche Nègresse

White women pre-occupied Descourtilz who wrote that the climate corrupted the “‘virtue’ of the creole woman, whose ‘sedentary life’ excited their ‘voluptuous affections.’”²²¹ Dubois writes that “viewing the colonies as distant realms of excess and violence, and their inhabitants as fundamentally different, served to create a distance between slavery and the Europeans who profited from it and consumed what it produced.”²²² This “excess” also served to distance whites from non-whites, and was especially useful to overlay on the black female body. For Moreau de St. Méry (incidentally the cousin of Empress Josephine, both formerly of Martinique), white women born in the colony (*la femme Créole*) were elegant, lazy, and prone to melancholy and idleness. They were uneducated, but had common sense. They loved to sing, dance and eat sweets. He found the Creole woman to be generous and sympathetic, but pointedly not toward her slaves.²²³ This lack of affability was exacerbated by a black woman intimately linked to her husband: « *Rien n’égale la colère d’une femme Créole qui punit l’esclavage que son époux a peut-être forcée de souiller le lit nuptial dans sa fureur jalouse elle ne sait qu’inventer pour assouvir sa vengeance.* »²²⁴ It is perhaps not surprising that reprisals against intimate relationships between black women and white men came from the hands of white women. But it did set up a troubling dynamic: white men were removed from the discussion of interracial relations, beyond that of social commentators.²²⁵ On this account, these men were able to both partake in the pleasures of colonial life via their own relationships with non-white women, and to remark upon the perceived jealousy of white women because of these liaisons. Either tack reinforced white French masculinity and sexual prowess, while relegating both white and non-white women to “object” status.

Moreau stated quite boldly that rivalries existed between black and white women, especially over white men. But he also suggested an unwitting (and unwelcome) paradox as a result of this rivalry: white women imitating their black counterparts in order to entice white men: « *On est même assez surpris de voir que dans leurs attitudes, leur imiter les Mulâtresses, qu’elles se dépitent tant d’avoir pour rivales, et dont elles augmentent ainsi l’orgueil.* »²²⁶ He continued:

Ce qu’on se persuadera facilement, c’est qu’il y a entre les Mulâtresses et les Blanches, une antipathie qui prend sa source dans la persuasion que leurs vues s’entre-nuisent. . . . De là, cette haine qui se montre dans les actions, dans les discours, de là, les unions malheureuses, la ruine de plusieurs familles, et quelquefois encoure des écarts de mœurs de la part de Blanches, a qui le désir de la vengeance conseille d’imiter, en quelque chose, celles qui ont causé leurs maux.²²⁷

Both the sumptuary laws adopted in the French colonies in 1779 and the Louisiana *tignon* law were designed to racially differentiate people of color from their white counterparts as a punishment, but this plan backfired when white women in the colonies began adopting the *tignon* as well. Mary Hassal remarked that when she was presented to Emperor Napoleon’s sister Pauline in Saint Domingue, she “was dressed in a muslim morning gown with a Madras handkerchief on her

in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein, (Baton Rouge Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

²²¹ Quoted in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 34.

²²² Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 34-35.

²²³ Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de St. Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile politique et historique de la partie française de l’isle de Saint-Dominique*, vol. I, 39-43.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

²²⁵ Men like Moreau de St. Méry, for example.

²²⁶ Moreau de St. Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile politique et historique de la partie française de l’isle de Saint-Dominique*, vol. I, 109.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

head.”²²⁸ Chaela Pastore’s dissertation on colonial exchanges in Saint Domingue asserts that white colonists looked to mixed-race women for fashion trends, and remarks that laws such as the one of 9 February 1779 were unsuccessful because the banning of luxurious goods for people of color adversely affected the economic structure on the island.²²⁹ Yet she is also clear that relations between these women were still fraught with contradictions and tensions, blurring racial and economic boundaries and mores.

Mary Hassal, in an 1802 letter to American Vice-President Aaron Burr, was also very specific about her feelings toward mulatto women, their attachment to their luxuries, and their influence over their white lovers:

But before the revolution their splendor, their elegance, their influence over the men, and the fortunes lavished on them by their infatuated lovers, so powerfully excited the jealousy in the white ladies, that they complained to the council of the ruin their extravagance occasioned to many families, and a decree was issued imposing restrictions on their dress. No woman of color was to wear silk, which was then universally worn, not to appear in public without a handkerchief on her head.²³⁰



Fig. 1.11. Agostino Brunias (1730-1796), *Linen Market, Dominica*, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection²³¹

²²⁸ Hassal, Letter from Mary Hassal to Aaron Burr, 1802, Letter I, *Secret history, or, The horrors of St. Domingo* (Philadelphia: Bradford & Inskeep; R. Carr, Printer, 1805), 8. Hassal also claimed that one Creole woman, whose husband and children were murdered by slaves during the Revolution in Saint Domingue, took great comfort that she was saved by another slave, who “saved all my madrass handkerchiefs.” Letter from Mary Hassal to Aaron Burr, 1802, Letter II, 19. Hassal is a pseudonym; her real name was Leonora Sansay, and she was the wife of a planter. See *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789–1804: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Laurent Dubois & John D. Garrigus (Bedford: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), 180. See also Chaela Marie Pastore, “Merchant Voyages: Michel Marsaudon and the Exchange of Colonialism in Saint Domingue, 1788-1794” (Ph. D. diss., University of California Berkeley, 2001), 214.

²²⁹ Pastore, 215-216. Mary Hassal explained that “They [women of color] determined to oppose this tyranny [the decree banning them from wearing certain items], and took for that purpose a singular but effectual resolution. They shut themselves up in their houses, and appeared no more in public. The merchants soon felt the bad effects of this determination, and represented so forcibly the injury the decree did to commerce, that it was reversed, and the olive beauties triumphed.” See Mary Hassal, Letter X 78.

²³⁰ Mary Hassal to Aaron Burr, 1802, *Ibid.*

²³¹ I am particularly interested in this image because of the many different types of women depicted here. Also, that there are white women clearly wearing the *tignon*. Image Reference Brunius-Yale; Source Original painting; courtesy,

Inexplicably intertwined with their so-called feminine wiles is Hassal's belief that they had that type of power in the first place. The additional insult was their ability to turn white women – who should have been the only women considered this powerful – into jealous rivals. The use of the family to articulate these feelings of inadequacy is brilliant, in that it clearly equates the abnegation of patriarchal responsibility with *métissage*.

White women ignored sumptuary laws designed to prevent people of color in Saint Domingue from being able to “pass” as white via their clothing in the colonies. Given the fears of clothing erasing boundaries between black and white, the decision on the part of white French women to appropriate what was designed to punish black women and women of color further confused the already complicated racial separations mandated by law. Whereas laws in the colonies were designed to further mark racial differences, these laws also implied that it was only in the colonies where it would be an issue. The very complex and contradictory view of black women and women of color by white women set the stage for new complications to come in France.

* * *

Julien Raimond, a member of the colored elite in Saint Domingue, also spoke of interracial marriages between colored and elite whites in Saint Domingue, but his interpretation was quite different. He traced the subsequent discrimination to the period of 1744, specifically to financial considerations on the part of white French men, and importantly to the moral standing of the white women who were initially sent to the island.

The colony began to become prosperous and a large number of Europeans came over, including marriageable white women seeking to marry rich planters. But the virtues of the white women sent over in those days by the French government seemed ‘more suspect, and their marriages with the whites did not have all the fruit that was anticipated.’ They were often passed over for more fertile *filles de couleur*, who also often possessed the added advantage of owning land and slaves.²³²

So a poor white French man coming to the colonies could make his fortune not through hard work, but through an advantageous marriage to a woman of color with a large dowry, including possibly slaves. Not only could white French men gain the advantage of land and slaves, but the available white women were, in Raimond's estimation, morally suspect. Given the animosity between whites and colored on Saint Domingue, it is perhaps not surprising that Raimond would take a swipe at the morality of white women. After all, the same charges had been leveled at black women quite easily.²³³

The issue raised by Raimond – that of white women with questionable morality – was transferred onto the bodies of black women. In 1777, Hilliard d'Auberteuil wrote that, “Marriages are rare in St. Domingue.” He also stated that “Mothers who brought their daughters to the colony

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1981.25.76). Comments “Linen Market, Dominica,” shows enslaved people, free people of color, and Europeans in crowded market scene. Some of the features and human subjects in this scene are also found in the Brunias oil painting, “Linen Market at St. Domingo” (see image reference NW0009).

<http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/detailsKeyword.php?keyword=domingue&recordCount=29&theRecord=15>

²³² Julien Raimond, *Observations sur l'origine et les progrès du préjugé des colons blancs contre les Hommes de couleur* (Paris: January, 1791) as quoted in Hall, 145.

²³³ Stewart King asserts that this notion of non-white women as sexually and morally suspect comes from the notion that free women of color were largely relegated to roles as *ménagères* (professional assistants and sexual companions) of white men in Saint Domingue. King's analysis reveals that these relationships were much more complex and long-lasting than contemporaries believed them to be. See Stewart R. King, , 191. See also John Garrigus, “ ‘Sons of the Same Father’: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in French Saint Domingue, 1760-1792”, 147 for his discussion on the imposing of sexual stereotypes on non-white women by white Frenchmen in Saint Domingue.

in the hope of getting a rich husband for them arrived to find a colored woman already in the place of honor.”²³⁴ Black women taking the place of honor where only white women were supposed to reside usurped the sanctity of the marriage bed – indeed the very institution of marriage. Descourtltz simultaneously blamed black women’s sexuality and white women’s inadequacy as mothers: “These ‘libertine’ slaves, tricking their masters, continued their illicit sexual affairs even as they gave their milk to their master’s children. Black women fed ‘corrupted milk’ to the white boys, and this ‘pernicious drink’ communicated the ‘germ’ of ‘impudent desires.’” Descourtltz notes that “Creole mothers were to blame for instilling in their boys a lust for slave women by handing them over to them at a young age rather than breast-feeding them themselves as they should have.”²³⁵ What Dubois does not say is that these simultaneous charges against both white and black women provided great justification to exercise social control over both. White women in the colonies were not acting as adequate mothers, so that the lives of future French citizens were in grave danger.²³⁶

Commenting about white women in West Indian plantation society, Eve O’Callaghan writes that “constructions of the ministering angel, the white witch, the self-sacrificing plantation wife/worker, the degenerate Creole, are circulated in one text only to be contradicted in others, or even within the same account. Representations and self-representations are further complicated in texts which differentiate between *kinds* of white women, such as creoles and British, residents and tourists, elites and indentured servants.”²³⁷ Thus, along with non-white women, white women in the colonies were a canvas with which to project colonial fact, fiction, and fantasy. It is difficult to find their own voices amongst the noise of those who were writing about them so forcefully. However, unlike their non-white counterparts, white women could still fall back on their “whiteness” to differentiate themselves. This imposition of their whiteness could be applied with religious fervor – under the guise of their civilizing presence in the colonies – in order to reinforce their own French purity, and as a powerful rebuke to the rhetoric about lazy sexual deviants gone “native.”

According to Garrigus, colonists in Saint Domingue used stereotypes about women to implicate both free black women and men, solidifying their inappropriateness for Frenchness. He goes on to argue that what whites were so fearful of was the blatantly public nature of the displays that non-white women were making (and that white women were emulating). As Moreau wrote: “These women took money that should have gone to legitimate families in France to satisfy their own ‘insatiable’ desire for rich fabrics.”²³⁸ Not only were these women taking resources that

²³⁴ Rogers, 103.

²³⁵ Michel Etienne Descourtltz, *Voyages d’un naturaliste, et ses observations*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1809), 2:51-52, as quoted in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 69.

²³⁶ Women who could afford to do so in the metropole also handed their children over to wet nurses. What is being highlighted here, I believe, are the racial (and sexual) implications of white women who turn their children over to black wet nurses.

²³⁷ Eve O’Callaghan, *Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939: ‘A Hot Place, Belonging To Us’* (London: Routledge, 2003), 175 (emphasis hers). For scholarship on white women in the colonies, see Doris Lorraine Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the early French Caribbean*; Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Ann Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures,” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4: 634-660; Ann Stoler, ‘Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate’ in *Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Julia Ann Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Clare Midgley, ed., *Gender and Imperialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

²³⁸ Garrigus, “‘Sons of the Same Father’: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in French Saint Domingue, 1760-1792”, 147.

belonged to “legitimate families in France,” their lack of shame about their “insatiable” behaviors – whether economic or sexual – exacerbated this sin.

This chapter has shown that the French had troubling relationships with black women in the colonies. Those troubles extended to those who crossed color lines to be with them, or like them. In essence, there were *many* dangerous female bodies in Saint Domingue: black women, women of color, poor white women, and even well-to-do white Creole women were potentially dangerous; all of them needed to be managed. Non-white women needed to be controlled lest they ensnare white French men. White women had to be supervised lest they “go native” – in essence becoming black women. Garrigus also writes that “contemporaries were troubled by what such behavior revealed about colonial society as a whole, particularly about the inability of individual colonists to sacrifice their immediate pleasures for a larger public good.²³⁹ After all, if the races were so different, how could one person so easily leave one to “join” another? This contradiction was at the heart of so many discussions of the era, and highlighted the precariousness of existing racial and racist discourse. As more and more whites began bringing their slaves back with them to France, conversations about race began in France proper, with the representations of black women’s bodies “coloring” those discussions.

²³⁹ Garrigus, 147.

CHAPTER TWO:

SANG IMPUR: LEGISLATING RACE IN ANCIEN RÉGIME FRANCE

Fig. 2.1. Unsigned, *Louise Marie-Thérèse, the Black Nun of Moret (1664-1732)*, Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ « Le cabinet de curiosités de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève », in les collections de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève,” Paris, 1989, n°103. A folder at St. Genevieve entitled, “Documents Concerning The Princess Louise Marie-Therese, Daughter of Louis XIV and Marie-Therese” is empty.

*Aux armes, citoyens!
Formez vos bataillons!
Marchons! Marchons!
Qu'un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons!*

La Marseillaise, the French National Anthem²⁴¹

In his 1752 chronicle, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire recounted an anecdote about the rumored black child of the French king. The financially well provided for offspring (who was said to greatly resemble Louis) was banished to a convent in the town of Moret where she purportedly flaunted her pedigree and lamented her exile, much to the annoyance of the Mother Superior. The king, Voltaire writes, sent his official mistress, Françoise d'Aubigné, Madame de Maintenon, to chastise the impudent child and remind her of her need for quiet modesty in keeping with her “proper” station – namely that she was an exile. The young woman (fig. 2.1) – also referred to as the “Black Nun of Moret”²⁴² – responded thusly (I paraphrase): “The fact that the King has sent you, someone of such high standing, to tell me that I am not his daughter, further convinces me that I am.”²⁴³ No response from either the king or his mistress was detailed, ending the story instead with the young woman’s voice. In this, Voltaire curiously allowed the *mauresse* something often missing in representations of black women – he permitted her to speak, to even have the last word. And she did so forcefully, with almost royal audacity. However, the *mauresse*’s pedigree was ultimately insufficient, for according to Voltaire, her blackness was enough to negate everything else.

In the convent she embodied an inauthentic piety, disrupting the path of true nuns with complaints, rather than contemplation of God. To Madame de Maintenon, she represented an embarrassment and a threat, a force that must be contained far from the seat of French government. Though the *mauresse* herself shrewdly interpreted Madame de Maintenon’s actions, naming herself the true child of Louis XIV, it was in vain. She was not entitled to access French society through legitimate means. Thus, while Voltaire incorporated multiple, feminine perspectives in his representation of the Black Nun of Moret – most notably her own – the overall control of the representation remained his to render. The Black Nun was the object – the source of strife – within his larger narrative. Voltaire’s chronicle included this story of the king’s sexual and racial (mis)appropriation in the literal body of his alleged black child, « *une mauresse, personnage mystérieux* »²⁴⁴ – whether to indict or to congratulate the king (or both), or simply to titillate his reading audience is unclear.²⁴⁵ What Voltaire *did* accomplish – unwittingly perhaps – was to consolidate a wide array of

²⁴¹ Claude-Joseph Rouget, *La Marseillaise*, 1792; made the official national anthem July 14, 1795.

²⁴² Or as the *Mauresse de Moret*.

²⁴³ « *On soupçonna, avec beaucoup de vraisemblance, une religieuse de l'abbaye de Muret d'être sa fille. Elle était extrêmement basanée, et d'ailleurs lui ressemblait. Le roi lui donna vingt mille écus de dot, en la plaçant dans ce couvent. L'opinion qu'elle avait de sa naissance lui donnait un orgueil dont ses supérieures se plaignirent. Madame de Maintenon, dans un voyage de Fontainebleau, alla au couvent de Muret et, voulant inspirer plus de modestie à cette religieuse, fit ce qu'elle put pour lui ôter l'idée qui nourrissait sa fierté. « Madame, lui dit cette personne, la peine que prends une dame de votre élévation, de venir exprès ici me dire que je ne suis pas fille du roi, me persuade que je le suis. » Le couvent de Muret se souvient encore de cette anecdote.* » See Voltaire, Chapter XXVIII, Suite des anecdotes, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Volume 1, Chronologie et préface par Antoine Adam professeur à la Sorbonne (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), 378-379.

²⁴⁴ To quote Adolphe Laurent Joanne, in *Les environs de Paris illustrés* (Paris: Hachette, 1868), 546.

²⁴⁵ The story of the black nun has many versions and seems to have developed into some full-fledged urban myth. For instance, in the Louis de Rouvroy Saint-Simon, *Oeuvres complètes de Louis de Saint-Simon: pour servir à l'histoire des cours de Louis XIV, de la régence et de Louis XV: avec des notes, des explications et des additions à la fin de chaque volume, extraites des correspondances et des portefeuilles de l'auteur et de plusieurs princes et seigneurs ses contemporains* (Strasbourg: J.G. Treuttel, 1791), 24-26, the author writes: « *On fut étonné à Fontainebleau qu'à peine la princesse de Savoie, depuis duchesse de Bourgogne (car elle ne fut*

issues, namely the shifting sites and meanings of representations of black women and black subjectivity in eighteenth-century French society.

* * *

All the major European powers (Portugal, Spain, England, France, Scotland, Denmark and Holland) in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries were involved in slavery and the slave trade. Though they actively worked to disguise it, the French were both directly and actively involved in – and benefited from – the buying and selling of peoples of African descent, with blacks passing through four major ports. While many European cities (Paris, London and Madrid, to take only a few examples) were hailed as bastions of *cosmopolitanism*, I maintain that they were in fact *imperial* cities, achieving their heightened cosmopolitan status in part because of the rewards of their slave colonies. Financially and socially, the colonies supported European lifestyles at home. Yet it was necessary to suppress how the money was actually made in order to preserve their cosmopolitan images. Because the practice of slavery was not to touch (and thereby tarnish) France proper, this would prove to be a longstanding problem.²⁴⁶

Discursive formations of this sort rely heavily upon the notion of *concealment*: here/not here. Free blacks and interracial relationships were problematic to be sure, but they were in the colonies, out of direct sight. As white French men and women were increasingly moving between France and Saint Domingue, bringing their slaves with them as they traveled, legislators and other politicians came to believe that the very presence of only a few in France threatened ideas of a slavery-free and pure France²⁴⁷ – which might be why blacks like the Black Nun needed to be hidden away.

The disturbing trend of blacks obtaining their freedom, and the appearance that they were moving somewhat effortlessly – perhaps even anonymously – throughout the kingdom exacerbated

mariée qu'à son retour), y fut arrivée, que madame de Maintenon la fit aller à un petit couvent borgne de Moret, où le lieu ne pouvoit l'amuser, ni aucune religieuse, dont il n'y en avoit pas de connues; elle y retourna plusieurs fois pendant le voyage, et cela réveilla la curiosité et les bruits. Madame de Maintenon, y alloit souvent de Fontainebleau, et à la fin on s'y étoit accoutumé. Dans ce couvent étoit une professe, une mauresse inconnue à tout le monde, et qu'on ne montrait à personne. Bontems, premier valet, de-chambre et gouverneur de Versailles, par qui les choses du secret domestique passaient de tous temps, l'y avoit mise toute jeune, avoit payé une dot qui ne se disoit pas, et depuis continuoît une grosse pension tous les ans. Il prenoit exactement soin qu'elle eût son nécessaire et tout ce qui peut passer pour abondance à une religieuse, et que tout ce qu'elle pouvoit désirer de toute espèce de douceur lui fut fourni. La feue Reine y alloit souvent de Fontainebleau, et prenoit grand soin du bien-être du couvent, et madame de Maintenon après elle. Ni l'une ni l'autre ne prenoit pas un soin direct de cette mauresse qui put se remarquer, mais elles n'y étoient pas moins attentives. Elles ne la voyoient pas toutes les fois qu'elles y alloient, mais souvent pourtant avec une grande attention à sa santé, à sa conduite et à celle de la supérieure à son égard. Monseigneur y a été quelquefois, et les princes ses enfans une ou deux fois, et tous ont demandé et vu la mauresse. Elle étoit là avec plus de considération que la personne la plus connue et la plus distinguée, et se prévaloit fort des soins que l'on prenoit d'elle et du mystère qu'on en faisoit; et quoiqu'elle vécût très-régulièrement on s'appercevoit bien que la vocation avoit été aidée. Il lui échappa une fois, entendant Monseigneur chasser dans la forêt, de dire négligement: Madament? C'est mon frère qui chasse. On prétendit qu'elle étoit fille du Roi et de la Reine, et que sa couleur l'avoit fait cacher et disparaître, et publier que la Reine avoit fait une fausse couche; et beaucoup de gens de la cour en étoient persuadés. Quoi qu'il en soit la chose est demeurée une énigme.» In one version, the black child is the Queen's (from an illicit affair with her black pygmy); Jules Michel Henri Mathorez, *Les Etrangers en France sous l'ancien régime; histoire de la formation de la population française*, tome première (Paris: E. Champion, 1919), 394-397. The notoriously unreliable J.A. Rogers has a version, also alleging that the child was the Queen's, whom she had with her dwarf, Nabo; see "Race-Mixing in France," *Sex and Race*, vol. 1 (New York City: J. A. Rogers Publications, 1942, renewed 1970), 246-253. Shelby McCloy has yet another version of this story, stating that the Black Nun was Louis XIV's mistress and putting the story in 1695; see Shelby Thomas McCloy, *The Negro in France* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 14-15. There was also a novel about the story, entitled, "L'Orpheline de Moret," written by Teste d'Ouet and published in 1835. See also note 24. The Black Nun of Moret is said to have died in 1732.

²⁴⁶ Is there a great difference between cosmopolitanism and imperialism? I would suggest there is not, but there are political stakes in highlighting one's imperial status over a notion that one simply welcomes people from all nations, which these cities most certainly did not. My point is that a multitude of sins can be hidden behind notions of cosmopolitanism that are not possible with a label of imperial or colonial.

²⁴⁷ See Baudry Deslozières, *Les Egarements du negrophilisme* (Paris: Chez Migneret, Imprimeur, 1802).

those anxieties. Representations of black women in France were focused around their status as slaves and as carriers of disease, given their illicit sexual appetites. As in the colonies, what remained intact was the level of unsuitability and inauthenticity attached to the black female body. These fears led to a growing paranoia that was worked out in a significant arena of discursive investigation: legislation.

Chapter one detailed the negotiations of race and legislation in Saint Domingue. The first part of chapter two looks at simultaneous legislation developing in France. In a letter dated 10 June 1707 the Minister (of the Marine?) wrote:

*L'Intention de Sa Majesté est que les Negres qui auront été amenés dan le Royaume par les Habitans des Isles qui refuseront d'y retourner, ne pourront y être contrains; mais que du moment que de leur plein volonté, ils auront pris le parti de les suivre et de se rendre avec eux dans l'Amérique, ils ne puissent plus alléguer le Privilège de la Terre de France, auquel ils semblent avoir renoncé par leur retour volontaire dans le lieu de l'Esclavage ; c'est la règle qui doit être suivie sur ce sujet qui ne peut tirer à aucune conséquence, ni augmenter considérablement le nombre des Negres libres, parce que les Habitans en amènent peu, et choisissant lorsqu'ils sont obligés d'en amener pour les servir ceux qu'ils connoissent le mieux et dans lesquels ils ont plus de confiance, ils seront plus certains qu'ils ne desiront pas les quitter; **cette règle répond au cas particulier qui regard les Nègresses, dont les requêtes ne doivent point être reçues.**²⁴⁸*

There is a certain logic in stating that those blacks who were free in France and “voluntarily” elected to follow their masters to America – where slavery was the law of the land – should not be able to re-claim free status if they came back to France. This assumed that a non-freed person had the luxury of freely determining his or her own movements. There is also an admonishment of white French men and women who brought their “trusted” slaves in order to make their own lives easier. Also, a “good” slave might be rewarded, once in France, with his or her freedom, thereby increasing the number of free blacks there.

However, it is the last sentence that I find particularly important. It shows how some of the first writings in the eighteenth century addressing blacks being brought to France expressed that the women occupied a special place of concern. There is more than one way to read this clause. One is that women, as domestics, were close to the family – thus owners might have a certain regard for them. Or vice versa. This reading contributed to the idea that blacks were happy in their enslavement, regarding their master’s family as their own. Yet does this sentence hint that white French men were bringing the slaves they knew best – meaning their mistresses – under the guise of servants, and thus the desire of these women to stay in France was especially suspect? If so, it was particularly important to disregard black women’s requests to remain in France (with free status). Either way, the phenomenon of bringing slaves to France was from its inception gendered. How then did enslaved women, once in France, experience and negotiate the situation facing them? While black women were portrayed as sexual predators in Saint Domingue, in France they often portrayed *themselves* as sexual prey for white Frenchmen, or as servants terrorized at the hand of their mistresses. Thus, in a small way they were able to create an alternate narrative that was gender specific.

The second part of this chapter examines a case referenced by name by the 1782 Legislative Committee to vividly demonstrate how white French men and women played an integral and problematic part in allowing blacks to obtain their freedom. In 1780, a 26 year old enslaved woman by the name of Henriette Lucille²⁴⁹ demanded her freedom from her mistress, Madame Lafarge Paquot, charging cruel treatment among other things. She notably asserted that her “owners” had

²⁴⁸ *Lettre du ministre sur les Nègres amenés en France*, du 10 juin 1710, in *Loix et constitutions des colonies françoises de l'Amérique sous le vent*. T. 2 ; ed. Moreau de Saint-Méry, (Paris : chez l'auteur, 1784-1790), 99. Emphasis mine.

²⁴⁹ Henriette Lucille’s name has multiple forms: Henriette Lucille, or simply Lucile or Lucille.

failed to legally retain their hold over her, and therefore were not entitled to their claim. For more than one year Madame Lafarge Paquot fought the charge, tirelessly writing letter after letter to the Ministry of the Marine and the Lieutenant General of the Paris police, imploring the government to assist her in arresting and repatriating her wayward slave back to Saint Domingue. In the end, despite a well-fought battle, Madame was unsuccessful. Henriette Lucille won her freedom. The case of Henriette Lucille represents more than a battle of wills between a mistress and her slave. It also permits a peek into the problems of women of disparate circumstances entering the public arenas of politics, business, and the law – places they most certainly did not belong.

The legislation enacted during this period reveals a further growing concern of French authority: the ways in which white French men and women, who flaunted the law for their own comfort – and often their own sexual gratification – put the French elite’s self-presentation of racial homogeneity at risk. On a larger scale, these incidents can be used to illuminate more dangerous conflicts of interest brewing between the state’s authority and its subjects.

In looking at the letter from the Minister regarding black women being brought to France, as well as cases like Henriette Lucille’s, I believe we can make a gender-focused analysis of these issues. In his story of the Black Nun, Voltaire spoke directly about defying royal authority, and used the black female body to do so (and we will see a version of this phenomenon again in chapter four). The case of Henriette Lucille points out the contradiction of slave owners defying royal authority, while at the same time relying upon it to retain their own privileges.

Race: Developing Formations in France

The idea that there could be a black child of a French king is not as unexpected as it might appear at first glance.²⁵⁰ The aristocracy delighted in having blacks at court and often gave them to each other as the equivalent of house pets: “Little Negro boys were often presented as gifts to persons of prominence in France by officials and planters abroad.”²⁵¹ Madame de Pompadour (official mistress to Louis XV) commissioned a painting in which she was depicted as a “*sultane*” (see fig. 2.2). Depicting Europeans in settings such as this were quite popular during the period,²⁵² yet with someone as prominent as Madame de Pompadour, additional problems were raised. Presenting her in a Muslim setting acknowledges her power, but the exoticism of the setting ameliorates the charges of petticoat influence.²⁵³ The artist, Carle Vanloo, as the “Premier Painter to the King Louis XV,” would have been aware of these nuances.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ England had its own narratives of royalty with black children, although in the case of Queen Victoria, the child was adopted. See Joan Amin-Addo, “Queen Victoria’s Black Daughter” in *Black Victorians, Black Victoriana*, ed. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

²⁵¹ McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 30.

²⁵² See Christine Peltre, *Orientalism in Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998); Perrin Stein, *Exoticism As Metaphor: Turquerie in Eighteenth-Century French Art* (PhD diss., New York University, 1997); Roger Benjamin, Mounira Khemir, Ursula Prunster, and Lynne Thornton, *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*. (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997); Emmanuelle Peyraube, *Le harem des Lumières: l’image de la femme dans la peinture orientaliste du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du patrimoine, Centre des monuments nationaux, 2008); James Thompson and David H. T. Scott, *The East, Imagined, Experienced, Remembered: Orientalist Nineteenth Century Painting* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1988); and Nicholas Tromans and Rana Kabbani, *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁵³ See Colin Jones, *Madame De Pompadour: Images of a Mistress* (London: National Gallery, 2002); Elise Goodman, *The Portraits of Madame De Pompadour: Celebrating the FeMadame Savante* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000); more “popular works” include Evelyne Lever, *Madame De Pompadour: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002); Margaret Crosland, *Madame De Pompadour: Sex, Culture and the Power* (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton, 2000); and Evelyne Lever, *Madame De Pompadour: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

²⁵⁴ Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France, 1700-1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); even with a contemporary reputation as a great and tremendously popular artist, Levey claims him to have been “amiable, deeply stupid and uncultivated,” 73.



Fig. 2.2. Carle Vanloo (1705-1765?), *Une sultane prenant le café que lui présente une négresse*, c. 1754-55, peinture sur toile, 132 x 162 cm, Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs²⁵⁵

Note the vivid whiteness of Pompadour's skin and silk dressing against the dark, rich colors of the velvet curtains behind her and the black woman who serves her. The painting clearly invoked an Orientalist mystique (the harem setting, the hookah pipe, the costumes, and the café). Yet the inclusion of a black servant to convey exoticism and wealth takes it solely out of this realm of analysis and into one that requires the addition of a racialized framework, one which gives importance to "blackness" and Orientalism and to the simultaneity of these paradigms.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Inv. Number 26544. See Tjitske Akkerman and Siep Stuurman, eds., *Perspectives on Feminist Political Thought in European History: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 113, for a more detailed conversation on this painting.

²⁵⁶ See Amy Aisen Elouafi, "The Colour of Orientalism: Race and Narratives of Discovery in Tunisia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 2 (2010): 253-71. She argues for a more nuanced investigation of the role of race and color in the making of Orientalism, stating that both were "integral to European constructions of difference," 254. Another example highlights the continuing incorporation of Orientalism and blackness. In 1790, a small satiric pamphlet called *Les Bordels de Paris* appeared about houses of prostitution in Paris. On page 17, the following passage appeared: « Bordel de Negresses. Chez mademoiselle Isabeau, ci-devant rue neuve de Montmorency, aujourd'hui rue Xaintong, maison de M. Marchand preteur sur gages. Le prix n'y est point fixe, la negresse, la mistife et la mulatress y sont marchandeas, coMadame on marchande les feMadames d'une caravane. » See M.M. Dillon, Sartine, Lenoir, La Troliere, & Compagnie, *Les bordels de Paris, avec les noms, demeures et prix, plan salubre et patriotique soumis aux illustres des états généraux pour en faire un article de la Constitution* (Paris, 14 Juillet 1790), L'enfer collection, item number ACQ. 4G 191, BNF. Fernando Henriques writes in *Prostitution in Europe and the Americas* that "the existence of such a brothel seems to show that coloured women

The elaborate costumes and accessories had specific purposes. Kate Lowe, in “The Stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe” writes that in Renaissance images

Africans (even though usually slaves and servants) are often depicted wearing beautiful and expensive jewellery. . . . One reason for the preponderance of other bejeweled Africans is that a large proportion of black African images come from courtly settings, where the Africans would have been clothed and adorned to show off the status of their masters.²⁵⁷

Jean-Marc Nattier’s painting *Mademoiselle de Clermont « en sultane »* (fig. 2.3) can be instructive here.



Fig. 2.3. Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766), *Mademoiselle de Clermont « en Sultane »*, 1733, oil on canvas, 109 x 105 cm, London, Wallace Collection

were in demand as prostitutes. This can be taken as an indication of a genuine liking for such whores, or their scarcity value in the Paris of the day.” Fernando Henriques, *Prostitution in Europe and the Americas* (New York: Citadel Press, 1963), 132, as quoted in Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus*, 72-73. I find this short piece (and Henriques analysis) interesting on several other levels. There is a brothel, yet these particular women are equated with women sold from “an oriental caravan.” In addition to the link of black women with the Orient, Henriques suggests that there may, in fact, be white Frenchmen who had a “genuine liking” for Negro women (the actual quote ends at the word “caravan”). See also Adrienne L. Childs, *The Black Exotic: Tradition and Ethnography in Nineteenth-Century Orientalist Art*. (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2005); and Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities*, especially Chapter Six.

²⁵⁷ Kate Lowe, in “The Stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe”, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23-24.

Note the various shades of her black slaves, one inexplicably with her breast exposed, juxtaposed with Mademoiselle's white skin, the sheets she sits upon, and the towel used to dry her. In addition, there are a good number of women dedicated to Mademoiselle de Clermont in her private bath (and what appear to be at least two young boys in turbans), giving credence to her immense wealth (or extravagance).²⁵⁸

Elaborately dressed, the slaves served as servants, jesters, mini-companions, and fodder for aristocratic amusements.

In France, it was the day of the exotic. Dress, furniture, decorations, foods and drinks, books, and plays smacked of the faraway – of the orient and America – and a sure way to prestige was to have a black in livery to open the door for madame's friends and to drive her carriage. . . . One boy of five or six years old was sent to Marie-Antoinette in 1787 by the Comte de Boufflers, governor of Senegal.²⁵⁹

This child was named Jean Almicar.²⁶⁰

Hans Debrunner remarks that de Boufflers “read the signs of the time and did not engage in the transatlantic slave trade,” only collecting “*des souvenirs vivants* for his friends.” These “living souvenirs” that he purchased and brought back from Senegal suggest that, whatever Debrunner chooses to call it, transatlantic slavery was *exactly* what he was engaged in. Among others, he purchased “in exchange for some trinkets and a barrel of rum,” a young moor for the Queen and a moor for Countess Diane.²⁶¹ In 1788, he brought a young Senegalese girl named Ourika as a gift for the Duchess of Orléans. “I still have a parakeet for the queen,” he wrote, “a horse for the Maréchal de Castries, *a little captive for Mme de Beauvau*, a sultan hen for the Duke of Laon, and an ostrich for M. de Nivernois.”²⁶² It seems to escape Debrunner that his “captive” was the only human in his living zoo. Depicting slaves brought into France as “house pets” fits into the ongoing discourse of freedom in France, reinforcing the preposterous idea that no slavery was allowed in the metropole. Such a distinction proclaims that “house pets” were somehow not slaves and therefore the fallacy could continue.

Like most amusements, these blacks' overall value could prove to be short-lived. Much sarcasm was voiced about the elaborate and exotic presentation of these blacks, and their proximity to their mistresses – with all the sexual innuendo that that implied.²⁶³ In fact, Madame de Sévigné wrote to Madame de Grignan of her love of chocolates. She then segued into a report on the Countess de Coëtlogon: « *La marquise de Coëtlogon prit tant de chocolat, étant grosse l'année passé, qu'elle*

²⁵⁸ Smalls offers an interesting reading of this work in juxtaposition with the *Portrait d'une négresse* that began this dissertation. He argues that by showing the negress seated and alone, as compared to Nattier's work where it is the white woman seated and attended to by blacks, Benoist turned the *Portrait d'une négresse* into something of an allegory of her own condition of subservience to patriarchy. I am not at all convinced by this argument. See James Smalls, “Slavery is a Woman: ‘Race,’ Gender, and Visuality in Marie Benoist's *Portrait d'une négresse* (1800),” *NCAW* (Spring 2004).

²⁵⁹ McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 30.

²⁶⁰ Hans Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige, Africans in Europe: A History of Africans in Europe Before 1918* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1979), 100-101.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

²⁶² Françoise Massardier-Kenney, “Duras, Racism, and Class”, *Translating Slavery: Gender & Race in French Women's Writings, 1783-1823*, Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney eds., (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1994), 189. Emphasis mine. See also Linda Marie Rouillard, “The Black Galatea: Claire de Duras's Ourika”, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 32, Nos. 3 & 4, (Spring-Summer 2004) : 210. A portrait of this young woman (as she was depicted in French fiction) will be discussed in chapter four of this dissertation.

²⁶³ Yet another version of the Mauresse de Moret story claims that the Queen suffered a “psychic shock” by looking upon blackness (in the form of her pygmy) and this is what caused her to give birth to a black child. See Debrunner, 97. This would have made the story even more tragic, as the child is posited as a true heiress of the King and Queen, permanently “disfigured” and thus exiled because of her mother's proximity to blackness. See also note 6.

accoucha d'un petit garçon noir comme un diable, qui mourut. »²⁶⁴ J.A. Rogers slyly observes that “the noble ladies of France, Germany and England had coal-black pages about them ‘to set off the whiteness of their skin.’ They, too, seemed to have been very fond of ‘chocolate.’ ”²⁶⁵ It is not surprising that the stakes for white French noblewomen having black children would have been high. Even though affairs between black women and white men were often tolerated – at least in the colonies – the same allowances were not permissible for white French women and black men.

What is unclear is why white French women would continue to keep black males in such intimate proximity (and allow the continuation of such rumors) instead of only black females, since both seemed, at particular times, to be available. On the one hand, women like Mademoiselle de Clermont and the Countess de Coëtlogen had the financial means to purchase and display their slaves, and thus to treat the boys as if they were no more than accessories in the home that exhibited the affirmation of their wealth and power. On the other hand, these same “accessories” could be used to indict their female owners, with hints amongst polite society that they were also utilized as sexual toys. So black boys and young men were both sexually neutered (under the guise of house pets and accessories) and hyper-sexualized, depending upon the circumstances.

The Duchess du Barry had a pygmy whom she claimed to adore:

Amongst my household favourites at the time was Zamor, a young African boy, full of intelligence and mischief; simple in his nature, yet wild in his country. Zamor fancied himself the equal of all he met, scarcely deigning to acknowledge the king himself as his superior. This son of Africa was presented to me by the Duc de Richelieu, clad in the picturesque costume of his native land; his head ornamented with feathers of every colour, a short petticoat of plaited grass around his waist, while the richest bracelets adorned his waist, and chains of gold, pearls, and rubies glittered over his neck and hung from his ears. Never would anyone have suspected the old Marechal, whose parsimony was almost proverbial, of making such a magnificent present.²⁶⁶

Like Voltaire and the Black Nun, the Duchess invokes an insult to royal authority via Zamor’s belief that his own importance meant more than even the King’s status. Perhaps it was to make his subsequent actions more understandable.

The Duchess’s adoration soon abated. As he grew older and apparently uglier, the Duchess found it difficult even to look at him, though her whimsy had made Zamor safe from her change of heart. Unfortunately, Zamor had been given, as a joke, a legally binding title and a stipend, making it very difficult to dismiss him out of hand.²⁶⁷ The Duchess du Barry would have cause to lament her close association – for Zamor eventually testified against her, helping to seal her fate.²⁶⁸ The

²⁶⁴ Letter dated 25 Octobre, 1671, to Madame de Grignan, from the Marquise de Sévigné, Marie de Rabutin Chantal, *Lettres de Madame De Sévigné, de sa famille et de ses amis, Recueillies, et annotées par M. Monmerqué*, Edouard SoMadamer, Paul Mesnard, and L.-J.-N. Monmerqué, 1862, vol. 2, letter 214, 396. J.A. Rogers references the chocolate remarks to the infamous *Mauresse de Moret* narrative; it was said that her mother, Marie-Thérèse ate too much chocolate and that she was the unfortunate result! See J. A. Rogers, *Sex and Race: Negro-Caucasian Mixing in All Ages and All Lands* (New York City: J. A. Rogers publications, 1940). For a discussion on chocolate, see Bertram Gordon, “Chocolate in France: The Evolution of a Luxury Product,” in Louis E. Givetti and Howard-Yana Shapiro, eds., *Chocolate: History, Culture, and Heritage* (New York: John Wiley, 2009), 569-582.

²⁶⁵ Rogers, *Sex and Race: Negro-Caucasian Mixing in All Ages and All Lands*.

²⁶⁶ Madame du Barri, *Mémoires du Duchesse du Barri*, translated from the French by the translator of “Vidocq,” Vol. IV (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot, 1831), 64. The *mémoires* written by the Countess are all most assuredly embellished; therefore we must be cautious of the contents. However, it is interesting to me (and to this project) that her *mémoires* rely so heavily on these representations of blackness.

²⁶⁷ In reality, Zamor was a native of Bengal. However, the Duchess referred to him as an African.

²⁶⁸ She was guillotined in 1793 during the Terror.

Duchess, horrified at his treachery, exclaimed, “Zamor, my little one, how can you lie against me, you whom I have loved as my own child.”²⁶⁹

“A Foreign Wonder”: A Black Venus in France’s Royal Court

Young black children and African pygmies were not the only blacks who contributed to the exotic atmosphere surrounding French nobility in eighteenth-century France. The Duchess du Barry’s *mémoires* speak of a “Black Venus” in the French court who captivated no less than a future king, the Comte d’Artois: “I must now lose sight of these subjects to speak to you of a foreign wonder which made its appearance in Paris, and this was a black Venus, so beautiful as to turn the heads of all who beheld her; not that I should give her a place in Memoirs had not my name been most iniquitously mixed up in the various calumnies related to her,”²⁷⁰ but this distasteful and unjust connection must somehow be explained. I also find this particular representation important because Isabel, as she was known, while corresponding to the stereotypes of Africans at the time, also went beyond acceptable boundaries. Isabel’s problematic behavior allowed a continuing trend of whites (in this case a woman) to use the black female body to make larger points about social order. In the end, Isabel proved as problematic as Zamor.

The ways of describing Isabel rested in her appearance and her foreignness. First, the Duchess said she was quite beautiful, apparently unlike other negresses, and quite alluring both to common and noble men:

The name of this dark-skinned goddess was Isabel, who resembled her sister negresses in nothing but complexion. She had neither the flat features nor woolly hair which characterize her species, and her charms had already been so productive as to amass for her a splendid fortune, with which she had quitted the New World to enjoy herself in Paris. At her first arrival Isabel was pronounced a charming creature, and more than one Lord of the Court vied with the most humble yet wealthy financier who came to lay his heart and purse at the feet of the fair enchantress.²⁷¹

Du Barry emphasized that she spoke in “her foreign and peculiar accent” and of “her unlimited command of wealth.”²⁷² Her wealth, we learn, was a product of her beauty, which had attracted both white and black men to her. Although beautiful, she was still a “creature.” Isabel, however, though in love with a black slave named Plato,²⁷³ used her wiles to sexually enslave her white master, who lavished her with his wealth and then conveniently died.²⁷⁴ The idea of the black seductress realized in the colonies presented itself here in France with dazzling, and potentially dangerous, effect.²⁷⁵

Isabel told the Duchess the story of her next lover, the Comte de Rosencranz, who offered to buy Plato for her – not realizing her love for him – but she refused. Plato, however, rejected her

²⁶⁹ One is unsure whether he was her “child” or a “magnificent present.” It is clear, however, that her disgust, and the attempt to be rid of him did not make her the most attentive of parents. Zamor, however, is another potent example of the connection between race and Orientalism.

²⁷⁰Madame du Barri, 190-191. Etienne-Léon Lamothe-Langon is also listed as an author. See also note 27.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 190-191.

²⁷² Ibid., 190-191.

²⁷³ Sue Peabody writes that it was somewhat standard to give blacks in the colonies classical Greek names. See *There Are No Slaves in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 164.

²⁷⁴Madame du Barri, 195.

²⁷⁵ For instance, the story of a slave woman, Xica da Silva recounts how the Afro-Brazilian slave wins the heart of a powerful man. She quickly, through her sexuality, is able to gain total control over him. A film was made of this story in 1976 (entitled *Xica* in its American release, written and directed by Carlos Diegues), as well as a novel, *Memórias do Distrito de Diamantina* by João Felício dos Santos. Thank you to Tyler Stovall for this reference.

because of her white lover, and then she came to France.²⁷⁶ Here, she became as much a spectacle as the Africans owned by white Frenchmen and women at Court. “When she repaired to Versailles to enjoy the spectacle of His Majesty dining in public, that place was thronged with persons anxious to obtain one glimpse of the captivating negress.” While at Versailles, Isabel saw and was immediately captivated by the Comte d’Artois. Instead of making her feelings known in the proper way, she told someone that she would gladly *pay* for time with him!²⁷⁷ Though the Comte declined the offer, he was intrigued and invited her to visit Bagatelle.²⁷⁸ Not only was Isabel acting outside of the proper conventions of the French Court, she had stepped beyond proper gender boundaries.

She became a huge curiosity, so much so that the Duchess asked to meet her and properly arranged an introduction. The Duchess seems to have forgotten herself here. Earlier she stated she needed to disavow Isabel, yet here she is saying she *wanted* to meet her. But Isabel was unable to wait, and arrived at Luciennes to introduce herself!²⁷⁹ Her appearance again took the Duchess by surprise:

She was dressed in the utmost excess of Asiatic splendor; her short robe of crimson damask was embroidered with gold, and trimmed with a fringe of the same material; below this descended a white satin petticoat similarly decorated, and her feet were set off by a pair of shoes the same colour as her dress, clasped together with diamonds that might have graced the diadem of an empress.²⁸⁰

Excessively dressed in “Asiatic splendor” with an Indian shawl, her fashion represented the whole world, a combination of Orientalism and blackness. Like the African slaves Lowe depicted, Isabel was also completely bejeweled. “I will not swell the catalogue by enumerating the magnificent necklaces, ear-rings, bracelets, agrafes, etc., which completed the costume of Isabel; suffice it that they corresponded in splendor and richness with the rest of her attire, and must have amounted to an enormous sum.”²⁸¹ The Duchess remarked: “I could not but admit that, *with the exception of her complexion*, she was most captivating.”²⁸²

We see Isabel excessive in every way – in appearance, in her manner, and in her actions. Even in the midst of an already decadent court, full of its own intrigues and backstabbing, she was too much. What can we make of a white noblewoman using the story of Isabel and her sexual adventures? One, it mitigates their connection to one another. Isabel was a spectacle; meeting her was akin to seeing an exhibit. And despite her better judgment, the Duchess was “captivated”; Isabel’s pull was too powerful.²⁸³ Yet Isabel’s inappropriateness on French soil is what stands out.

Both Isabel and Zamor were spectacles for white gazes and their unsuitability to be incorporated as subjects in the French kingdom was seldom in doubt. They both demonstrate that that the presence of the blacks (free or enslaved) not only challenged convention, it also seems to have unbalanced the entire French political and social order.

²⁷⁶ Madame du Barri, 200-201.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 191.

²⁷⁸ The implication is for a sexual affair.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 192.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 192.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 192. Kate Lowe writes that one reason for the correlation of blacks and jewelry in this manner was to emphasize the wealth of the master or mistress of the African. In Isabel’s case, it was really the wealth of her lover, who unfortunately, could not teach her proper Court etiquette. Another reason is to mark the abundance of wealth said to be available in Africa with the “embodiments of their inferiority in a European context,” 24.

²⁸² Madame du Barri, 192. My emphasis, because this becomes the main theme of *Ourika* in chap. 4.

²⁸³ Yet, even in the midst of their interactions, the Duchess does not usurp the gendered boundaries that Isabel does. Black women were trophies for white male lovers in the colonies.

Never the Twain Shall Meet: Legislating Frenchness

The ability to separate slavery in the French West Indies from France became more and more problematic, as the following situation makes clear. This case also illuminates how the narrative of the impotent black girl was transformed into a newer (and perhaps more dangerous) representation: an assertive black woman. In 1714, a planter named Madame Villeneuve deposited her slave, Pauline, in the Our Lady of Calvary convent in Nantes. The stay was to be one year while Madame Villeneuve went on to Paris.²⁸⁴ Unlike the Black Nun of Moret, Pauline subsequently decided that she *wanted* to remain in the convent, but her mistress, who had paid for Pauline's expenses, refused to allow it.

Claiming that Pauline was her property, Madame Villeneuve filed a court case demanding either her slave's return or financial compensation for her loss. The Présidial Court determined that Pauline had not been registered as property with the proper clerk in Nantes. A benefactor, René Darquisade, intervened and agreed to sponsor her in the convent. The final results of the case were decided in 1715: Pauline definitively won her freedom,²⁸⁵ took her final vows as a nun, and became Sister Theresa in 1716. This case caused much consternation beyond the borders of Nantes.

One of the results of Pauline's case was that it reinforced the French government's need to halt the ability of blacks to obtain their freedom on French soil. No longer just "pets" for French nobles, blacks represented a financial commodity for their owners that needed to be protected. In Nantes, Mayor Gérard Mellier, also a treasurer in France for Brittany, took up that cause. After the King declared Nantes one of four major port cities in France, Mellier felt that a slave's ability to gain his or her freedom on French soil jeopardized Nantes's (and therefore France's) economic future.²⁸⁶ Pauline Villeneuve's successful bid for freedom seemed to legitimize his fears, so Mellier set out to create a new registration system to prevent a reoccurrence and urged that Caribbean slavery "be legally recognized in France itself." Moreover, because he wanted to "extend the notion of slaves as 'moveable property' into France proper,"²⁸⁷ Mellier sent the King and his regent [or the Royal Council of the Marine] a memorandum on his ideas.²⁸⁸ A few months later, the King's Edict concerning Negro slaves from the colonies became law.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁴ Debrunner, using McCloy's text, *The Negro in France*, claimed that Pauline had run away to the nunnery. Robert Harms' work strongly refutes this. See Debrunner, 101; McCloy, 43 and Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 6-11, for a more detailed summation of this story.

²⁸⁵ Did being in a convent really represent freedom in any real sense? Harms notes that the mission of the *filles du Calvaire* required "poverty, humiliation, prayer, silence, and chastity." Harms paints a vivid picture of a convent where the physical space for nuns and their religious practices projected a harsh existence. See Harms, 7. And he correctly hypothesizes that Pauline's decision was probably based both on her religious conviction and a desire to avoid going back to the French Caribbean as a slave, 8. I would argue that because she was first and foremost the slave of Madame Villeneuve, one must entertain that even with the harsh conditions of the convent, her choice may have seemed better to Pauline than her legal status as "slave" – whether in the French West Indies or elsewhere. What more profound freedom might there be? For a more complete interrogation of convent life, see Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004) and Olwen Hufton and Frank Tallett, "Communities of Women, the Religious Life, and Public Service in Eighteenth-Century France," in *Connecting Spheres: European Women in a Globalizing Worlds, 1500 to the Present*, Second Edition, eds. Joan W. Scott, Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁸⁶ Harms, 13-15.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁸⁹ Pierre Boule, "Racial Purity or Legal Clarity? The Status of Black Residents in Eighteenth-Century France," *The Journal of the Historical Society* VI (March 2006): 21-22. See also McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 21-23 for more on Mellier.

Peabody's text, *There are No Slaves in France*, provides a brilliant overview of the eighteenth century's most important slave laws in France. It is not my desire to duplicate that work,²⁹⁰ however it is critical in understanding nineteenth-century France to see the trajectory of this legislation; thus her insights merit some rearticulation. According to Peabody, two of the most critical laws concerning blacks and other peoples of color were the Royal Edict of 1716 and the Royal Declaration of 15 December 1738.²⁹¹ The first was designed for a specific purpose: to allow white French men and women to bring their slaves from the colonies to France without losing (under the common law which stated that there was no slavery in France) what was claimed to be their rightful ownership. In short, it was, in Peabody's words, an endgame around the "Freedom Principle."²⁹² The particulars of the Edict were straightforward: slaves could come to France for either religious instruction or to learn a trade.²⁹³ Unwittingly, however, this caveat suggested that blacks were human beings with at least some degree of subjectivity, and not property as the *Code Noir* had previously declared them – at least to the extent that religion and education were endeavors that could move them beyond that of animal status. Pauline Villeneuve made great use of that assumption even before it was specifically legislated.

Permission to bring slaves into France had to be obtained from the colonial government before leaving the colony. If permission were granted, a permit was issued with the stipulation that the slave had to be immediately registered upon reaching France. If handled properly, the slave would remain the property of his or her master, and could remain in France with him/her indefinitely – an important economic factor, since masters could not buy or sell slaves on French soil.²⁹⁴ If all of these requirements were not fulfilled or properly handled, the slave would become free.²⁹⁵

The Declaration was designed in part to retard the disturbing trend²⁹⁶ of blacks using loopholes in the edict of 1716 to win their freedom.²⁹⁷ Religious instruction and proper training still applied to the new law as the only legitimate reasons for bringing slaves to France, but it was no longer sufficient to merely state that a trade was to be learned. Now it had to be explained what trade would be learned and who would teach it.²⁹⁸ Registration was, as before, still necessary, but now the date of arrival had to be noted.²⁹⁹ Furthermore, a deposit – in advance – was required.³⁰⁰ There were some additional changes also worth noting, because they in large part were directed at the owners who brought slaves into France: whereas freedom could be obtained under the Edict of 1716, failure to comply would result in confiscation of the slave by the King and returning him or

²⁹⁰ Sue Peabody, "There Are No Slaves in France," in *The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancient Regime*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, passim.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 3. Several historians point to 1571 and the *Parlement* of Bordeaux as the moment when slavery ceases in France. See Stein, 194, Peabody, and Pierre Boule, 21. The Freedom Principle was based on the notion that since slavery did not exist in France, once slaves set foot on French soil, they were free.

²⁹³ Like in the *Code Noir*, the importance of Catholicism was stressed.

²⁹⁴ Marriage, with the owner's permission, would result in manumission.

²⁹⁵ See McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 25-6, which discusses 1716.

²⁹⁶ Pierre Boule says a report discussed the dangers of blacks in France and the trouble they might get into, 22. Also see McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 26-28.

²⁹⁷ According to Peabody's figures, by the 1730s, two blacks had petitioned for freedom and both received it. Those numbers would rise throughout the eighteenth century, culminating by the 1790s with a grand total of 154 petitions of freedom, with all receiving their freedom the first request or under appeal. Including acts of liberty, the figure rises to 247. See Peabody, 55.

²⁹⁸ *Déclaration royale du 15 décembre 1738, concernant le séjour des esclaves en France*, Article III.

²⁹⁹ *Déclaration royale*, Article II.

³⁰⁰ McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 26.

her to the colonies.³⁰¹ Moreover, the Declaration set a three year limit for blacks to remain in France.³⁰² The Edict and the Declaration were registered throughout France, but not in France's most powerful court, the *Parlement* of Paris. Instead, the Admiralty (Office of the Marine) handled matters concerning blacks, not the legislative body. The lack of legislative registration in Paris is proof that blacks were not overly numerous and therefore did not merit the fears the French had cultivated.³⁰³

Blacks, then, made successful attempts to win their freedom in France, and the government was legally unprepared for this development. Its initial response was to free them, until other legislation was developed to deal with the situation by attempting to keep them out of France proper, no matter what was going on in France's colonies. It is interesting that French subjects felt themselves so morally separate from their colonies, even while they were so financially and culturally connected to them. The Admiralty Ordinance of 5 April 1762 dropped certain justifications for bringing blacks to France (while still requiring their registration in France). As Peabody points out, there was still a clear intention within the legal language to retain the notion that freedom existed on French shores.³⁰⁴ While these changes did not ensure that all blacks (or their masters and mistresses) complied, we have, for the first time, a better idea of the numbers of blacks in the capital.³⁰⁵

General discourse on blood mixing intertwined with the discourse of too many blacks remaining in France – not surprising since the same fears existed and were discussed *ad nauseam* in the French colonies. Alongside the legislative process, rhetoric began almost immediately about the fear of blacks overrunning Paris and about blacks' ability to infect whites with their tainted blood. There seemed to be a new directive – to stop simply legislating their existence while in France, but to rid France of blacks entirely. One particularly vocal proponent for completely disallowing blacks in France for any reason whatsoever was Guillaume Poncet de la Grave. Unlike many of his countrymen, as *procureur du roi de l'amirauté de France*, de la Grave had the power to make his dissatisfaction known loudly and often.³⁰⁶ First, he demanded that all blacks, free or enslaved, register immediately.³⁰⁷ By 1762, 159 blacks were registered in Paris (of this number, 49 were female).³⁰⁸ It was hardly a critical mass.³⁰⁹

De la Grave wanted to return blacks to the colonies, specifically to prevent miscegenation and cultural “depletion.”³¹⁰ This is clear, given his dedication to registration and removal of blacks. So while the black body in France bothered him in general, the black female body seemed to cause him a particular type of grief. He turned to the dangerous or diseased black woman to make his point. As Peabody states, he linked blacks with public health in order to oppose miscegenation: “by

³⁰¹ *Déclaration*, Article V.

³⁰² *Déclaration* Article VI. Those blacks already in France had to be declared within three months or they too would be confiscated. Finally, owners were relieved of slaves (without financial compensation), and blacks were denied their freedom.

³⁰³ That the Admiralty was overseers (both literally and figuratively) really brings home the notion that slavery was and would continue to be seen as an overseas issue, not a “French” one.

³⁰⁴ Peabody, 74.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

³⁰⁶ Poncet de la Grave is a fascinating character; I wish it was not beyond the scope of this project to talk more about him. For other details on de la Grave, see Stefan, Goodwin, *Africa in Europe, Interdependencies, Relocations, and Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

³⁰⁷ Peabody, 81.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁰⁹ Occupations for the women were as follows: 13 were servants (7 chambermaids); 1 was a cook; 4 were hairdressers, 2 were nurses; 3 were seamstresses; and 30 had no trade listed. See Peabody, 83.

³¹⁰ Lucien Pierre Peytraud, *L'esclavage aux Antilles Françaises avant 1789 d'après des documents inédits des Archives Coloniales* (Paris: Hachette, 1897), 387-388.

preventing the marriages between blacks and whites, the intercourse [communication] is destroyed, by removing the public women, the monsters that take our youth and infect it with the illness that is carried into families, are extinguished.”³¹¹ What she does not emphasize, and it is truly important, is that de la Grave, like the minister in his letter of 1707, had to move beyond the idea of the “dangerous” slave body, onto one that specifically targeted black women, in order to strengthen his argument. In addition, it rendered invisible white French women having sex with black men. Poncet’s text also linked back to fears that the presence of black men and women “unbalanced” the French social order.

Poncet de la Grave specifically implicated black women residing in France in this dilemma, while at the same time adhering to the laws that freed them from bondage. De la Grave emphasized two points: that black women were synonymous with prostitution, and that miscegenation monstrously infected the “poor youth” of France, who then brought disease into their own families. He pointedly did not mention that these youths were visiting “public women” in the first place.³¹² “[In the Kingdom] their marriages to Europeans are encouraged, the public houses are infected, the colors mingle together, and the blood degenerates.”³¹³ Read in conjunction with the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), this supposed crisis becomes more nuanced. The Treaty of Paris left France bereft of many of its colonial possessions in the West Indies and North America – including Canada – and India fell under British rule as well. These losses would have also engendered conversations about a weakened military, and thus a weak French man. This delicate French man, further corrupted by black blood, must have seemed potentially devastating to the future of the nation. In addition, this passage again relied upon a certain directionality – the actions of black women bringing disease upon unsuspecting male victims made them the sexual aggressors. The concern that infection, dilution, degeneration, and impurity were all found in blood became increasingly centered on a racialized body.

The Déclaration du roi pour la Police des Noirs

Plans to return blacks to the colonies and bar the rest from France were discussed in 1763, but these attempts failed to succeed in ridding France of their so-called Negro problem.³¹⁴ In 1776, Royal-issued *lettres patentes* discussed the discomfort with blacks remaining in France in almost any capacity.³¹⁵ The *Déclaration du roi pour la Police des Noirs* of 9 August 1777 seemed to drop all pretenses. While the previous laws were concerned with the status of blacks (or at least slaves), at issue now was how to rid the French kingdom once and for all of people of African descent, regardless of their status as slave or free:³¹⁶ « nous sommes informé aujourd’hui que le nombre des noirs s’y est tellement multiplié. »³¹⁷ Paris was singled out as a city inundated with blacks.³¹⁸ As Peabody remarks,

³¹¹ Poncet de la Grave to Chardon, December 19, 1777, AN Colonies F1B4, fol 196v, quoted in Peabody, 124. There are copies of several of his letters (including this one) in the *Police des Noirs* folios at the *Centre des archives d’outre mer*.

³¹² In 1777, Poncet de la Grave generated a deluge of correspondence about the bad behavior of two black prostitutes. De la Grave tried to have them deported, but the Minister of the Marine overrode his order. See Peabody, 123-24 for a brief overview.

³¹³ *Les détiennent en prison avec défenses aux concierges de s’en dessaisir sous peine de punition exemplaire*, 20-21, [BN MSS, fonds français, 13357] as quoted in Peabody, 119.

³¹⁴ Neither will the *Police des Noirs* in 1777, but it will add to the level of surveillance.

³¹⁵ Peabody, 114, 116-117, and 162.

³¹⁶ *Déclaration du roi pour la Police des Noirs* of August 9, 1777 (now called the *Déclaration*), Articles 1 and 2.

³¹⁷ *Déclaration*, Article 2.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, see McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 47 for additional information on blacks in Paris.

this declaration had the sad distinction of being the first legislation in France based entirely on skin color.³¹⁹

As the previous laws had demonstrated, where there was a will, there was a loophole – domestics. Article 4 allowed a single black or mulatto to accompany his or her master to France. However, he or she needed to be literally deposited in a *dépôt des noirs* – at their owner’s expense³²⁰ – until a boat could transport the slave back to the colonies.³²¹ Article 5 decreed that a deposit of 1,000 *livres* be left in the colony of *disembarquement*. Like the previous legislation, proper documentation was crucial in the new law. Article 9 required that masters register the slave they brought with them.³²² It also introduced an interesting caveat, one that Henriette Lucille would make good use of. It stated that « *Voulons que, passe ledit délai, ils ne puissent retenir à leur service lesdits Noirs, que de leur consentement.* »³²³ Free blacks could only be kept in service at their own consent. Emeka Abanime states that “this was an oblique way of saying that Negro slaves in France would become free one month after the registration of the new law by the *parlements* . . . and that slave owners who did not want to lose their blacks through manumission should send them back to the colonies within the stipulated length of time.”³²⁴ Why the government would allow this, given that the possibility of manumission had been legislated out of existence years before, is maddeningly unclear. In early 1777, 121 blacks registered their presence in France, 34 of whom claimed they were free. By 8 August that number had risen to 189, culminating in a grand total of 336 by September.³²⁵

One of the most important things that distinguished the Admiralty Ordinance of 5 April 1762 and the *Déclaration pour la Police des Noirs* of 9 August 1777 was that both pieces of legislation were registered with the Paris *parlement*, evidence that the ever-present concerns about blacks in France were finally being acknowledged in Paris.³²⁶ By 1778, blacks comprised no more than .025 percent of the French population (as compared with .11 percent in England) of 26 million. In fact, only 765 people of color were registered with the Clerk of the Admiralty in Paris between 1778 and 1790 (out of an estimated Parisian population of 500,000-600,000).³²⁷ And yet, an *Arrêt du conseil d’état du roi, pour la police des noirs, mulâtres, ou autres gens de couleur qui font dans la ville de Paris* came out on 11 January 1778, followed by several other legal decrees: an *Arrêt du conseil* #853 dated 5 April 1778 forbidding interracial marriage,³²⁸ and calling for arrest of any clergy who performed it; on 8 (or 11)

³¹⁹ See also Emeka P. Abarime’s essay “The Anti-Negro French Law of 1777,” *The Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 1 (1979): 21-29.

³²⁰ *Déclaration*, Article 8.

³²¹ Shelby McCloy called dépôts “concentration camps”, 47; the Comtesse de Béthune called them a prison. They often literally were prisons. If separate space could not be found for the dépôts, a portion of a prison was used.

³²² *Déclaration*, Article 9; free blacks had to register themselves within a month of the declaration; it states: « *Ceux de nos sujets, ainsi que les étrangers, qui auront des Noirs à leur service, lors de la publication & enregistrement de notre présente Déclaration, feront tenus dans un mois, à compter du jour de ladite publication & enregistrement, de ce présenter pardevant les Officiers de l’Amirauté dans le reffort de laquelle ils font domiciles, & s’il n’y en a pas, pardevant le Juge Royal dudit lieu, à l’effet d’y déclarer les noms & qualités des Noirs, Mulâtres, ou autres gens de couleur de l’un & de l’autre sexe qui demeurent chez eux, le temps de leur débarquement, & la Colonie de laquelle ils ont été exportés : Voulons que, passe ledit délai, ils ne puissent retenir à leur service lesdits Noirs, que de leur consentement.* » See also Emeka P. Abarime’s essay, 26, for information on article nine. Failure to have the required certificate would result in re-enslavement and shipment to the colonies. See McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 48.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Emeka P. Abanime, “The Anti-Negro French Law of 1777,” *The Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 1 (1979): 26.

³²⁵ Peabody, 118, 183.

³²⁶ Peabody, *passim*.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³²⁸ *Arrêt du Conseil d’état du roi, concernant les mariages des Noirs, Mulâtres ou autres Gens du Couleur*, April 5, 1778, Centre des archives d’outre mer, hereforth known as CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 10.

January 1778, the necessity of registration and a certificate for blacks came into play calling for those who failed to comply to be sent to colonies (the certificates were called *cartouches*; see fig. 2.4); #810 dated 5 April 1778 mentioned both sexes in the ban on marriage; and #1571 dated 6 November 1781 forbade anyone from making a person of color a *sieur* or *dame*, and called for the arrest of anyone who did. The Declaration of 1777 certainly had not done its job.



Fig. 2.4. Undated, Sample of a *Cartouche, Police des Noirs: Certificate pour un an*, n. 226, Amiraute de Nantes, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France

Several dozen cases before Henriette Lucille's were successful in obtaining freedom for their defendants.³²⁹ At the heart of *L'affaire de la Nègresse Henriette Lucile* – a slave asserting a freedom she had already taken – several essential issues appeared, namely the flouting of the law by people such as Henriette Lucille's mistress, and the French government's growing disdain towards its subjects who usurped the nation's interest – keeping blacks out of France – in favor of their own, evidenced by their indictment of Madame Lafarge Paquot's behavior in their final decision. The rhetoric of non-compliance and the subsequent court decisions formed the basis for a continuing critique of France's inability to keep its kingdom "pure" of so-called race-mixing, and revealed the difficulties when both blacks and whites were able to circumvent murky or ambivalent French law. In many ways, this mentality helped the monarchy usher in its own demise. If legislation emphasized blacks' outsider status, a complicated counter-discourse of black inclusion was also at work.³³⁰ If nobles and

³²⁹ See the earlier figures.

³³⁰ I almost hesitate to use "counter discourse" as it tends to negate the simultaneity of what is happening during this period.

elites used personalities such as the *Mauresse* and Zamor to toy with the idea of defying royal authority, they were themselves at the receiving end of individuals such as Pauline and Henriette Lucille defying *their* authority.

Henriette Lucille's ordeal has been briefly summarized and discussed by other historians.³³¹ As I stated previously, my approach is to take a more gendered reading of the events, and to ask specific questions about the role of womanhood. Several things about the case make it ripe for a more thorough analysis, namely that the Legislative Committee felt that this was one of the more unseemly and contentious cases that could be used in order to separate rhetoric from reality and/or theory and practice. And it used this case to reach startling conclusions: get all blacks out of France entirely.

Part of my interest in this case stems from the volume of documents that have survived; this offers us a fairly coherent narrative. The presence of women as protagonists; the fluidity of the representation of black womanhood in the person of Henriette Lucille; and the contentious assertions made by and between the two white noblewomen, Madame Lafarge Paquot and the Comtesse de Béthune, make it even more compelling. The correspondence between Madame Paquot, the Comtesse de Béthune (Henriette Lucille's protector), the Paris Lieutenant General of Police (Monsieur le Noir) and the high court – with its variety of sniping and manipulation of both gender and racial roles – show the myriad stakes involved in keeping Lucille in bondage, or in setting her free. Finally, the case reveals the very specific desire to manage Henriette Lucille's unmanageable body.

“Cet fille de mauvaise mœurs”: L’Affaire de la Nègresse Henriette Lucille



³³¹ Both Peabody and McCloy briefly discuss Henriette Lucille. In Peabody's case, she concludes her entire project with a brief review of the Legislative Committee. Their findings are more central to my argument of the government's response to white French non-compliance with racial legislation.

Fig. 2.5. *Servante noire préparant un dressoir*, huile sur toile, cadre en bois doré,
H. cm : 33,4 - L. : 42 avec cadre, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France³³²

In 1776, Henriette (usually called Lucille) was brought to Paris from Cap Français by Monsieur Paquot to care for the Paquot's two children.³³³ No evidence appears claiming any issues worth writing about until 11 November 1780, when Madame Lafarge Paquot wrote a letter to the French Minister of Marine's point person, Daniel Marc Antoine Chardon,³³⁴ seeking to obtain an order to arrest and repatriate her negress, Lucille, whom she represented as a girl of « *mauvaise conduite* » and « *mauvaise mœurs.*»³³⁵ A man, Madame complained, was at the root of all her problems with Lucille.³³⁶ M. Chardon wrote back on 26 November, acknowledging receipt of the letter and asking for proof that Madame had made the declaration to the *greffe* (clerk) of the admiralty as required by article 9 of the *Déclaration du Roi, pour la police des noirs*.³³⁷ On that same date (and also on 30 November) a log entry of some type from Chardon's office to the Minister of the Marine summarized the exchange, including Madame's discontentment with the purportedly bad behavior of Lucille: « *une négresse nomme Henriette dite Lucile, dont elle éprouve toutes sortes de mécontentement.* » It reminded the log's reader pointedly of the importance of following the 1777 law, including the results of non-conformation. It furthermore indicated that it was unknown whether Madame had indeed followed it. Finally, it proposed that no further action be taken until such time as a copy of the declaration was produced.³³⁸ The last suggestion did not appear to have been honored, as the same day a letter from Versailles to M. Jean Charles Pierre Le Noir (also spelled Lenoir), head of the Paris Police, was sent on behalf of His Majesty for an order to arrest Lucille and send her to a *dépôt des noirs* until such time that she could be put on a ship headed back to Cap Français.³³⁹

Several days later Madame wrote to Monsieur Le Noir with the requested documentation (the letter also indicates that her brother-in-law had delivered the letter, and that she had a *négociant*).³⁴⁰ She emphasized that her husband, M. Paquot, was a war veteran: « *Je vous observé que mon mary est*

³³² Inv. Number 17335.

³³³ She arrived on *la Jeune-Julie* and according to Peytraud was registered with the *greffe* on rue Saint-Honoré; her place of birth was listed at Saint Domingue. See Lucien Peytraud, *L'esclavage aux Antilles françaises avant 1789, d'après des documents inédits des Archives coloniales* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et cie, 1897), 393. Although Peytraud states that this document is in carton A of the files, I was unable to locate it. McCloy states that she was a nurse. Although he does not indicate his evidence, it is not an inappropriate suggestion, especially since the Paquots had two children and he was a war veteran. See McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 54-55.

³³⁴ The actual Minister of the Marine was Charles Eugene Gabriel de la Croix, the marquis de Castries, who replaced Chardon's mentor, Antoine Raymond Jean Gualbert Gabriel de Sartine, comte d'Alby, in October 1780. Sartine had appointed Chardon to oversee the *Police des Noirs*.

³³⁵ Madame Paquot, while clearly a smart woman, had unstandardized spelling. Rather than correct her, unless it is crucial to a specific point, I have decided to leave her writing as is. See Letter to M. Chardon from Madame Lafarge Paquot dated 11 November, 1780, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 29. Given that Madame Lafarge Paquot steadfastly maintained that she had obtained the proper documentation for Henriette Lucille to come to France, it is interesting (and perhaps revealing) that she choice to highlight these issues, and not more straightforwardly assert her legal rights.

³³⁶ Letter to Chardon.

³³⁷ Which I spoke of earlier in this chapter. Letter to Madame Lafarge Paquot dated 26 November, 1780, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 26.

³³⁸ Log entry from M. Chardon?, *Archives Nationales* (AN), « Colonies » F1B1, entry 23.

³³⁹ Letter from Madame LaFarge Paquot to M. Le Noir dated 30 November 1780, n. 25.

³⁴⁰ Letter from Madame Paquot to M. Le Noir dated 26 November 1780, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 27. As for the husband, which war is unclear. Perhaps the Seven Year's War?

retourné au commencement de la guerre qu'il a été pris par l'ennemie. »³⁴¹ Madame then introduced an interesting wrinkle to her narrative: it seems Lucille had a child, one whom Lucille attempted to leave at the *hôtel dieu*.³⁴² The powers that be in the *hôtel* had refused to take the child however, advising, according to Madame, that Lucille bring the child to the Paquot home: « *ce rendre chez moi.* » Lucille refused, opting to go to another *hôpital* where « *des âmes charitables l'aide de leur generocite.* »³⁴³ The same day, the king issued an official order for Lucille to be sent to a *dépôt des noirs* in Nantes and for her mistress to pay for all costs, including her “*rembarquemens pour les colonies.*”³⁴⁴ There is no further documentation until August of the following year, when we discover that all is not well *Chez Lafarge Paquot*.

Madame wrote on 3 August 1781 (to whom it is not indicated, most likely M. Chardon) of a dilemma. Her friend Madame de la Touché³⁴⁵ was traveling to Saint Domingue, and Madame had promised her the services of Lucille (who was also meant to return there). Lucille, however, despite the order and arrest warrant, has not returned to Madame Lafarge Paquot. Madame Paquot beseeched advice, assuring her reader of Madame de la Touché's friendship and good intentions toward Lucille: « *c'est une amie qui ma promis d'avoir des égard pour elle.* » Madame Paquot declared this the perfect opportunity to apprehend Lucille, and assured Chardon that she knew exactly where Lucille was residing; as soon as she would hear back, she could quickly put any plan into action.³⁴⁶

A document entitled “Colonies” suggested that by 13 November everyone knew where Lucille had been staying, and possibly why Madame did not simply go and retrieve her. It also contained a deposition of sorts from a new and significant player on the scene: Madame la Comtesse de Béthune, who indicated that Lucille had been in Paris for six years (possibly putting her in Paris as early as 1775). Moreover, rather than Henriette Lucille being bad as Madame alleged, « *cette négresse a été forcée par les mauvais traitemens de sa maîtresse* » to leave her house and seek the protection of the countess. It stated that Madame Lafarge Paquot, knowing that the countess had interceded, put Lucille in prison and was preparing to obtain an order of repatriation for the following day. The countess asked for the opposite order: a suspension of her departure (or to be brought back if the order has already been executed) and a declaration of Lucille's freedom.³⁴⁷

Accordingly, the law of 1777 was invoked: it was claimed that due to the fact that the three year period had elapsed, she, like any black in France, was free. Returning Henriette Lucille, when she should already be declared free on French soil, was therefore contrary to government policy.³⁴⁸ Madame Lafarge Paquot wrote to Chardon on 14 November lamenting that the order to Monsieur Le Noir had yielded no response. Worse, her problems with Lucille (« *vous avez eu connaissance monsieur, des désagrémens que j'ai éprouve de cet fille* ») were exacerbated by the arrest of the wrong girl: « *le malheur vent qu'il est servie pour un autre qui portois le même nom.* » Worse still, Madame seemed to have

³⁴¹ Letter from Madame Paquot to Lenoir dated 30 November 1780.

³⁴² Ibid. The *hôtel dieu* is the oldest hospital in Paris, opening around 651. It is a charitable hospital, offering public assistance. See <http://www.paris-pittoresque.com/monuments/17b.htm>.

³⁴³ Letter from Madame Paquot to M. Le Noir dated 26 November 1780, n. 27.

³⁴⁴ Official order « *De par du roy* » to send Henriette Lucille to a *dépôt*, n. 33.

³⁴⁵ This may be the Madame de la Touché who was infamous for having a liaison with the Duke of Kingston. She also, along with Madame d'Arty and Madame Dupre, might be mentioned by Jean Jacques Rousseau as one of the “Three Graces.” In Moreau de Saint-Méry's *Loix et constitutions des colonies françoises de l'Amérique sous le vent*. T. 2, a M. le Comte de la Touche (no accent), Capitaine de Vaisseau, Directeur des Portes et Arsenaux a la Cour, is amongst the subscribers (xiii). I do not know if this was a relation of the Madame de la Touché discussed in the chapter, but his connection to the French colonies makes this link likely.

³⁴⁶ Letter from Madame Lafarge Paquot to M. ? dated 3 August 1781, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 34G.

³⁴⁷ Colonies documents dated 13? November 1781, n. 21 and 22.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., n. 22.

played a part in the mistake: « *et par ma trop grande indulgence a ne l'avoir pas mise à profit dans les tems.* »³⁴⁹ Would M. be so kind as to issue yet another order?³⁵⁰ Madame indicated her *négociant* in Nantes would be willing to handle the transportation of Lucille,³⁵¹ unlikely though it now seemed.

A new issue now entered into the official correspondence: who was paying for the costs of handling Lucille once they actually arrested her? Beginning in the third week of August it dominated the narrative. Another order – per Madame Lafarge Paquot's request – was discussed after 24 August.³⁵² It stated that Madame's correspondent would pay all costs at that time³⁵³ to Monsieur Le Noir on 28 August.³⁵⁴ Madame received a letter from Versailles (Chardon?) the same day acknowledging receipt of her letter (dated 24 August), indicating that her new request for an order of repatriation had been forwarded to Monsieur Le Noir (whom she should contact) and inquiring yet again about payment of fees³⁵⁵ – interesting, since she had indicated several times that she would pay them.³⁵⁶

Given the plethora of letters already sent, Madame sent a peculiar one on 28 August, writing to Chardon almost as if for the first time, asking for an order from the King.³⁵⁷ She indicated her *négociant* in Nantes by name: *Périssel père et fils*³⁵⁸ « *qui sont prevenus, et qui acquitterons exactement tous les fraix.* »³⁵⁹ She hoped to take advantage of a vessel leaving for the colonies: « *Je désire bien profiter des première vaisseaux disposer a partir pour le Cap Français pour rembarque ma négresse Lucille venue avec moy de ce pay.* »³⁶⁰ Perhaps Madame had had enough, or maybe her time in Paris had come to an end and she wanted Lucille with her when she left. The rest of November was more of the same – a letter to M. Le Noir asking for the *rebarquement* of Lucille, the absolute necessity for monies to house her, etc.³⁶¹ Finally, the verdict: either the Bureau des Colonies or the Paris Admiralty Court ruled that Madame had not followed the law of 1777 after all, and thus, Henriette Lucille was free: « *Dans cet état, il est de toute justice de rendre la négresse Henriette Lucille la liberté dont elle n'auroit pas due être privée.* »³⁶²

As we move away from the story itself, we must consider what it tells us about its participants. Several things can be gleaned from these documents, especially with regard to Madame Lafarge Paquot, so let us begin there: Madame was literate.³⁶³ We can also make inferences about

³⁴⁹ As it might have been impossible to secure Lucille, Madame Lafarge Paquot may have allowed someone else to use the warrant.

³⁵⁰ Letter to M. Chardon from Madame Lafarge Paquot dated 14 August 1781, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 34D.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Summation of the story of Henriette Lucille dated 24 August 1781, n. 22. Please note there are two documents with the number 22, with different dates – see FN 107.

³⁵³ Note to someone named Dupré, dated 28 August 1781, n. 31.

³⁵⁴ Letter to M. Le Noir dated 28 August 1781, n. 34A.

³⁵⁵ Letter to Madame Lafarge Paquot dated 28 August 1781, n. 32.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., n. 34B.

³⁵⁸ « *Le monde des négociants* » states that the family Périssel of Nantes, if indeed they are the same, « *seraient issus de riches familles de négociants orléanaises.* » See <http://www.ac-nantes.fr.8080/peda/disc/svt/estuaire/estuaire9899/arm....> There is also Perissel et consorts, who owned a slave ship named *La Gaillarde*, in 1713, which brought 400 slaves to *Cap Français*. Thank you to Eric Saugera for leading me to this information.

³⁵⁹ Madame Lafarge Paquot to M. Chardon dated 30 August 1781, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 34E.

³⁶⁰ Madame Lafarge Paquot to M. Chardon dated 28 August 1781, n. 34B.

³⁶¹ Letter from Madame LaFarge Paquot dated 30 August 1781, 34D.

³⁶² Journal entry (no date) entitled « *Affaire de la Négresse Henriette Lucille* », n. 36-37A.

³⁶³ By today's standards, Madame Lafarge Paquot's grammar and spelling are deplorable. However, eighteenth century spelling and grammar in France were less standardized. She also followed the conventions of letter writing during the period, starting her actual writing far down the page, in order to indicate her subordination to her subjects, and signing off her letters appropriately. Review the following literature on letter writing: Susan Foley, “Your Letter is Divine,

her social status: she lived on rue de Conde in what is now the 6^{ième} arrondissement, and she counted a certain Madame (possibly comtesse) de la Touché amongst her friends or acquaintances. She was comfortable asking (or demanding) the right to what she felt was her legitimate property, being Henriette Lucille. While she did not specifically invoke the law of 1777, she knew about or was counseled on the legislation regarding *her* negress and how the system worked in order to get her back. If Madame did indeed know the law, other than saying she provided a copy of the declaration to French officials, she never invoked it again in her letters. Rather, it was Messieurs Chardon and Le Noir that seemed most anxious to obtain it.

Furthermore, her tenacity was revealed in the many letters she wrote, and in her utter refusal to let Henriette Lucille get away. She situated her husband (as a war victim) and herself clearly: she was a woman of some means, one committed to honoring her promises (to Madame de la Touché); she was a mother needing the help of her domestic to care for her two children. Where her husband was at present is anyone's guess: he seemed to pass quickly, never to resurface in her letters.³⁶⁴ The letters finally reveal someone who understood the etiquette of letter writing, as well as her own gender position: she asked for counsel and advice often – while being clear that she knew exactly what she wanted.

Conversely, the documents reveal almost nothing about Madame La Comtesse de Béthune (which gives us some freedom – or folly – to speculate).³⁶⁵ One could argue that her protection of Henriette Lucille showed regard for her, or at least for the emancipation of blacks in general. She might just have been a proponent of the Freedom Principle. Her deposition revealed that Lucille had been sent to a “prison” versus a “*dépôt*.” Many wrote about the appalling conditions of the *dépôt des noirs*; so we should not consider her assessment an exaggeration. However, one could also assert, given her tone, that the countess and Lafarge Paquot knew each other and were using Henriette Lucille to air certain animosities.³⁶⁶ For example, the countess indicated that the reason that Henriette Lucille sought her protection was due to the bad treatment by Madame Lafarge Paquot.³⁶⁷ Furthermore, the countess insinuated duplicitous behavior on the part of Madame by indicating that Lafarge Paquot, knowing of the countess's deposition and protection, sought the rapid seizure of Henriette Lucille. Where did she find out about Henriette Lucille's ill treatment? It seems likely Henriette Lucille herself told her. The countess, in keeping with her Christian duty, had therefore

Irresistible, Infernally Seductive’: Leon Gambetta, Leonie Leon, and Nineteenth-Century Epistolary Culture,” *French Historical Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 2337-267; C. Dauphin, P. Lebrun-Pezzerat, and D. Pouban, *Ces bonnes lettres: Une correspondance familiale au XIX siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); *La Correspondance: Les usages de la lettre au XIX siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1991); and Sarah Horowitz, “The Practices of Friendship and Sociability,” *States of Intimacy: Friendship and the Remaking of French Political Elites, 1815-1848* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008).

³⁶⁴ Lucien Peytraud, in *L’esclavage aux Antilles Françaises avant 1789*, refers to a document (which I could not find) that brings M. Paquot into the discussion. The document he references states: « *Aujourd’hui est comparu au greffe M. Paquot, demeurant rue Saint-Honoré, paroisse Saint-Roch, lequel, pour satisfaire a l’ordonnance de la Chambre, a déclaré avoir a son service une négresse no Madame Henriette, âgée de vingt-cinq ans, arrivée sur le vaisseau la Jeune-Julie en 1776 et être dans l’intention de la ramener avec lui au cap Français ou elle est née, dont il nous a requis acte a lui octroyé et a signe. Fait en l’Amirauté de France, au siège général de la Table de marbre du Palais. A Paris, le 14 mai 1777, Bothée.* », 393.

³⁶⁵ There are several possibilities: Princess Béthune / Madame Béthune (Albertine-Josephine-Eulalie la Vaillarot) married Eugene-Francois-Leon, prince of Béthune (1746-1824). There is also an Adelaide de Béthune (1761-1823), possibly from Poland. Finally, in 1779, Josephine Louise married a comte de Béthune. Based on dates, I believe, but am not certain, that the countess in this case is likely Adelaide or Josephine Louise.

³⁶⁶ Again, McCloy states that Madame and the Countess were friends, that “personal interference” by Louis XVI helped Henriette Lucille's cause, and that she was permitted to remain in France. But he does not indicate the location of this evidence. See McCloy, *The Negro in France*, 54-55.

³⁶⁷ This is a shrewd maneuver on the Countess's part; it paints Henriette Lucille as an otherwise obedient servant and places Madame Paquot as someone who must defend herself.

intervened to help this poor servant, who had previously only wanted to do her job. Any of the sexual innuendo Madame Lafarge Paquot included had disappeared.

Representations of Henriette Lucille – whose voice is absent, of course – must be remarked upon. Madame’s ability to re-enslave Henriette Lucille depended upon her ability to convey already-existing tropes of black female behavior. She was portrayed as a woman of bad conduct and values, the child she gave birth to presented as proof of this assertion. Moreover, she was easily influenced both by the “bad man” previously mentioned, who led her to leave Madame Lafarge Paquot’s household, and the countess who now protected her. Madame’s own declarations, that Henriette Lucille, already her property, had given birth to a new piece of property in the form of her child was unexamined. Neither was the timing of the pregnancy: Lucille traveled with M. Paquot (without his wife and their children) from Cap Français to Paris; who knew the real father of her child? The countess’s representation of Henriette Lucille suggested that she had left only because of bad treatment, not her enslavement. Lucille was not the Nun of Moret or the rebellious Pauline, but part of her worth was in becoming a victim upon whom the countess could write her own piety and Christian charity upon.

Finally, a note on Henriette Lucille’s supposed willingness to give up her child: if indeed the pregnancy was the product of sexual coercion or rape – by the “bad man” Madame references, or perhaps Monsieur Paquot – or unplanned and unwanted for other reasons, we will never know. The available source material is simply not sufficient to indicate for certain. Nor can we ever imagine how horrific it must have been to be turned away and told to go back to the very person – and institution – she sought to escape. Henriette Lucille might have been choosing the ultimate sacrifice for a mother who was enslaved: to save her child from a life of similar bondage by letting her or him go.

A level of agency (however constricted) was definitely missing from how Henriette Lucille was represented by the various corners, but not entirely. Evidently, Henriette Lucille had enough wherewithal to leave Lafarge Paquot in the first place. In addition, she had adequate understanding of French social hierarchy to seek protection from a countess, clearly one with more power than her mistress! In this choice, she avoided even the appearance of impropriety (which made it harder to dismiss her out of hand) by aligning herself with a white woman instead of a white man. If there were indeed animosity between the countess and Madame, Lucille would have seen it, and may have been able to exploit it.

What this case shows is that blacks had achieved access to the law in a new way; as a result they were able to push back against representations of themselves with their own narrative. Henriette Lucille’s case makes clear: if you were not a bad mistress, this would have never happened. It is your fault. I am the victim of your bad behavior. In doing so, victimhood becomes an important weapon (however slight) to use against a slave’s captors. Indeed, in the end the report stated that « *Il est évident que les principes établis dans le rapport du 26 Novembre 1780 sont contraires à la déclaration du Roy du 11 août 1777 et aux arrêts du conseil subsequens. Il n’a point suffi aux maîtres ainsi que M. Chardon l’a observé, pour conserver la propriété de leurs noirs, d’en faire une simple déclaration aux greffes, avec cette formalité illusoire* »³⁶⁸

While bestowing upon Henriette Lucille her freedom, the Bureau commented not on her pregnancy, her bad character, nor even her unlawful leave of her mistress, but rather on the countess’s assertions of Madame Lafarge Paquot’s bad treatment.³⁶⁹ The declaration, which Madame seemed to have intimated that she provided, was conspicuously missing from the final

³⁶⁸ Rapport du Bureau des Colonies, November 1781, CAOM, Aix-en-Provence, France, Police des Noirs — Sous-série F1B, FR CAOM COL F1B 1 à F1B 4, folder 4, C143, n. 40-41.

³⁶⁹ Colonies document, n. 35.

report; rather, it was her failure to follow the law properly that was at the heart of the document. A subsequent *mémoire* written by or for the marquis stated three reasons for Henriette Lucille winning her freedom: 1) she had been declared (the first time) after she had already been in France; 2) the order for her arrest had been given away or had expired by Madame Lafarge Paquot the first time it was issued; and 3) Henriette Lucille was already in France when Madame Paquot asked for the subsequent order in 1781 (and thus was under the “protection” of the declaration of 1777).³⁷⁰

The government’s assertions bespeak the systematic lack of adherence to the laws concerning blacks and peoples of color by nobles who usurped the laws for their own comfort. By failing to see the nation’s rights over their own, they perpetuated the continuing problem of blacks on French soil.³⁷¹ The final review was thus a stinging indictment upon those subjects who refused to behave as such. On a larger scale, all these cases also address issues of ownership – a fundamental questioning of who was worthy of owning “property” – because in order to own something, one must prove themselves worthy. These cases highlight just how unworthy subjects like Madame Lafarge Paquot – who had defied royal authority – really were.

* * *

In 1782 a legislative committee assembled by the new Minister of Marine, Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix, Marquis de Castries, was asked to comment on two matters: 1) the condition of blacks and mulattos living in France; and 2) what should be done about them.³⁷² The Committee decided that all blacks and mulattos should be removed from France, even if they were free.³⁷³ As Peabody reminds us, a century of lamenting about race (and now color) ended with the frustrating knowledge that slaves may not be “technically” in France, though blacks and other peoples of color were certainly present. French subjects were no more able to come to terms with that realization at the end of this process than they had been at the beginning!

According to Debrunner, deportations began after 1783, and ports were closed to incoming slaves.³⁷⁴ The proposal highlighted a recurring fear, one that would begin to dominate the hearts and minds of the monarchy and its machine yet again: blood mixing in what was feared to be an increasingly impure France. Any inclusion of so-called non-white blood was seen as acting as a pollutant, tainting European stock. People of color, especially in Paris, were proof to many that those fears were not unfounded. “The freedmen” a commentator stated, “might in great numbers come to live in the Kingdom, mix with French blood by marriage and pass on to their children their vicious tendencies, the traces of which will continue until a distant posterity.”³⁷⁵ Both black men and women apparently had the power to taint future generations of Frenchmen. Yet, warnings of this danger seemed to disproportionately rely upon rhetoric about black women, and, as we will see in chapter three, turned to the language of science to validate claims made about them.

In 1783, cartouches were again required for blacks, regardless of their status.³⁷⁶ Less than a week later, a letter was published by the minister entitled, « *Lettre du ministre aux Administrateurs, sur les*

³⁷⁰ *Mémoire*, date unknown n. 73-76.

³⁷¹ See for instance, « *Observations sur le rapport fait par le Bureau des Colonies, relativement à la négresse de la Dame Paquot, et aux nègres des [illegible] You, et de Langedcourt* » dated Novembre 1781, n. 68-70.

³⁷² « *Avis du comite de législation légale des noirs et mulâtres demeures en France et la conduire à leur parole gouvernement à leur égard*, 71-73.

³⁷³ *Mémoire*, 73-77.

³⁷⁴ I would dispute Debrunner’s claims; the slave trade, albeit illegal, continued for decades after its official end. See Debrunner, 140.

³⁷⁵ Q. in Dr. Lemaire, “Dunkerque et la traite des noirs au XVIIIe siècle,” *Union Faulconnier, société historique et archéologique de Dunkerque et de la Flandre maritime* 31 (1934): 106, as quoted in William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880*, 112.

³⁷⁶ « *Arrêt du Conseil d’état, pour le renouvellement des cartouches des Noirs et autres Gens de couleur qui sont à Paris* » 23 mars 1783, Moreau de St. Mery, *Loix et constitutions des colonies françoises de l’Amérique sous le Vent*, volume 5, 305.

Nègres amenés en France. »³⁷⁷ In the document much was made of white Frenchmen who pretended not to know the law of 1777 and brought their slaves to France without permission (or registration). It demanded that administrators adhere to that law. Not much had changed from 1707. Since none of the laws I have discussed had much success in entirely ridding France of blacks, I do not think it is inappropriate to suggest that the Legislative Committee would probably not have been successful in implementing its recommendations. Two revolutions, however, render my conjecture mute.

The lack of a strong abolition movement meant that there was little structured opposition to these types of policies. French abolition could be divided into two distinct parts. The first was the founding of *Les Amis des Noirs* in 1788. Although the name of this group was meant to highlight their stance (Friends of the Blacks), their agenda was to end the slave *trade*, not to end the institution of slavery itself.³⁷⁸ Many of the principals of the eighteenth century abolitionist movement were killed in The Terror. With Napoleon's re-establishment of slavery in 1802, it would take decades for the movement to recover enough for the second phase of abolitionist groups to have a significant impact.³⁷⁹

Revolution

Immediately following the French Revolution, there was still hope that changes in the status of white French men and women could extend to non-whites as well (as they had been extended to Jews in 1792).³⁸⁰ The anonymously penned, "A Negress's Song" spoke to some of those hopes. She wrote to her newborn:

To a more pure day that enlightens you / Open your eyes, oh my son! / You alone consoled your mother / in her painful worries. / If from sleep which hastens you / she interrupts the sweetness / it is that it delays her tenderness / to awaken you to happiness. / What freedom at your morning? / My son, what more beautiful destiny / than the tricolor flag. / I want to guard your cradle / That this heavenly guardianship / shines on your newborn gazes.³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ It also notes that instead of the one slave allowable to come to France in order to assist their owners, owners were bringing 3 or 4, often too young to actually provide needed services. « *Lettre du ministre aux Administrateurs, sur les Nègres amenés en France* » 28 mars 1783, Moreau de St. Mery, *Loix et constitutions des colonies françoises de l'Amérique sous le Vent*, volume 6, 306-307.

³⁷⁸ The other main group of the period was *La Société de la Morale Chrétienne* (1821). See Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), particularly chap. 3.

³⁷⁹ Lawrence Jennings notes that most French abolitionists were killed under The Terror (1793-1794), fled, or were discredited. See Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation*. Jennings also notes that the association with Jacobinism also contributed to its lack of appeal, especially when Napoleon gained power. French Abolitionism does not achieve "critical mass" until the 1830s when Britain abolishes slavery. This is not to say that discourse is absolutely silent, just that there is a decrease in this type of literature in France during this time. The second wave was from 1830 to 1848, and saw the beginning of such groups as the *Society for the Abolition of Slavery* (1834); all were founded in Paris. French abolitionists are almost exclusively aristocrats, high-ranking civilians, etc. Cross-pollination of members between groups did not really allow for new ideas to come to the forefront. The groups were almost exclusively gradualist, and lacked the desire or ability to appeal to mass support, which had made such a difference in ending slavery in Great Britain. Their overall determination to follow the British model, versus following their own path, was highly problematic for those who considered Britain a rival to be avoided at all costs. In this context, pro-slavery politicians could evoke the *fraternité* between the two movements and could suggest that those who were proponents of French anti-slavery movements were in collusion with British interests. Thus, a vote for abolition could be seen (or portrayed) as a vote for Britain itself.

³⁸⁰ For a history of representation of Jews during this period, see Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

³⁸¹ Anonyme, « Le Chant d'une Nègresse, » *Chansonnier de la République pour l'an III, dédié aux amis de la liberté, Les Archives de la Révolution française, L'édition de Bordeaux et Paris, 1794-1795*, Maxwell, cop. 1992, BNF, Notice n° FRBNF37246173. Translation mine.

Though it is not clear if this was written by a black woman (no information is available on the author(s) of any of the songs in the collection), these words of freedom and longing would resonate strongly, coming from a disenfranchised voice – particularly one who had known such long-term enslavement. The faith in a “pure day” and the “tricolor flag” that the Negress’s son awakened to find, however, were short lived. The French Revolutionary period of 1789-1799 may have inaugurated a new social order, but it did not completely disrupt the preceding discourse on blacks in France. In 1791, as the fighting began in Saint Domingue, the franchise was offered to blacks born of free parents. In 1792 (the official end of monarchy), the franchise was extended to all free men of color. The changes were dizzying – bestowing full rights of French citizenship on free men of color; ratifying the first constitution; arresting a fleeing king or queen; and declaration of the Republic.

With the rapid changes taking place, it is no wonder that few white French men and women knew how to deal with all the turmoil of their new identity as citizens, not subjects. Following the Revolution of 1789, cities and provinces echoed with cries of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*. It would be overly simplistic to claim that the Revolution consolidated and articulated the rights of the middle, or even the popular, classes, while wiping out the constraints imposed by the former aristocracy and setting France upon the path to a cohesive, egalitarian, and homogeneous national society. Of course, this did not and could not happen. Nor was the social order somehow re-established and maintained. Rather, the end of the French Revolution led to decades of political and social instability; class tensions remained as contested as racial and gender paradigms.³⁸² The end of a longer period of monarchical rule and the inception of the First Republic in 1792, along with the execution of the royal couple, destabilized concepts of political and social authority. The rapid rise and collapse of monarchies meant continual upheaval, while the lack of stability in social and economic structures in nineteenth-century France forced a redefinition of French identity that was often full of contention and violent intrigue.

The loss of France’s most important colony resonated throughout Europe. Historian Alfred Cobban writes that decrees beginning in 1790 show that French political leaders considered the colonies and France inseparable.³⁸³ Yet he also maintains that, given Napoleon’s wide-ranging attention toward European military conquest both in Europe and in Asia, the failure of Saint Domingue represented a loss to be sure, but only a momentary setback to Europe’s greatest military nation.³⁸⁴ Napoleon had his sights elsewhere, as his extensive military excursions attest. However, contrary to Cobban’s assertion, subsequent legislation powerfully indicates that Saint Domingue (and Napoleon’s defeat) still had France’s considerable attention.

³⁸² Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault’s work is useful here. In fact, they claim that parents unable to control their children were asking the King to intervene, and even imprisoning children as a corrective measure. See Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le désordre des familles: lettres de cachet des archives de la Bastille au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982). Jeffrey Merrick writes that “[t]he father ruled his wife, children, and servants like a domestic monarch, and the divinely ordained monarch ruled his subjects like a royal father. Disobedience and impropriety in the household were regarded as public offenses because families provided the model for the hierarchical relations of subordination and authority that ordered French society.” See “Sexual Politics and Public Order in Late Eighteenth-Century France: The Mémoires secrets and the Correspondance secrete,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (1990), 68. So this it is not completely surprising that in the case of Pauline Villeneuve and Henriette Lucille, their “owners” would go to court and/or ask the King to get them back. The difference is that in both these cases, it was about human property based upon race.

³⁸³ Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France, Volume 2: From the First Empire to the Second Empire, 1799-1871* (First published 1961 by Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, England; 1986 edition), 39.

³⁸⁴ Cobban, 41.



Fig. 2.6. Jean Baptiste Chapuy, *Vue des 40 jours d'incendie des habitations de la plaine du Cap Français*, 1791, [S.l.]: Gravure imprimé en couleurs (avec effets de nuit), 46,5 cm x 71 cm; Feuille : 52,5 cm.³⁸⁵

Colonial refugees fled the vestiges of revolution in Saint Domingue, spreading out to, among other places, North America, Cuba, Jamaica, and Brazil. Many ultimately came home to France with tales of the terror: savage, blood-thirsty murderers; disloyal slaves who changed alliances at the drop of a hat; ungrateful men who were sexual animals (in the way black women had been seen before the revolution) – all unduly influenced by whites who wanted revolution. Race made former slaves unstable – and unpredictable. They had defied royal authority and had gained their freedom.

Olympe de Gouge, who had been a member of the Friends of Blacks, wrote that she had once believed that blacks deserved their freedom, but the revolution in Saint Domingue had convinced her that she was mistaken (see fig. 2.6). “Men were not born for chains, but you prove that they are necessary.”³⁸⁶ Furthermore, Napoleon’s horrific experiences in Saint Domingue would mingle with these narratives and become solidified with his re-establishment of *ancien régime* racial legislation after he proclaimed himself Emperor in 1804.

* * *

Such was the political and legal climate in late eighteenth-century France. While the metropole was attempting to legislate race both at home and in its colonies, it was simultaneously negotiating what it meant to be French. Its losses abroad did little to prove its military prowess, and

³⁸⁵ Gravure par Rémond; se vend à Paris chez Boquet Rue Ticquetonne, 46,5 cm ; Largeur : 71 cm; Feuille : 52,5 cm ; Largeur : 73,6 cm, N°. 122, 1791.

³⁸⁶ According to Doris Kadish, Olympe de Gouges was fervently anti-slavery, 668-680. While she was consistent, even the revolution in Saint Domingue gave her pause. Cohen points to her rewritten preface when she published her play, *L'Esclavage des noirs, ou l'heureux naufrage*, in 1792 (it had originally been presented at the *Comédie Française* in 1783 and again in 1789; see Cohen, 183). She goes on to admonish blacks and states that « *La plupart de vos Maîtres étoient humains & bienfaifans, & dans votre aveugle rage vous ne distinguez pas les victimes innocentes de vos perfécuteurs.* » See the preface of *L'Esclavage des noirs, ou l'heureux naufrage*, (Paris: 1972), BNF, n.° Yth-6166, 4.

the behavior of many of its white subjects in the colonies highlighted the inability or unwillingness to tow the regal line.³⁸⁷ A century of specific forms of legislating race ended with the French Revolution – only to be re-issued with the Revolution in Saint Domingue and the rise of Napoleon.

France would neither free all blacks on French soil nor deport them. France in the eighteenth century had already inculcated in its subjects the importance of slavery and new definitions of race, yet the law of 1777 was designed in part to prevent miscegenation and diluting the blood of France. These fell the way of the other laws on slaves in France, failing to work as fully as the government had hoped. The French Revolution ended much discussion on blacks, concerning itself with other pressing issues – but the problem of blacks in France did not entirely disappear. Until the 1789 Revolution in France, most blacks and people of color were enslaved, both at home and in the colonies. Of course free blacks and people of color resided in both places, with the vast majority living outside of the metropole. Yet as we have seen over and over again, even the miniscule number of blacks and others of African descent in Paris made many people extremely nervous, as evidenced by the degree of legislation being passed. The tropes of representation discussed in this chapter did important, though often imprecise, cultural work. After all, The Black Nun of Moret wickedly showed the king that in trying to dismiss her, to make her invisible, he inadvertently brought her more into public scrutiny – and thus “legitimacy.”

However, different tropes are needed for different times. Before the Revolution, representations of black women were based on slavery and a growing concern about free peoples of African descent on colonial soil. When blacks (or the fear of blacks) moving onto French soil became a more immediate concern, certain representations were already firmly entrenched in the French collective psyche. The level of threat depended upon where these bodies were located. As the boundaries between colony and metropole became less fixed, representations naturally changed.

France entered the nineteenth century with many legal, political, and cultural components in place: loud discourse both pro- and anti-slavery; an economic system increasingly dependent upon colonial enterprise (with slavery at its center); and the rise of science and other areas of so-called expert knowledge to solidify racial difference. White French men and women articulated their fears and anxieties over political and social transitions - often complicated by the return of French refugees from Saint Domingue - through the production of representations focusing on black women's bodies, complicating already unstable ideas of race, class, gender and sexuality.

³⁸⁷ Almost everyone who won their freedom was able to prove to the French courts that their master or mistress did not follow the letter of the law.

CHAPTER THREE:
 ENTERING DARKNESS: SEX, SCIENCE AND THE PRODUCTION
 OF THE HOTTENTOT VENUS



Fig. 3.1. *La photo de la semaine*, *Cinevogue Magazine*, 1949, courtesy of the *Musée de l'Homme*, Paris³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ 14 Février 1949, Issue #39.

In 1829 a nude Hottentot woman, also called “the Hottentot Venus,” was the prize attraction at a ball given by the Duchess du Barry in Paris.³⁸⁹

Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*

« De son image, en vain j'ai voulu me distraire. »³⁹⁰

Written about Sarah Bartmann, by the reviewer of the play bearing her name

The 1949 Valentine's Day issue of *Cinevogue* magazine's « *La photo de la semaine* » featured a photograph of two “women,” one black and one white (fig. 3.1). In it, French actress Anne Vernon gazes upon the body cast of Sarah Bartmann,³⁹¹ the infamous Hottentot Venus. Several things stand out in this bizarre image: both are presented in profile, allowing the photographer to accentuate the differences in their bodies, particularly Bartmann's famous *derrière*. Vernon's presentation – the Parisian glamour shot – displays her in high heels, tight skirt, the hand on her hip calling attention to her small waist. Her hair and make up are flawless. She is the epitome of the Parisian fashion ushered in by Christian Dior and his “New Look” of 1947.³⁹² Vernon places an almost maternal hand on Bartmann's shoulder. In contrast, the inanimate figure of Bartmann (or rather, her body cast³⁹³) is naked and her mouth gapes open like a blow up doll. The caption reads: « *Au Musée de l'Homme, Anne Vernon, Vénus authentique, examine avec curiosité la Vénus hottentote aux formes puissantes.* »³⁹⁴ Unlike the “powerful forms” of her counterpart, Vernon's “authentic” feminine shape is the template for French beauty. In rejecting Bartmann, the viewer's gaze turns toward Vernon. Yet Vernon is complicit in the objectification of Bartmann, and, more generally, of women (including herself) by her presence here. What is clear, though, is that over 150 years after her death, representations of Sarah Bartmann continued to have mythic impact. She was still being juxtaposed with white women and pronounced aesthetically lacking.

This chapter looks at why the black female body matters in understanding the personality, character, and evolution of nineteenth century *white* French society. It also examines the ways shifting scientific interpretations of race and gender impacted white French men and women.³⁹⁵ I have chosen to further investigate these shifts with the arrival from London (see fig. 3.2) of *the* iconic figure of black womanhood in France in the nineteenth century: the living Sarah Bartmann.

³⁸⁹ Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 88. This quote is interesting, in part, because of the date (Bartmann had died over a decade earlier), and for the imposition of the infamous title onto another “Hottentot.” The documentary, *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman*, posits that there may have been more than seven women give the moniker “The Hottentot Venus.”

³⁹⁰ “In vain, I wanted to distract myself from her image.” *Journal des débats politique et littéraires*, November 21, 1814.

³⁹¹ A word regarding the spelling of Bartmann's “name.” No record has been found of her original name; and the name give to her has been manipulated in myriad forms. She had been called Saartje Bartmann, which metamorphosed into Sarah Bartmann or Sara Bartmann, when she was baptized. See Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe, 1815-1817,” in *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, ed. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 20.

³⁹² The “New Look” became popular after the end of the war. It entailed a rounded shoulder, a cinched waist, usually a very full skirt (that used more than twice the number of yards as a conventional skirt), and fitted jacket. It represented a return to opulence after wartime rations had prevented many fashion choices. For more on Christian Dior, see Christian Dior and others, *Christian Dior: The Man Who Made the World Look New* (London: Aurum Press, 1998).

³⁹³ In reality, I hope to eventually call into question the authenticity of the body cast. I believe it is simply inaccurate. Since she was dead when Cuvier made it, it would have been quite easy to manipulate it to “prove” his scientific hypothesis.

³⁹⁴ *Cinevogue* Magazine, 14 Février 1949, Issue #39, *Musée de l'Homme*, Paris.

³⁹⁵ See Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe: 1815-1817,” in *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 199.

Hendrik Cezar (or Cesars) brought Bartmann from her home in South Africa in 1810³⁹⁶ to Europe, parading her around for years – usually semi-naked, often on a leash or in a cage. She arrived in Paris in 1814, where she remained on display until her death at the end of 1815.

Bartmann was a living, breathing embodiment of ultimate difference, both scientifically and in popular culture. She was consistently presented in ways that demonstrated her “overt” sexuality and her racial and gender differences, though the particulars of how and where she could be “viewed” by others were determined by class standing.³⁹⁷ After her death, her body was used to further French anatomical studies and as sexual fodder for museum visitors.³⁹⁸ It is my contention that Bartmann became the template for representations of black womanhood, with all subsequent images filtered through hers.³⁹⁹ Moreover, after she died, other African women were given billing as “The Hottentot Venus.” That she was still being referenced well into the twentieth century highlights her importance.⁴⁰⁰



Fig. 3.2. Unknown artist, *Sartjee, The Hottentot Venus*, 1810?.
Aquatint [the original]vignette plate-mark 365 x 227, London⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 28.

³⁹⁷ The upper classes had the option of paying to view her privately, while the middle and working classes could only view her in more public settings.

³⁹⁸ Plaster casts were made of Bartmann’s body, and her genitalia were also preserved. They were displayed in the *Musée de l’Homme*, where they caused quite a sensation. Male guests were caught masturbating on or using her body cast. The case was removed from public exhibition in 1982 and her brain, genitals and skeleton were repatriated to South Africa in 2002. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus, Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 30-31.

³⁹⁹ See “The Power of Beauty print” (figure 7) from 1827 and the “Ball” engraving from 1829 (figure 9).

⁴⁰⁰ A poster for the *Grand Musée Anatomique*, dated 1870/71 advertises a showing of “La Véritable Vénus Hottentote.” *Musée de la Publicité*, reference number: 10859. A gigantic illustration of her was used at the Exposition of 1889; and more than “thirty-one million people attending the International Exhibition of 1937” saw her. See Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2. See depictions of white entertainer Polaire, born Emilie-Marie Bouchaud who was compared to the Hottentot Venus. Rae Beth Gordon, *Dances with Darwin, 1875-1910: Vernacular Modernity in France* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009).

⁴⁰¹ Aquatint made by Frederick Christian Lewis, Height: 361 millimetres, width: 223 millimetres, A reprint from an original, vignette plate-mark 365 x 227, registration number: 1872,0713.141. The British Museum. Note the warpaint on

In her time, the ubiquity of Bartmann's public and popular appearances made her hyper-visible and hyper-sexualized to scientists and to different classes in France. This icon,⁴⁰² which allowed the French to lower their gaze on black female bodies, was in fact a way for French subjects to raise their own expectations of normative race, gender, class and sexual identities. Her body and her image were used to establish nationalistic boundaries. Thus, her supposed abnormalities were exaggerated to articulate all that was excessive in French society. The Hottentot Venus became the terrain for projecting all that was dangerous for French national identity – primarily gender inappropriateness, class transgressions, and miscegenation. These were important reminders for returning émigrés and newly arrived colonial refugees. When Bartmann arrived, the loss of Haiti – and with it the loss of French lives, national honor, and the prestige of the French Empire – was barely a decade old. Controlling her image made up for losses in the Caribbean colonies, and functioned within scientific racial hierarchies to justify both African and West Indian colonialism. Furthermore, her availability to be viewed meant that one could use her body (either for fantasy or as a substitute for articulating those fantasies) without personal accountability. She seemed to invite the gaze, even as she allegedly repelled the viewer – flagrant public semi-nudity, which she was said to have endorsed, was proof of her corruption.

Because Sarah Bartmann was France's most visible black woman, the phenomena surrounding her facilitated several recurring colonial themes: the attempts to control and contain the black female body, to manage the white female body, and to shore up a flailing white male body. Also, it promised redemption for the losses in the West Indies through the advent of scientific discourse, returning white men to a position of male power and potency. By uncovering (literally and metaphorically) the source of black women's abnormalities, gender and racial roles could return to pre-Haiti norms. This chapter looks at some of the enormous literature on Sarah Bartmann, focusing on her so-called scientific value to the French academy, and how we can read the plethora of these images through that lens. The European ideal of normative beauty and physicality juxtaposed with its antithesis was multi-faceted; in this case, it afforded a scientific means of establishing ultimate difference. Moreover, it provided multiple benefits: scientific "proof," authoritative European male expertise, and the elevation of European womanhood. While scientific discourse could give intellectual "reasons" for the inferiority of blacks, French lay people could (and did) become a part of this discourse through literature, plays, photography, art, and other cultural venues. This was the entry point for the French bourgeoisie to contemplate and "know" the black Other, and to raise their collective self-esteem. Now all that remained was the reproduction of that commodity for the general middle class public. Africa, thy name is Vénus.

her face, the pipe and the spear, all seemingly "male" accoutrements on her body. There is no indication that she ever smoked. Also, the caption lists that she is "exhibiting" which denotes it is her own choice (versus "being exhibited"). The phrase, "drawn from life" suggests to the reader that no liberties were taken in rendering her form.

⁴⁰² Sander Gilman states: "Rather than presenting the world, icons represent it. Even with a modest nod to supposedly mimetic portrayals it is apparent that, when individuals are shown within a work of art (no matter how broadly defined), the ideologically charged iconographic nature of the representation dominates. And it dominates in a very specific manner, for the representation of individuals implies the creation of some greater class or classes to which the individuals is seen to belong. These classes in turn are characterized by the use of a model which synthesizes our perception of the uniformity of the groups into a convincingly homogeneous image." Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature in *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 223. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting has taken Gilman to task (see the introduction of "Black Venus") for filtering his study mainly through how Bartmann's presence in Europe affected whites. I agree with this assessment; however, I believe that Gilman is still required reading when attempting to explore the correlation between blackness and whiteness in Europe, and it remains a useful endeavor to see how others used Bartmann's image.

This chapter also explores some of the cultural aspects of Bartmann's representations at the hands of French whites, both men and women, and analyzes the play written about her. Sarah Bartmann's "Hottentot Venus"⁴⁰³ highlights the way that science and popular culture work *mutually* to inform and regulate normative behavior, and in doing so it contests existing categories that separate scientific discourse from popular entertainment. Moreover, it illustrates how ignoring these connections can contribute to an analytical misreading about her overall significance in French cultural constructions. Combining these narratives reveals particular French fears of transgressing social and political boundaries, and of miscegenation – both of which were critical in creating a cohesive white French identity. By re-focusing the gaze from Bartmann and back upon itself, I point to how representations of her facilitated a particular construction of French nationalism. While scientific discourse provided intellectual rationale for the inferiority of blacks (and legitimated an often-sexualized viewing of them), literature, plays, art, and other cultural venues provided access points both for the French bourgeoisie and laboring classes to contemplate and know the black Other. Thus it taught white French men and women what to avoid in order to become more authentically French.

In what follows, I examine how the production of Bartmann as a "type" functioned on the one hand for France's need to remember a different version of the West Indian colonial narrative, while on the other hand to establish and regulate normative French behaviors for its subjects at home. Reading Bartmann's story in connection with French anxieties over the loss of Haiti underscores and complicates the fluid construction of both French whiteness and collective identity. Because Bartmann was seen as a representation of everything that opposed white French identity, she was constructed as a living embodiment of ultimate difference.⁴⁰⁴ Thus, French losses abroad at the hands of black men could be constructed as an anomaly, rather than as an indictment of a weak France.

* * *

Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully in *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* offer the most thorough (and nuanced) historical study of Sarah Bartmann.⁴⁰⁵ In their quest to find the woman behind the moniker, the authors write: "We will always know more about the phantom that haunts the Western imagination, a phantom so complete that it has nearly become a living, breathing person, than we do about the life of Sara Baartman, the human being who was

⁴⁰³ The word "Hottentot" is an blatantly racist and essentialist term, often utilized in the past to refer to any Black South African, or any other person of African descent. Bartmann was believed to be Khoisan from South Africa, though she was sometimes referred to as a "bushwoman" or of mixed race descent. The use of "Hottentot" throughout this paper is used to denote actual quotations or as a means of putting motivations into historical context. No disrespect is intended.

⁴⁰⁴ Other scholars are writing or have written about nineteenth century representations of black women in French culture. See T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, "The Dawning of Racial-Sexual Science: A One Woman Showing, A One Man Telling, Sarah and Cuvier," in *FLS, Ethnography in French Literature*, Vol. XXIII, 1996 and *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). Sander Gilman has exponentially increased our understanding of Bartmann's importance in several aspects of French culture and science, including the link of black female sexuality to prostitution and other forms of sexual deviance. His works include *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); and "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985). Other helpful works include Gen Doy, "More than Meets the Eye: Representations of Black Women in mid-19th Century French photography," *Women's Studies International Forum* 21, 3 (May 1998); *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, with a foreword by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, (Fribourg: Office du livre, 1976-89) and Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, eds. *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰⁵ Clifton C. Crais, and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

ultimately destroyed by an illusion.”⁴⁰⁶ They also posit (and convincingly argue) that most of the narrative that has been repeated by scholars about Bartmann is, in fact, incorrect.⁴⁰⁷ There is much about this recent work that makes it critically important to the historiography on Bartmann.⁴⁰⁸ The most significant is the level of archival research in South Africa, England, and France done by the authors, which allows us a seldom-explored portrait of Sarah Bartmann before she became the so-called Hottentot Venus. It details her place of birth, her upbringing, and her travels to Cape Town. In addition, the work helps to understand what choices Bartmann may have had, and how she attempted to negotiate the removal from her homeland, the loss of her parents and children, and her masters’ roles in her life. However, there are also some issues that must be interrogated. While past

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰⁷ Z.S. Strother’s “Display of the Body Hottentot” represents another strong historical study of Sarah Bartmann. Strother claims that to her contemporaries Bartmann was seen as neither “black nor sexy.” Moreover, she states that the gaze at her was, in effect, “anti-erotic.” I strongly disagree. It is clear that some observers found her to be “unsexy.” However, race was critical in her overall construction; furthermore, the so-called scientific gaze allowed all gazes directed toward her to *seem* anti-erotic, and thus acceptable. Cuvier’s writings, discussed later in this chapter, reveal his inability to see her as only a scientific specimen, try as he might. In addition, Strother notes that Bartmann could “never actually threaten the viewer with the sexual power of a ‘Venus.’” Again, I disagree; the anxiety over interracial relationships and the fanaticism in developing racial categorizations belie that argument (deemed necessary by the proliferation of multi-racial children produced in the French colonies, for instance), hence the need to make her seem so sexually repulsive, 2.

⁴⁰⁸ Most of the writings on Bartmann (with some notable exceptions) seem to situate themselves into fairly straightforward categories: science or popular culture and between her time in London and in Paris. Sources of importance concerning Bartmann’s images and representations in popular culture are also plentiful. First and foremost of these contributors is Percival Kirby, who appears to be one of the first historians to take Sarah Bartmann on as a historical “subject.” From 1935 to 1954, Kirby, often in breathy tones, regaled his readers with tales of this “abnormal specimen.” Kirby deserves credit for bringing Bartmann to historical attention, particularly as early as he did; however, he must also be recognized as continuing a strategy of (re)making her into a public spectacle, ripe for the titillated gaze (his illustrations include skeletal measurements, as well as engravings of Bartmann). Thus his writings, however important, must be read both cautiously and critically. See “The Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News*, vol. VI, no.3, (Johannesburg, South Africa, June 1949), “The Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News* 6 (1949): 55-62; “La Venus hottentote en Angleterre,” *AEsculape* 16 (January 1952); “More About the Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News*, vol. X, no. 4, (Johannesburg, South Africa, 1953); “The ‘Hottentot Venus’ of the *Musée de l’Homme*, Paris,” *South African Journal of Science*, vol. 50, no. 12, (July 1954); and “A Further Note on the ‘Hottentot Venus,’” *Africana Notes and News*, vol. XI, no. 5, (Johannesburg, South Africa, December 1954). Work has been done demonstrating Bartmann’s importance to scientific racism, and recent important readings highlight how these texts contribute in the construction of race in the nineteenth century. See Henri de Blainville in “Sur une femme de la race hottentote,” *Bulletin des sciences par la société philomatique de Paris*, (1816), 183-190; and Georges Cuvier “Extrait d’observations faites sur le cadavre d’une femme connue à Paris et à Londres sous le nom de Vénus Hottentotte,” *Mémoires de Muséum d’Histoire naturelle* 3 (1817) for the former. For the latter, a terrific scientific, race, and gender analysis is accomplished by Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe: 1815-1817,” in *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, ed. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995). See also Yvette Abrahams, “Images of Sara Bartmann: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in Early-Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, ed. Ruth Roach Pierson, Nupur Chaudhuri (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998). See also Rosemary Wiss, “Lipreading: Remembering Saartjie Baartman (Kung tribeswoman put on Display in England in 1810), Women’s Difference: Sexuality and Maternity in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourses,” *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 5:1-2 (Winter-Spring 1994). Bernth Lindfors offers useful information on Bartmann and other blacks in “‘The Hottentot Venus’ and Other African Attractions in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Australasian Drama Studies* 1 (1983); and “Ethnological Show Business: Footlighting the Dark Continent,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996). See also François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar, “L’Invention du Hottentot: Histoire du regard occidental sur les Khoisan, XVe-XIXe Siècle (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), and Gérard Badou, *L’énigme de la Vénus hottentote* (Paris: Lattès, 2000). Finally, a 1998 film, *The Life and Times of Sara Baartmann*, by South African documentarian Zola Maseko utilizes new archival research to expand our overall knowledge of Sarah Bartmann as a South African woman sold into a different kind of bondage to serve the financial, social, and erotic needs of her new “keepers.”

scholars, notably Yvette Abrahams, have denied Bartmann any agency in her own narrative, at times Crais and Scully give her too much. For example, they state that Bartmann “insisted” that her master’s brothers accompany her to London.⁴⁰⁹ They also state that Bartmann was resigned to going abroad.⁴¹⁰ I question how a slave such as Bartmann could “insist” upon anything, much less demand that her master come with her. And while the notion that she was “resigned” to go abroad is more likely correct, the phrasing infers that she ultimately had the deciding vote whether to go. There are other such problematic statements as well.⁴¹¹ I think these issues lessen what is arguably the definitive work on Bartmann to date, which is not to belittle the new and important information here that exponentially increases what we know about Bartmann and her life – both in South Africa and in Europe.⁴¹²

Sarah Bartmann

Sarah Bartmann was born fifty miles north of the Gamtoos River in the 1770s.⁴¹³ According to Percival Kirby,⁴¹⁴ Bartmann was smuggled out of South Africa by Hendrik Cesars (the brother of her master, Peter) without knowledge of the Governor.⁴¹⁵ The Cesars brothers were free blacks living in South Africa. Aboard ship or perhaps prior, Hendrik Cesars entered into a partnership of sorts with surgeon Alexander Dunlop, who sold his “stake” in her upon reaching London.⁴¹⁶ Dunlop was also notable for his penchant for exporting “museum specimens” from South Africa,⁴¹⁷ and had first seen Bartmann in Cape Town around 1809.⁴¹⁸ Dunlop, Cesars, and Bartmann sailed from Cape Town on 7 April 1810 aboard the HMS *Diadem*, where she was the only female on board ship.⁴¹⁹ They arrived in Chatam, 30 miles from London, in July that year.⁴²⁰ The contract – if indeed

⁴⁰⁹ Crais and Scully, 55.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴¹¹ For example, the writers state that “we can well imagine that the relationship between Cesars and Sara moved, if it had not been previously, to one of sexual intimacy,” 81. There is no source attributed to this statement; moreover, “relationship” and “intimacy” ignores their actual status as slave and master. In another case (108), the writers wonder if Bartmann agreed to be baptized as a way of increasing her audience! Another example: Crais and Scully state that “we must entertain the idea that Sara *agreed* to go to Paris because she thought that there might live a man [Réaux] she had known in Cape Town, a remaining connection to the land of her birth,” 127 (emphasis mine). Again, this notion that Bartmann was in a position to agree or not about her own movements suggests power where there is no evidence to suggest that she had much. And Bartmann was not born in Cape Town; she was given or sold to a man with the actual power to bring her there without her consent.

⁴¹² Based upon their research, we now know that Bartmann had a Dutch lover, Hendrick van Jong, with whom she had at least one child, before she became a spectacle; also that she was most likely displayed as the “Hottentot Venus” in Cape Town before she came to London. See Crais and Scully, 37-38; 50-51.

⁴¹³ This is one of the most important differences from the standard narrative. Most historians have taken Kirby’s assertions that she was born around 1788, somewhere within the boundaries of Caffraria (to the West of Great Fish River). See Sharpley-Whiting, “The Dawning of Racial-Sexual Science”, 116. See also Percival Kirby, “More on the Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News* 10 (1935) : 128. This would have put her age in the mid to late 30s instead of 26. See Clifton, note 1, chapter 1.

⁴¹⁴ Kirby, “More About the Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News*, vol. X, no. 4, (Johannesburg, South Africa, 1953), 125.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 125. Court documents take pains to reassure that she personally went and asked for permission to leave; more on this later. Crais and Scully assert that while there were attempts at a contract, it was a contract between Dunlop and Cesar in the Cape, not between either of them and Bartmann. Also, they assert she was listed as being “free.” See 54-57.

⁴¹⁶ Lindfors, 86. See also Percival Kirby, “The Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News*, 55.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴¹⁸ Crais and Scully, 54.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57; 59.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

there was one⁴²¹ – between the two men and Bartmann stated that she was to be responsible for domestic duties, and also that she would be exhibited in England and Ireland.⁴²² She was to be given a portion of the proceeds from her exhibition and repatriated back to South Africa after a period of two years.⁴²³

When Sarah Bartmann first appeared in London, Anne Mathews, wife of the famous actor and an eyewitness to her exhibition, wrote that Bartmann was

surrounded by many persons, some females! One pinched her, another walked around her; one gentleman poked her with his cane, and one lady employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, ‘natural’. This inhumane baiting, the poor creature bore [with] a sullen indifference, except upon some great provocation, when she seemed inclined to resent brutality, which even a Hottentot can understand. On these occasions it required all authority to subdue her resentment. At last her civilized visitors departed.⁴²⁴

Apparent in Mathews’s account is shock at the barbaric treatment of Bartmann by self-styled “civilized” Europeans, and her surprise that women would participate in her ill treatment.⁴²⁵ Nevertheless, Mrs. Mathews still relegated Bartmann to a subhuman status, remarking that “even a Hottentot” can “resent brutality.” It is not clear what type of authority was needed to subdue Bartmann’s resentment, although the quote indicates that her handler was not above physical coercion, or at least the threat of physical coercion. Later it was said that if she did not capitulate to his orders to perform, Cesars threatened her.⁴²⁶ The outrageous spectacle of Bartmann on display, the belief that she had to be controlled, and the remarkable ease of those who abused her would become the center of a battle over the ultimate control of her body.

The Times in London stated that “a stage [was] raised about three feet from the floor, with a cage, or enclosed place at the end of it; that the Hottentot was within the cage; [and] that on being ordered by her keeper, she came out, and that her appearance was highly offensive to delicacy.”⁴²⁷ The paper continued:

The Hottentot was produced like a wild beast, and ordered to move backwards and forwards, and come out and go into her cage, more like a bear on a chain than a human being. . . . She frequently heaved deep sighs; seemed anxious and uneasy; grew sullen, when she was ordered to play on some rude instrument of music. . . . And one time, when she refused for a moment to come out of her cage, the keeper let down the curtain, went

⁴²¹ Kirby, “More on the Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News*, 125. Kirby believes that the contract was a fraud, written after she arrived and became the subject of abolitionists in London.

⁴²² Sharpley-Whiting, “The Dawning of Racial-Sexual Science,” 117. Solly and Moojen’s deposition states that she was to be “Caesar’s nursery maid.” See “The following is the result of the examination of the Hottentot Venus – 27th Nov. 1810,” 43.

⁴²³ Solly and Moojen’s deposition claim the period of servitude to be six years, see “The following is the result of the examination of the Hottentot Venus – 27th Nov. 1810,” 43, while Bullock’s sworn statement claims two years; see “In the Kings Bench,” William Bullock, dated 21 November 1810, Record PFF 723 (J18/462), Public Records Office, as listed in Z.S. Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot,” *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, 47.

⁴²⁴ Mrs. Charles [Anne] Mathews, *Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian*, vol. IV (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), 136-39. This account, from R. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), quoted in Rosemary Wiss “Lipreading: Remembering Saartjie Baartman (Kung tribeswoman put on display in England in 1810), Women’s Difference: Sexuality and Maternity in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourses,” 269. The court documents claim the period was for five years.

⁴²⁵ And yet, Mrs. Mathews was also one of the viewers (albeit one who does not prod her). If we return briefly to the picture that began this chapter, the same surprise could be leveled at Vernon, who by her very presence in the picture, aids in the ongoing ill treatment of Bartmann (see figure one).

⁴²⁶ Crais and Scully, 80.

⁴²⁷ *The Times*, 26 November 1810, 3, quoted in Lindfors, “The Hottentot Venus” and Other African Attractions in Nineteenth-Century England,” 87.

behind, and was seen to hold up his hand to her in a menacing posture; she then came forward at his call, and was perfectly obedient. . . . The dress is contrived to exhibit the entire frame of her body, and spectators are even invited to examine the peculiarities of her form.⁴²⁸

The circus- even zoo-like atmosphere surrounding Bartmann may be difficult for twenty-first century readers to fathom, though not the considerable stress that Bartmann exhibited. In fact, the shocked response by some to Bartmann's London showings led to a court case in November 1810 brought by Zachary Macaulay and other abolitionists – aptly yet derogatively titled “The Case of the Hottentot Venus”⁴²⁹ – to determine whether she was being held against her will.⁴³⁰ The court documents highlight the contradictions surrounding her voyage to England and the ambiguities of the exact nature of her status. They also speak to a strong need to represent Bartmann as an active and free agent in her own exhibition: she was “perfectly happy in her present situation; had no desire whatever of returning to her own country, not even for the purpose of seeing her two brothers and four sisters.”⁴³¹ According to her three hour interrogation on 27 November 1810, she corroborated an agreement with Dunlop and is reported to have “personally” asked for permission to make the voyage. Moreover, the document takes pains to remark on how happy she is, said to have “everything she wants,” including two Negro boys to wait on her. Her only complaint was the desire for warmer clothes.⁴³²

Yet the document also states that when asked if she could go back to Cape Hope at any time, she did not answer. The final lines of the document maintain that she could not read or write (Bartmann's first-person voice never appears in the text). The transcript goes so far as to say, “she understands very little of the Agreement made with her by Mr. Dunlop on the twenty ninth October 1810,”⁴³³ so it is unclear how she could corroborate its contents. Nevertheless, another affidavit signed by Arend Jacob Guitard, a notary, overemphasized on her own desire to be exhibited. He noted that, when questioned about her well-being, Bartmann responded that she was well-treated and wanted to stay in England. He also claimed that the agreement was translated for her benefit, read numerous times, and that he questioned her himself.⁴³⁴

Macaulay, Babington, and Wageninge's statement, however, could not be more dissimilar from Guitard's findings. The abolitionists who went to see her during her exhibition continually

⁴²⁸ *The Times*, 26 November 1810, 3, quoted in Lindfors, 87. Abolitionists seized upon her countenance as a way to prove she was being held against her will. See “Transcripts of the Sworn Affidavits filed during the Trial of 1810,” deposition of Zachary Macaulay, Thomas Gisborne Babington, and Peter Van Wageninge, dated 17 October, 1810, Record PFF 747 (KB1/36), Public Records Office, in the appendix of Z.S. Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot.”

⁴²⁹ Bartmann's new London moniker, which had first been applied to her as early as her time in Cape Town, announced a shift in her public identification and presentation.

⁴³⁰ Kirby, “The Hottentot Venus,” *Africana Notes and News*, 57. Crais and Scully remind us that Macaulay did nothing to assist the two black boys also slaves with Bartmann, 89. One reason was that Macaulay had been a slave overseer in Jamaica; another, that he had had his own problems regarding ownership of two black boys, so to bring attention to the boys would have been to bring attention to his own past issues, 87-88.

⁴³¹ Transcripts of the Sworn Affidavits filed during the Trial of 1810,” 1, Record PFF 747 (KB1/36), Public Records Office as listed in Z.S. Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot,” *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999). See Strother for copies of the court documents.

⁴³² “The following is the result of the examination of the Hottentot Venus – 27th Nov. 1810,” dated 28 Nov. 1810, 41.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴³⁴ A sworn deposition of the court signed Arend Jacob Guitard, dated 27 Nov. 1810. Record PFF 723 (J18/462), Public Records Office, as listed in Strother, 48. See “The following is the result of the examination of the Hottentot Venus – 27th Nov. 1810,” a sworn deposition of the court signed Samuel Solly, representative for Zachary Macaulay, and John George Moojen, representative for Alexander Dunlop and Henrick Caesar, dated 28 Nov. 1810. Record PFF 723 (J18/462), Public Records Office, as listed in Z.S. Strother, 41.

emphasized her unhappy demeanor and her treatment as a means of proving coercion. She was said to be at any given time “morose, sullen, distressed, mortified, miserable, and degraded.”⁴³⁵ They stressed the similarity of her treatment to zoo animals, stating that her handlers regularly threatened her in order to get her to perform. They also asserted that when questioned about her condition in Dutch (which she understood), rather than the reported ease with which she appeared to answer her previous examiners, she would not answer.⁴³⁶ It is notable how much effort went into making Bartmann appear a willing participant in her own exploitation (see fig. 3.3 for a depiction of her apparent happiness during her time in London). By proving she was executing her own free will – something impossible under the slave system operating in Africa and Great Britain – it also absolved those viewing her. As a result, any discussion about the institution of slavery, or call for its abolition, ended before it began. Thus, her treatment by Cesars and Dunlop simply became part of a job that she had already consented to do, rather than an indictment against her possible enslavement.

Despite the enormous disparity in testimonies, the case was dismissed and Bartmann’s exhibitions continued⁴³⁷ – and she was even more popular after the court case than she had been before it. She went on to Bath in 1811. Then in December in Manchester, for reasons unknown, she was baptized by a Reverend Joshua Brookes. Her name appeared on her baptismal certificate (see fig. 3.4) not as the Dutch “Saartje Baartmann,” but as the Anglicized “Sarah Bartmann.”⁴³⁸ It was also believed she married, even though no definitive proof of this was found.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁵ See “Transcripts of the Sworn Affidavits filed during the Trial of 1810,” deposition of Zachary Macaulay, Thomas Gisborne Babington, and Peter Van Wageninge, dated 17 October, 1810, Record PFF 747 (KB1/36), Public Records Office, as listed in Z.S. Strother, 43-46.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴³⁷ I do not mean to imply that because British abolitionists sought to end Bartmann’s display that they somehow behaved better than their French counterparts. The caricatures of Bartmann underscore her importance in establishing Englishness as well, albeit often in political cartoons. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of my discussion to give Bartmann’s time in England the full attention it deserves. See Kirby, “More on the Hottentot Venus,” 128. See Crais and Scully for a very detailed portrait of her time in London.

⁴³⁸ Kirby, “More on the Hottentot Venus,” 128. Profound thanks to Dr. Philippe Menecier, *conservateur des collections d’anthropologie biologique* at the *Musée de l’Homme*, (and now at the *Jardin des plantes*) for letting me see this, and so many other Bartmann artifacts, and for discussing with me her importance in French society.

⁴³⁹ Crais and Scully suggest she might have married Dunlop, and was possibly pregnant again. They cite an article from the *Manchester Mercury* as indication of marriage. See Crais, note 15, on page 199.



Fig. 3.3. Transformation Playing Card, *The Hottentot Venus showing her agility*, Guildhall Library, London⁴⁴⁰

She was also displayed in Ireland as late as 1812. Dunlop died in July 1812, and Cesars' whereabouts were unknown. It appears she met up with traveling shows (and may have hired herself out to them) until Henry Taylor took her to France.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴⁰ Transformation [playing] card, The Five of Clubs, 1811, Guildhall Library, London, and The Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards (published in 1978 by Harry Margery, Limple Castle, Kent, in association with Guildhall Library, London.) Bartmann is the Five of Clover; the caption is as follows: The Hottentot Venus shewing [sic] her agility.

⁴⁴¹ Crais and Scully, 119.

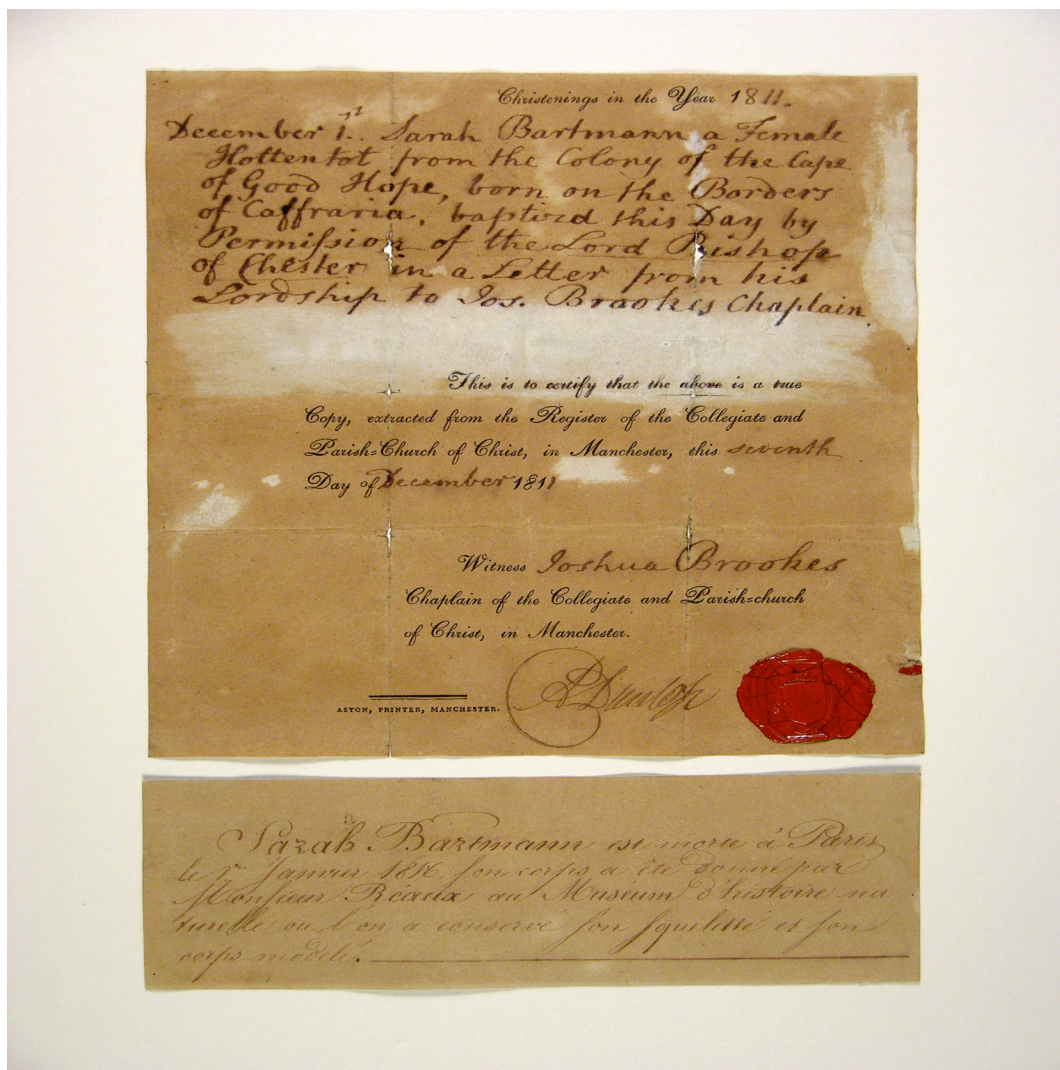


Fig. 3.4. Baptismal Certificate of Sarah Bartmann, December 7, 1811, courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme^{442e}

To put Bartmann's arrival in its historical perspective, I review the succession of events. On 1 January 1804, Saint Domingue declared itself the Republic of Haiti, though France would refuse to acknowledge this significant development until the 1830s. In fact, Sepinwell remarks that the French government refused to refer to Haiti by any other name than Saint-Domingue, thus holding onto the fallacy that Saint Domingue still belonged to the French nation.⁴⁴³ Cohen writes that "for twenty years [from 1802] the French government did not completely give up the possibility of reconquering Saint-Domingue."⁴⁴⁴ Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself emperor on 2 December 1804, and abdicated his throne (for the first time) in April 1814. With his departure came the return of the Bourbon Dynasty under Louis XVIII. Napoleon returned between March 20 and June 18,

⁴⁴² Rachel Holmes writes that the folds were because Bartmann folded and carried the certificate with her constantly until she died see Rachel Holmes, *African Queen: The Real Life of the Hottentot Venus* (New York: Random House, 2007). I do not find Holmes' work on Bartmann to be particularly helpful in the overall historiography. She attributes such intense emotions to Bartmann, without attribution, that her work reads more like a novel than a historical text.

⁴⁴³ Sepinwell, *The Specter of Saint Domingue*, 326.

⁴⁴⁴ Cohen, 181.

1815 for his “100 days,” until his defeat at Waterloo. With that, Louis XVIII returned from exile and was again recognized King of France. With him came the return of those émigrés nobles who had dispersed after the fall of Louis XVI.⁴⁴⁵ As many historians of the period have asserted (see the introduction to this dissertation), the Restoration marked a period of political and social uncertainty, with Royalists, Bonapartists, and Republicans failing to reconcile their disparate ideologies.

Napoleon’s loss, together with the occupation of France by its enemies, meant that France was a conquered nation, no longer a conquering one. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, pressure was put on France to end the slave trade, but this would not happen until 1821. In fact, the Bourbon Monarchy allowed the slave trade to prosper.

When Sara Bartmann arrived in Paris, she was fully the “Hottentot Venus.” It required little work on the part of the French men and women who looked at her to see her as anything else but that construction. But the government and the participants in her viewing found a way to put their own unique spin on her usefulness that differed from London’s. For one thing, France saw her presence as a reminder that Haiti was still possible. If recapturing Saint Domingue was possible, a strong France was still possible. Representation of her allowed France to see itself as a conquering nation again, at a time of military weakness and bereft of its most important colony.

Sarah Bartmann in France – La Vénus Hottentote

Really, this is no game! / Already all Paris praises her. / This woman is amazing: First she speaks very little./
 Her song seems barbarous,/ Her dance is lively and burlesque,/ Her face is a little grotesque,/
 Her waist of a becoming contour./ They say that marriage binds her;/
 But this Venus, I wager,/ Will never inspire love.⁴⁴⁶
 Scene III, *La Vénus hottentote, ou baine aux Françaises*, Vaudeville in One Act

As I previously stated, the need to distinguish black people from white, and the fascination with blacks as a site of difference were not new in France. Africans had already been displayed in European ethnographic zoos, placed in their imagined “natural habitats.” In most cases, this meant they were caged nude in order to “demonstrate” their primitiveness, proximity to nature, and to reinforce their animal-like status. When Bartmann was viewed in this type of setting, she could be manipulated in a variety of ways: her naked black body could be read as indicating her availability or accessibility – and not in any way associated with respectable middle- or upper-class white women who, by virtue of their race and class standings, were deemed sexually unavailable outside of marriage. Furthermore, her “availability” as a spectacle meant that one could “use” her body, either for fantasy or as a substitute for articulating those fantasies, without personal accountability. Any sexual titillation would not be the viewer’s “fault” – after all, there she was: naked. Thus, the Hottentot Venus provided an opportunity to conflate issues of distance and boundaries onto easily manipulated, narrowly focused, and hopefully containable areas: her genitalia and her images. Her exaggerated differences encapsulated all that was excessive and therefore dangerous to French elite society. An examination of the visual and written representations of Sarah Bartmann will help demonstrate how representations of black women were used to articulate these French anxieties, and how they influenced issues concerning national identity.

Bartmann arrived in a foreign-occupied Paris in September 1814 in the company of Henry Taylor, who promptly took her to the *Palais Royal*. She lived with him nearby in a basement apartment. She was exhibited at the Café de Chartres, where patrons were encouraged to touch

⁴⁴⁵ Émigrés also began returning after Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor.

⁴⁴⁶ Marie-Emmanuel-Guillaume-Marguerite Théaulon,, Armand Dartois, and Brasier, trans. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *La Vénus hottentote, ou baine aux Françaises* (Paris : Chez Martinet, 1814).

her,⁴⁴⁷ and she was shown to private audiences as well. She proved to be every bit as popular as she had been in London – in fact, the cost of a ticket to “view” her was prohibitive for anyone without disposable income.⁴⁴⁸

The price to view this one-woman spectacle was three francs. At rue de Castiglione and for the same admission price, Réaux was also exhibiting a five-year-old male rhinoceros. Here, Parisians could view two animals for the price of one; one male and one female. Bartmann was also exhibited from 11am to 10pm at the ground level of 188, rue Saint-Honoré.⁴⁴⁹

The *Journal des Dames et des Modes*⁴⁵⁰ had this to say about her startling appearance: “The doors of the salon open, and the Hottentot Venus could be seen entering. She is a ‘Callipygian Venus.’ Candies are given to her in order to entice her to leap about and sing; she is told that she is the prettiest woman in all society.”⁴⁵¹ Hearing this nicety was most likely received with great amusement by the viewing audience in this very proper salon; and giving her candies in order to make her perform would reinforce the belief that, like a dog, treats must be proffered in order to make the “animal” entertain. If we refer back to the discussion of the proliferation of blacks as pets at the French court in the eighteenth century, this behavior is perhaps not so surprising. What had changed is the work that her presence, as a template for black womanhood, accomplished. Juxtaposed against white womanhood, her presentation uplifted them and clarified civilized manners and behavior.

The *Journal de Paris* displayed her picture beside that of actress Anne Françoise Hyppolyte Boutet, who went by the stage name of Mademoiselle Mars.⁴⁵² The writer remarked: “Opposite this portrait we see that of Mademoiselle Mars, who in such a neighborhood is made to appear still more beautiful than she is, and, were we to be taxed with originality, we prefer the French Venus to the Hottentot one.”⁴⁵³ As she would be in the coming century with Ann Vernon, Bartmann was compared with the “classic” beauty of a famous French actress – and found sadly lacking in charms. The irony of the two women’s stage names is a point that cannot be overlooked: Mademoiselle Mars, named for a decidedly masculine god of war and destruction, was upheld as the embodiment of feminine loveliness and delicacy, whereas the Hottentot Venus, named for the feminine goddess of love and beauty, represented all that white French society saw as ugly, impure and revolting. In January of 1815, Bartmann was sold or transferred to a man named Réaux.⁴⁵⁴ The *Journal générale de France* stated he was also her husband, though no proof of this “marriage” was found.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁴⁷ Crais and Scully, 121-122. Cuvier, invited personally by Réaux to visit Bartmann, initially declined, but reconsidered when she had become more popular, 123.

⁴⁴⁸ The cost of a loaf of bread at this time was over one franc, the average male laborer earned less than 3 francs daily; women even less. See Johannes Willms, *Paris: Capital of Europe: From the Revolution to the Belle Époque*, trans. Eveline L. Kanes (London: Holmes & Meier, 1997), 154-162.

⁴⁴⁹ Sharpley-Whiting, “Writing Sex, Writing Difference: Creating the Master Text on the Hottentot Venus,” in *Black Venus*, 19.

⁴⁵⁰ According to Sharpley-Whiting, this journal was popular and widely read, 18.

⁴⁵¹ *Journal des Dames et des Modes*, 12 February 1815, quoted in Sharpley-Whiting, “Writing Sex, Writing Difference: Creating the Master Text on the Hottentot Venus,” *Black Venus*, 19. See also Bernth Lindfors, “The Hottentot Venus” and Other African Attractions in Nineteenth-Century England,” 88.

⁴⁵² Mlle Mars had also appeared in at least two plays by Alexandre Dumas. See McCloy, 169.

⁴⁵³ *Journal de Paris*, quoted in Percival R. Kirby “More about the Hottentot Venus,” 130.

⁴⁵⁴ Her Parisian handler, Réaux was also a “showman of wild animals in a traveling circus,” see “Bring Back the Hottentot” Venus,” *Weekly Mail & Guardian* (formerly *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*), June 15, 1995.

⁴⁵⁵ Apparently, “handlers” of spectacles and so-called freak shows claimed marriage to their spectacles to mitigate charges of exploitation. See Crais and Scully, 127.

Visual Representations

One of the most successful strategies in the construction and representation of Sarah Bartmann as “*La Vénus Hottentote*” was the capacity her image had (and still has) to titillate, outrage, or entice the viewer (sometimes, all at once). The representation of her body functioned as a marker so grotesque that one’s gaze would naturally fall upon her, and no one else. The production of the presentation of her occurred on multiple levels, with myriad intentions. For instance, it is interesting to note that although only 4’6” tall, Bartmann was often represented as being much taller, often towering over both French men and women beside her. And her body, not yet painted and molded by Georges Cuvier (who will be discussed later), became even more distorted.⁴⁵⁶ While journalists and popular magazines wrote about Bartmann, they also published drawings and prints, often caricaturing her body and showing the impression her presence evoked for French audiences. As offensive as these cartoons and prints may be, in effect they had little to do with Bartmann herself and more to do with what could be disseminated to the French middle-class through the representation of her body. I offer a mere sampling of them as a means of discussing her discursive value to spectators.



Fig. 3.5. Louis François Charon and Aaron Martinet, *Les Curieux en extase ou les Cordons des souliers*, 1814, engraving, 222 x 295 millimètres, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Paris⁴⁵⁷

Fig. 3.5 highlights quite well what the introduction of “foreign” elements can do to a “civilized” society. Because Bartmann was marked as uncivilized, her presence – however submissive – evoked uncivilized behavior. The first man has his leg on a chair. The chair, placed in what seems to be an outdoors scene, is there for only one purpose: to enable the white woman to

⁴⁵⁶ See note 6.

⁴⁵⁷ Registration number: 1998,0426.7, lettered with production and publication line ‘A Paris chez Martinet, libraire, rue du Coq no.15 et chez Charon rue St Jean de Beauvais no. 26.

see under his kilt. Although it is not possible to see his “response” to “La Belle Hottentote” – in the form of his actual erection – his sword hangs phallic-like between his legs. He utters in surprise, while simultaneously reaching for Bartmann’s buttocks: « *Oh! godem quel rosbij!* » The second man gazes at Bartmann’s genitalia, and exclaims: « *Ah! que la nature est drôle!* » Man number three, a Frenchman, needs his monocle for a better view, then remarks: « *Qu’elle étrange beauté!* » The white Frenchwoman, as she ties her shoelace, looks through Bartmann’s legs and is rewarded by the hidden response of the Highlander’s reaction to Bartmann. At this she responds: « *A quelque chose malheureux [her untied shoelace] est bon.* »⁴⁵⁸ Meanwhile, even a dog is similarly affected, sniffing under the too-short kilt of the second man. Has Bartmann had any control over the circumstances that facilitated this viewing? Throughout all these intense interchanges, Bartmann remains on her little podium, like a passive slave on an auction block. She makes no attempt to cover herself; rather, her hand is raised as if beckoning further scrutiny. Again, the use of “belle” is meant to be amusing or ironic; she is not beautiful to the people who gaze at her.

According to this image, Bartmann corrupts everyone and everything that beholds her, causing all to lose a bit of their civilization. The Scots, or Highlanders, who had humiliated France with their presence there, were uncivilized, and objectified Bartmann with their gaze. They were considered only slightly more civilized themselves, so in effect we are asked to see savages viewing savages. The gaze of the French woman has in turn objectified them. The following picture (fig. 3.6) takes this idea of Highlanders, and again shows that it is women who are behaving inappropriately.⁴⁵⁹ And if Highlanders were savages, what did it mean that French women desired them? Beyond anxiety over foreign soldiers receiving the attention of French women, the image poked fun at foreign soldiers: here even French women can ridicule these soldiers, making the occupying Highlanders not so intimidating after all.



Fig. 3.6. *Curious Parisians try to discover what Scottish soldiers wear beneath their kilts*, 1815, photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Sharpley-Whiting has an interesting take on the significance of this print; see *Black Venus*, 21.

⁴⁵⁹ Thank you to Dr. Buchanan Sharp for his expertise and input.

⁴⁶⁰ An illustration from 1815, *Curious Parisians try to discover what Scottish soldiers wear beneath their kilts* (photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images).

In the Bartmann print (fig. 3.5), one man likens her to food, another to strange beauty, the third finds her the living embodiment of the freakishness of nature. The white woman, dressed in the fashion of the day, transgresses her proper gender role to sexually objectify a man. That she does this unnoticed is beside the point – Bartmann is to blame for this impropriety. Indeed, according to this image, it is Bartmann’s hyper-sexuality that is shown to evoke these responses and behaviors. She is the embodiment of the unnatural, causing so-called civilized viewers around her to behave unnaturally. The white woman becomes overtly sexual in witnessing one man’s erection. Even though she does not actually look at Bartmann, she sees what is “produced” by her. Man number one does not see this, because his gaze is directed away from civilized (i.e., white) beauty. The work also highlighted issues regarding miscegenation, while reinforcing fears about citizens being corrupted just by the presence of blackness in both the colonies and, clearly, in the metropole. This illuminates the permeability of racial boundaries and, thus, racial hierarchies. Even Bartmann’s immobile presence could inspire uncontrollable sexual desires in both males and females, showing how easily civilization could be lost.

An engraving of 1827 (fig. 3.7) wonderfully reveals the myriad tensions facing white French subjects. Here, a black woman with exaggerated facial features in lovely European dress is painted and admired by a white Frenchman. She is illustrated in side and front views, identical to scientific renderings of Africans designed to emphasize skull dimensions (see fig. 3.8).



Fig. 3.7. Anon., *The Power of Beauty, or the Painter Enamoured!* 1827, colored engraving⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶¹ Note the image of The Hottentot Venus in the top right corner. A copy of this engraving, with the title attached is found in Rachel Holmes, *African Queen: The Real Life of the Hottentot Venus* (New York: Random House, 2007).

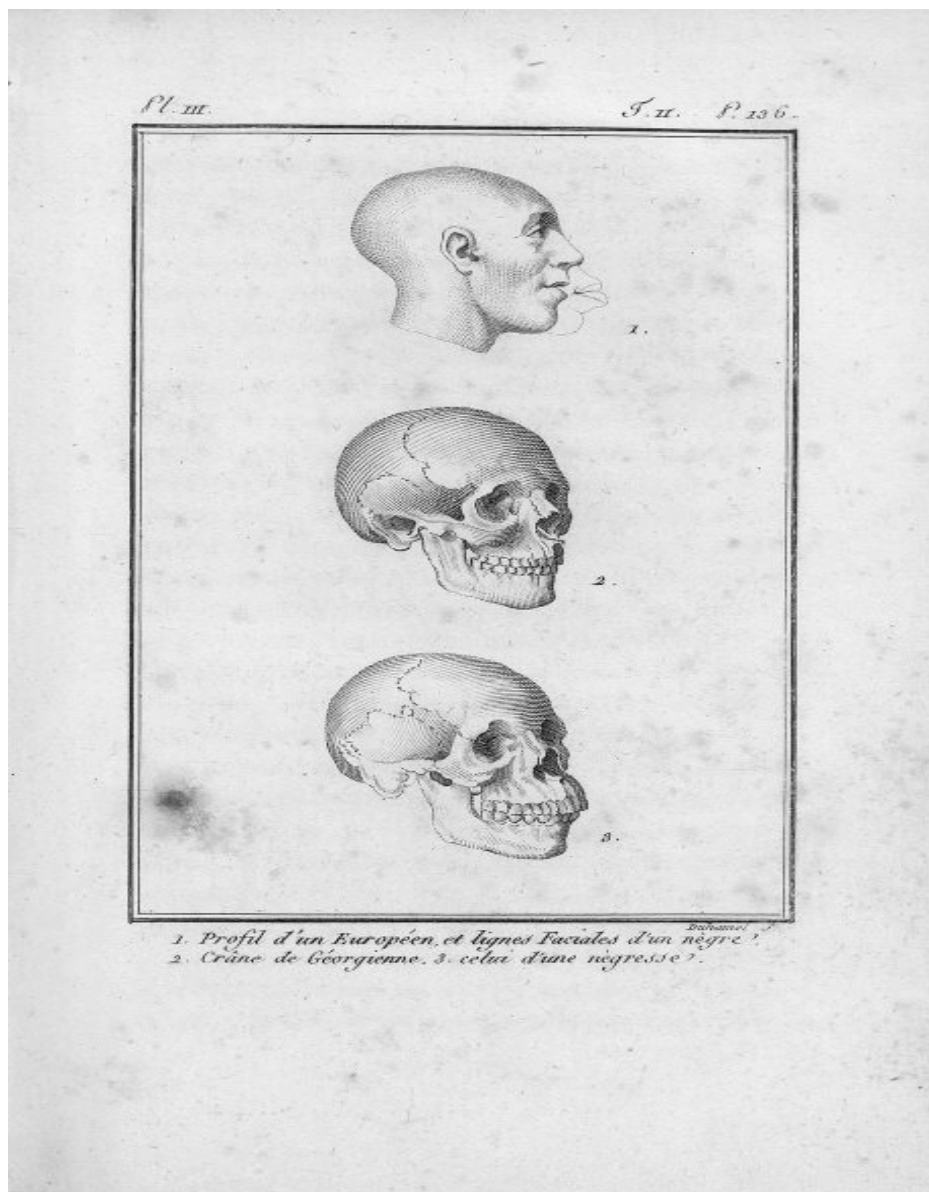


Fig. 3.8. *Illustrations de Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, 1800, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris⁴⁶²

The painter holds his paintbrush aloft, pointing toward a picture of the Hottentot Venus. The caption leaves it up to the viewer as to whether the black woman who poses is beautiful or if the painter is merely besotted. As the painting makes clear, even though Sarah Bartmann had been dead since 1815, she was still a useful marker, and an important reminder: no matter how black women are dressed, no matter their place of origin, they could never be beautiful, they could never be anything more than a Hottentot Venus, produced and framed for display. The presence of Bartmann on the wall is paramount, showing that she continued to be the dominant representation of black womanhood.

⁴⁶² *Illustrations de Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, Volume II. Pl. IV en reg. p.136, 1. Profil d'un Européen et lignes faciales d'un nègre. 2. Crâne de Géorgienne. 3. Celui d'une négresse. Cote : Réserve GN 310 V81 An IX, 1800-1801, v1 et v2, ex.1, Cote : IFN-2300617 BNF. Note the European is the only fully formed example; the rendering of the black male is inferior to him. The third figure, the negress, is the most distorted of all the figures.



Fig. 3.9. Sebastien Coeure, *The Hottentot Venus in the Salon of the Duchess of Berry*, 1830, a popular engraving.

Fig. 3.9 is believed to have been featured in conjunction with the invitation that the Duchess du Berry sent out for a ball in 1830.⁴⁶³ It is helpful to remember that Bartmann had been dead for over 14 years when this was created. The engraving depicts two white aristocratic couples. The man at left views through a monocle to see Bartmann more closely, as the woman next to him recoils in horror, leaning toward her male companion as though he can protect her from the threat Bartmann represents. The second man points at Bartmann (notice the bulge in his trousers) and seems to call out for others to come join the viewing. Both couples are beautifully dressed, covered from head to toe in luxurious fabrics. Even though they are inside (note the pale window frame and wall sconce), they all keep their coats on. Throughout all of this drama, Bartmann smiles, aggressively chasing the couples from behind a rope.

The idea of the rope as protection for the couples seems rather silly. Based on her actions, Bartmann has not the sense to know she needs to remain behind her barrier. Rather she appears here as an out of control child. The woman facing Bartmann acts as an important means of comparison (the rope highlights the ample and grotesque proportions of Bartmann's buttocks) seen side-by-side with a white female counterpart (much like Anne Vernon so many years later). Moreover, the other white woman's slenderness is juxtaposed with Bartmann's "heft." In effect, Bartmann's naked body becomes a teachable canvas, an instructional guide. White women should fear her, but can view her if they have the proper male protection. Men could be sexually aroused by her – covertly – if they could also provide justification for looking at her. Class boundaries were neither violated nor moral ones transgressed, and would remain that way as long as the rope was not crossed (by anyone). Bartmann must stay in her place, and viewers are now clear about their own.

⁴⁶³ More likely, it is some type of caricature or print after the event.



Fig. 3.10. Anon., *Les deux époques*, 1815, courtesy of the Collection Grob/Kharbine-Tapabor, Paris⁴⁶⁴

Fig. 3.10 presents what was perceived – at least by the artist – to be a rather disturbing trend: the deterioration of Parisian standards. The first scene shows a proprietor in the first years of his business. Either M. Bonneau or M. Mercier – young, slim, and deferential – is escorting a well-dressed nobleman out of his more elegant shop, happy in the knowledge that a purchase has been made. The second shows him years later – fat, happy and decidedly unhelpful to the single unescorted lady who has entered his shop. Tacked prominently above his moniker is a poster advertising the appearance of The Venus Hottentot, though only her iconic bottom is visible. Since this is the most important part of her power, it makes sense that the rest is invisible. The second image, denoting the disintegration of societal traditions and norms, gains credence by the image of Bartmann with what appears to be a man chasing after her naked, ample backside.

Bartmann's presence in Paris was not only employed in visual representations, but in performance as well. A popular vaudeville play, entitled *The Hottentot Venus, or Hatred of Frenchwomen*, premiered on 19 November 1814 at the Theater of Vaudeville.⁴⁶⁵ The play, which does not feature Bartmann herself, nevertheless attempted to portray the “essence” of her. The reviewer in the 21

⁴⁶⁴ In *Annales du ridicule ou scènes et caricatures parisiennes*, n. 11 du avril 1815.

⁴⁶⁵ Marie-Emmanuel-Guillaume-Marguerite Théaulon, Armand Dartois, and Brasier, trans. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting *La Venus hottentote, ou haine aux Françaises*. The English translation of the play is available in its entirety in Sharpley-Whiting's text, *Black Venus* (see Appendix). The original is located in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Department of Printed Matter, Microfilm; call number: 8 Yth 18862. Crais and Scully claim to have located an opera.

November edition of the *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* stated that he had to see the real Hottentot Venus before he went to see the production: « *Avant de voir la copie, j'avois voulu voir l'original : pour comparer, il faut connaître les deux termes de la comparaison.* »⁴⁶⁶ Hoping to find a “Venus” of his imagination (and of the stage), he was sorely disappointed to find only a thin young woman:

Mais hélas ! mes espérances ont été cruellement déçues ; mes illusions promptement évanouies. Au lieu de la Venus santé et majestueuse du Cap de tempêtes, je n'ai trouvé qu'une Venus svelte, élancée, sémillante comme les Amours qu'on fut donne pour fils : il y a eu lésion d'outré moitié : Mlle Sartjée vaut a elle seule au moins deux demoiselles Rivière.⁴⁶⁷

Z.S. Strother's essay “Display of the Body Hottentot” lists other reviews as well.⁴⁶⁸ Particularly of interest was the comparison between Bartmann and Mademoiselle Rivière, the young white French woman portraying her. Strother wrote that “one [reviewer] even credits the authors of the play with the *good business sense* in assuring the public that they would *not* see the play's title character.”⁴⁶⁹ The *Gazette de France* wrote: « *Le contraste qui présentait la jolie figure de cette actrice, avec celle du petit monstre qu'on devrait bien cesser d'exposer en public, a procure une si agréable surprise.* »⁴⁷⁰ It is ironic that while simultaneously exhibiting her throughout Paris – and specifically pointing out her difference – producers also believed that showing the “real” Hottentot Venus on stage would so shock audiences as to send them fleeing into the night.

La Vénus Hottentote ou haine aux Françaises

The play's twice divorced protagonist Adolph, has renounced future liaisons with French women, whom he proclaims are dangerous and distasteful (his two previous wives have “betrayed” him). Despite an arrangement by his Baroness aunt to marry his cousin, Amelia, he determines that he will only marry a woman from an uncivilized race – a savage – who is “foreign to our customs and morals.”⁴⁷¹ Amelia is undaunted by his refusal to even see her. Believing his desire to wed a savage as a sign of madness, Amelia and her aunt hatch a plot to bring Adolph back to his senses. Amelia says, “We must deceive him in order to make him happy.”⁴⁷² After being told by another suitor about the famous Hottentot Venus taking Paris by storm, Amelia dresses up like her in order to woo Adolph, who cannot tell that she is, in fact, a white French woman of noble breeding. While Amelia is disguised, Adolph is struck by her lack of civilized behavior, yet overcome by her beauty. Adolph decides to marry this perplexing and innocent – read: not French – creature, but in typical Vaudevillian style, reality sets in. First, the Chevalier shows the family a picture of the actual Hottentot Venus, whereupon all of them “cry out in fright” and decide that “with such a face / She cannot be a Venus.”⁴⁷³ The Baron exclaims, “Do you aim to make us believe, sir, that one there is a Hottentot, a people whose women are most renowned for their beauty?”⁴⁷⁴ Amelia is revealed, and finally Adolph decides that he will, despite her deception (this being the third time a French woman has deceived him), chance marriage again with one. The family is greatly relieved to have prevented

⁴⁶⁶ *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, 3, 21 November 1814.

⁴⁶⁷ *Journal*, 4.

⁴⁶⁸ See review in the *Journal General de France*, 21 November 1814 (note 56 Strothers), 34.

⁴⁶⁹ Emphasis mine. “Gentlemen, we have prudently / Hidden the Hottentot Venus / Behind the features of a cute little face.” Strothers, 31, note 55. Couplet d'annonce, qtd. in Martainville 1814, 4.

⁴⁷⁰ *Gazette de France*, 21 Novembre 1814, see Strothers, note 56.

⁴⁷¹ *La Vénus hottentote, ou haine aux Françaises*, 150.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

a calamity, and they live happily ever after, each character in the play proclaiming, “Do not abandon France.”⁴⁷⁵

The construction of class and racial boundaries and the dangers of miscegenation in the play reflect the culture’s anxieties and satiric interests at the time, especially with regard to shifting and transgressive gender roles. While the play simultaneously skewered the stupidity of the aristocracy, and instructed the bourgeois on proper conduct, it also cast Bartmann as the antithesis of acceptable French elite behavior or identity. I will return to this line of investigation momentarily.

Racial Mimicry: The Hottentot Speaks, or Does She?

Racial mimicry of Bartmann was not limited to this play, to the many images made of her, nor to her importance to science and scientific racism (examined later in this chapter). Bartmann’s voice was similarly fictionalized and appropriated as a way of talking about a series of compelling issues occupying French life. There are two satirical letters, written by someone identified only by the initial “C,” which pretended to be written by Bartmann in the *Journal de Paris*. There is also a fictional conversation in the *Journal des Dames et des modes*, and a fictional journal entry in *La Quotidienne*.

Before looking at the letters specifically, it is important to consider the incredible significance of newspapers as a form of cultural influence at this juncture in French society. There was also a story about a wild naked non-white woman running around in the mountains of France taken from the *Journal de l’Empire*.⁴⁷⁶ That story and Bartmann’s were not the only mention of blacks in 1814. In fact the *Journal de l’Empire* had over 50 mentions, on topics ranging from the colonies and abolition to the « traite des nègres. »⁴⁷⁷ This journal was most notable for detailing the comings and goings of royalty, including interesting little snippets of their lives. This included the state of their health, the authors’ happiness at the state of their health, sincere hopes for the continuation of their good health, or sadness at their failing health! Who was presented to the King, and marriage contracts and/or broken engagements also filled the pages. Any scandals surrounding royalty were detailed, such as considerable ink on the travails of the Princess de Galles in 1814. After the overthrow of Napoleon in that year, much time was spent welcoming back royals to France, re-establishing them as the “legitimate heirs” to the throne, and rallying the country behind its new King. Almost every issue devoted several columns to both foreign and local news (including the United States of America). Letters to the editor and their responses appeared less frequently. During periods of war,

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 162-164.

⁴⁷⁶ January 17, 1814, 3-4, *Journal de l’Empire*, « Histoire d’une femme trouvé entièrement nue sur les hautes montagnes du canton de Vicedessos.

⁴⁷⁷ The *Journal des débats politique et littéraires* was said to have the reputation for being a “major influence on French culture.” The journal was founded in May 1789 as the *Journal des débats et des décrets*. It contained debates and decrees of the National Assembly. It opposed Napoleon, who imposed upon it the title, *Journal de l’Empire* when he became Emperor. Not to be outdone, when Napoleon abdicated, the paper made its continuing dislike of Napoleon and his family quite plain.⁴⁷⁷ The Journal went through a rather dizzying change of titles: it was the *Journal des débats et lois du corps législatif* from 1er prairial an V-7 nivôse an VIII (20 May 1797-28 December 1799); then the *Journal des débats, des lois du pouvoir législatif et des actes du gouvernement* from 11-30 nivôse an VIII (1-20 January 1800). Next, it was the *Journal des débats et loix du pouvoir législatif et des actes du gouvernement* from 1er pluviôse an VIII-24 prairial an XIII (21 January 1800-13 Juin 1805), then the *Journal des débats* from 25 prairial-26 messidor an XIII (14 June-15 July 1805). Next it was called the *Journal de l’Empire* from 27 messidor an XIII (16 July 1805-31 March 1814), and finally the *Journal des débats politique et littéraires* from April 1814 until at least 1933. It ended its publication in 1944. It was a daily paper, including weekends, averaging four pages in length; in 1814 and 1824 each issue was two columns per page. Based on these figures, each year contained approximately 1,344 pages (for a grand total of 4,032 pages). In 1842, the journal doubled in length, with four columns per page. The paper’s contents remained remarkably consistent throughout the dates involved in this survey, with a few exceptions: in 1824 information from the *Bourse* began appearing, and in 1842 a full half-page of advertisements began appearing on the last page.

soldier's letters often were included, and private letters were "leaked" to the paper. The journal included decrees, legislation from the King, financial news, the royal lottery, and announcements. Military and government promotions, transfers and the like were detailed. Finally a separate section entitled « *feuilleton du journal des débats* » contained items on fashion, theatre, spectacles, book reviews, etc. The prevalence of so many references in a prominent journal of the age further underscored a pre-occupation with race, as well as signified the journal as a forum for discussion of issues such as this amongst the literate class.

The use of Bartmann's presence and fabricated voice, specifically in the genre of letter writing, is also worth a brief discussion. In *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox*, John Howland writes that in eighteenth-century France, "letters from abroad" provided an important function. He claims that "putting social satire in the guise of a letter from a non-native exemplifies the posturing that is a potential part of all epistolary communication." It is meant to specifically provoke a desired response or reaction, one that the writer already holds, and it also invokes issues of difference.⁴⁷⁸ Because the speaker is non-native to the country being written about, conventional etiquette in form and content can be ignored or subjugated to the more important message at hand. Even though Bartmann's supposed writing happened a century later, I believe the same analysis holds true. That she is literate is meant to add to the readers' overall amusement, as much as her belief that she is sophisticated enough to comment on French mores and values. But her very non-Frenchness also allows her access to "truths" that the writer believes French men and women must understand and adhere to.

*The First Letter*⁴⁷⁹

"My friend, I am happy here as I was bored in London. The Paris air suits kind women . . . It is agreed that everyone rushes to see Sartjee. These people are not disgusted."⁴⁸⁰ Thus began the first of two satiric letters, entitled « *Sartjee ou la Vénus hottentote, à son cousin* » published in November of 1814 in the « *Varieties* » section of the *Journal de Paris*. These musings, clearly not from Sarah Bartmann's own hand, had one thing right: although her time in Paris was brief – a little more than a year between her arrival in France and her death in December 1815 – she cast a large metaphorical shadow.⁴⁸¹

7 November 1814: Bartmann's imaginary intimate letter to her cousin – also her lover – went on to recount the happenings of her life in Paris. The authors, perhaps in homage to Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* written a century earlier, relied upon her foreignness as a vehicle to relay specific information.⁴⁸² Included were the reactions of the many French people who had come to see her, and her numerous interactions with them. As in the *Journal des Dames*, Bartmann comically believed the writings about her beauty, repeating it throughout the letter: "My Friend," wrote the fictional Bartmann, "other than the Hottentots, French women are the most beautiful women on earth, but out of modesty, they do not want anyone to know it. Their manner of dressing hides

⁴⁷⁸ John Howland, *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox*, (New York: P. Lang, 1991), 117,133.

⁴⁷⁹ These two letters were combined and published as a single letter in 1825. See M. Colnet, *Moeurs Françaises. L'Hermite du Faubourg saint-germain, ou observations sur les moeurs et les usages français au commencement du XIXe siècle* (Tome II), Paris M. Colnet, auteur de Part de dîner en ville. Tome Second, (Paris: Chez Pillet ainé, imprimeur – librairie, ...1825), 50-67.

⁴⁸⁰ « *Sartjee ou la Vénus hottentote, à son cousin* » Letter, 1. Strothers speaks briefly about the first letter. See note 64.

⁴⁸¹ There were also so-called interviews with Bartmann. One was written by a French émigré named Monsieur Musard and another by a journalist, in January of 1815. See Crais and Scully for a discussion of those "interviews," 128-129.

⁴⁸² For another version of foreigners writing about their time in France and commenting on contemporary issues, see the 1721 novel by Charles de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*. See also the newest edition, Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, a new translation by Margaret Mauldon, with an introduction and notes by Andrew Kahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

what is most enjoyable about them.” It is meant to be ironic that Bartmann deemed herself appropriate to comment on anything, including the comparable beauty of French and Hottentot women. She claimed that French women feel her attire is too immodest and “natural” to be seen in, which at least gestured toward their civilized bearing, while suggesting that their mode of dress ought to mimic her own in order to reveal their true beauty. But French women, while decidedly not Hottentot, ultimately fared little better in her account, acting in turn silly, stupid, shrewd and surreptitious. In her correspondence, these presentations were disseminated via two avenues: fashion and sex scandals.

The Weak, Ineffectual French Man

The play and this first letter are particularly informative in terms of the anxieties about proper roles for men and women, yet both unsettle and reaffirm gender categories. First, the idea of a weak French man is evident. In Adolph’s case, his multiple failures with French women are meant to speak as much to his masculine insufficiencies as to his ex-wives infidelities. When the Baroness tells Amelia that Adolph is determined to marry someone foreign, Amelia exclaims, “He doesn’t have any *nationalist* spirit!”⁴⁸³ He rejects Amelia (France) for the Hottentot Venus (Africa). In addition to maintaining French nationalism, Amelia is safeguarding racial and class boundaries. It is Adolph’s self-centeredness that endangers her safety measures: only someone as pathetic as Adolph would even think about marrying a non-French or non-white woman. He is pathetic, most of all, because for a fleeting moment, he desires blackness. But when he sees the truth, he realizes how much he has been deceived by blackness, and how he was almost fooled and ensnared by the lure of the (fictive) hottentot. He is lucky to get away with his sanity and his masculinity intact. The viewer is thus reminded of the dangers of succumbing to black female’s libidinous charms, or of being weak in the face of such bestiality. Thus, it is for the good of *France* that Amelia tricks Adolph. These tirades against the ineffectual Frenchman are perhaps not surprising, given the invasion of France by allied forces in 1814, and its subsequent surrender. Moreover, the failure of France abroad in the Napoleonic wars, and Napoleon’s abdication and exile did little to solidify an image of military strength or masculine power.

This anxiety concerning French male effeminacy and weakness also played out in Bartmann’s letter. It is clear that the wife has strayed. It is also clear that everyone knew it. But the shame lay not with the adulterous wife or the duplicitous suitor, but with the whiny and incompetent husband. Bartmann’s letter included the salacious details of a sex scandal brought on by an angry husband, whose effort to shame his wife backfired. The court decided that it was his lack of virility and masculinity that led his wife astray; furthermore, his own impotent actions prevented even the possibility of finding another woman. As Bartmann portrayed him, “the husband hardly dares to show his face in public and it is no surprise: women would tear his eyes out to avenge the honor of their sex.” Furthermore, he was publicly admonished to show more confidence and less jealousy in the future. The message: women can step out of acceptable roles briefly, but only to ensure suitable behavior – a proper marriage, for instance, or to cheat if her husband is not manly enough to put a stop to it. But while women keep the men in line, the problem that some men *need* to be kept in line remained.

The Silly, Shrewd, Slutty and Surreptitious French Woman

The rhetoric of the ineffectual French man simultaneously impacted contradictory representations of French women – often portrayed as shrewd and surreptitious. While French men were unsuccessfully fighting a war for something worthy of men – France’s very future as a major

⁴⁸³ *La Vénus hottentote, ou haine aux Françaises*, 130, emphasis mine.

European power – French women, according to Bartmann’s letter, were engaged in an inexplicable war of their own. The letter depicts a “war of hats.” Whereas French women wore theirs so high that one “must stand on tiptoe” to catch the top, English women wore theirs so low as to barely be able to see. To make matters worse, French women, like the play’s Amelia, refused French instruction. So acrimonious did the ludicrous altercation between women become – it threatened to start an actual war – the government almost had to intervene. Bartmann told her cousin that this latest fad – which followed the season in which French women “ridiculously” dressed as the Chinese – compelled her to tell her new French friends to stop this foolishness and to adopt Hottentot fashion, again placing her in a position of commenting on French behavior. The need to show national loyalty and love of country – which, as Mrs. Mathews noted in London, even a Hottentot understands – is bungled in French women’s hands: in order to prove their patriotism, they “coif themselves to frighten in order to better prove their patriotism” – raising their hats still further. Fashion trends usurped national concerns, re-iterating the need to regulate French women’s attentions. The fictional Bartmann’s critique was not only a call for the regulation of white French women’s capricious and misguided attempts to protect the nation, but an indictment of the situation that necessitated such behavior.

While the play revolves around Adolph accepting Amelia – and thus Frenchness – Adolph only reaches this point through Amelia’s transgression, namely her adoption of a racialized and sexualized persona that attracts him. Amelia has had to assume a black racial identity in order to solidify France’s white one. Moreover, Adolph is attracted to the Hottentot Venus not only for her supposed sweetness, but is also enamored by what he perceives as his ability to train her, something he could not do with French women: “I am going to finally, according to my whims, / Have a young student / Who knows yet nothing. . . . It is so rare that a husband / Finds, alas, in this country / An educational undertaking.”⁴⁸⁴ French women, while beautiful and civilized, were not as open to proper instruction and control.

Why are so many of these issues and these statements expressed through Bartmann? What work does her body do in emphasizing and privileging white French bodies, and thus the French nation? The Hottentot Venus became the terrain for projecting much of what was dangerous for French national identity – primarily gender inappropriateness, but also class transgressions and miscegenation.⁴⁸⁵ Black women like Bartmann were entitled to none of the protection (or respect) offered certain white French women like Amelia, yet still afforded a gender- and racially-specific discussion about fitting behavior. Adolph is literally disgusted out of his infatuation with Bartmann (and thus all savage women) just by seeing her picture, making blackness – as an ideology – a marker of ugliness and sexual deviance (as well as unsuitability). Importantly, this dialogue also allowed white women a role in the definition of the French nation. That Amelia is always known by the audience to be white and French is paramount. She has to deceive him – he is misguided. In the end, Adolph is unable to resist French women, even if Amelia is cunning, worldly and duplicitous (all things which she proves in winning him as a husband). But in his acceptance to marry Amelia, Adolph resumes his appropriate role as patriarch, while Amelia returns to her expected domestic role – albeit one that allows her to behave properly in public, yet reincarnate herself as the exotic and wild Hottentot woman in private. His rescue re-articulated the ultimate power of French manhood.

⁴⁸⁴ *La Vénus hottentote, ou haine aux Françaises*, 153.

⁴⁸⁵ Some of these charges, such as the effeminacy of Frenchmen had been directed at the French by other European nations. See for instance, national stereotypes leveled by the French and German at each other in *Nation als Stereotyp. Fremdwahrnehmung und Identität in deutscher und französischer Literatur. Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur*, Ruth Florack, ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000). Thank you to Mette Harder for translating this from the German.

The Second Letter

19 November 1814: If Bartmann's second "missive" was to be believed, French men certainly needed, if not saving, then at least a stern talking to. Unlike the first letter, women were entirely absent from Bartmann's ramblings this time around. Gone was the frivolity of women behaving badly, cuckolded husbands, and a war of hats. Here the focus was on men, the war, the role of journalists, and the potential failures of the French nation. For there was more than one type of man occupying France – and Bartmann, in speaking to her cousin, threw down the gauntlet, for France was fighting for its political and cultural future. But, as she admonished her cousin, "too many bad things have been said about the French."⁴⁸⁶ France might have real problems, she wrote, but at least it was populated by honorable "warriors" – not "idle" ones like the Hottentots and Marmotes.⁴⁸⁷ – warriors who were fearless to the point of recklessness, sometimes fanatically worried about military advancement, and so committed to displaying their bravery that those who come home unwounded, or even alive, felt the shame of letting down their country:

They accuse cannonballs of flying over them on purpose; they reproach the bombs for having missed them in order to deliberately sabotage their professional advancement. . . . They complain less of an arm they have lost as the one they have left, and they hope to get rid of it at the first opportunity. . . . They want to receive at least one decoration, honorable and just reward for their bravery, to attest to all who have eyes to see that, if they are still living, it's not their fault, and that they were well-enough behaved to deserve to die.⁴⁸⁸

Zealous does not even begin to describe these men. On the one hand, they cared about defending France; on the other hand, personal advancement colored their judgment.

There remained then only one problem, for surely men this brave should be victorious: their leader Napoleon. As the fictive Bartmann wrote, "The chief of glory of these brave men, the man their courage and good fortune elevated to the highest point of glory and power," saw his role "more philosophically," losing "the most beautiful empire in the world, and he is enjoying the best of health. The fact that he is still alive, in such circumstances, has astonished many people so accustomed to despising death."⁴⁸⁹ The writer's wrath extended to another group of men as well: journalists, or as she called them, "another species of brave men: warriors-orators."⁴⁹⁰ While still admitting that the courageous soldiers were clearly a bit obsessive, at least they did more than just talk, which seemed to be all that journalists did. Vulture-like in word and deed, they pretended to know everything, when in fact they did not have a clue – they even made up facts and claimed secret knowledge. Peace from war brought them no happiness, as they continued to hope for global chaos in order to have something to do. Legends in their own minds, they asked for more money and medals to prove their worth, and to be called "soldiers."⁴⁹¹ In short, "they believe the honor of France [was] compromised."⁴⁹²

"Bartmann" believed that even if the French sometimes "forget their natural lightness," and were sometimes prone to melancholy, "they are lively, irascible, but their rancor does not last long and their vengeance is not cruel." That was true, with the exception of "certain individuals who had abused their privilege as powerful men to oppress and harm others."⁴⁹³ Clearly directed at Napoleon

⁴⁸⁶ « *Sartjee ou la Vénus hottentote, à son cousin* » 19 November, 1814, Letter 2.

⁴⁸⁷ Letter 2.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Letter 2, last page.

Bonaparte (and those who followed him), she asserted, “they have been run off in shame, much milder punishment for those who, for a long time, have undone themselves in matters of honor.”⁴⁹⁴ Bartmann ended her letter with the following praise of the French, in lieu of allowing a Bonaparte to escape ultimate punishment: “This trait alone was enough to critique to you a nation of which many good things could be said if one set out to illustrate its good qualities rather than its poor ones.”⁴⁹⁵

In the end, perhaps the fictional Bartmann’s pretend missive to her cousin was simply making fun of all of France’s so-called warriors. Maybe she was claiming that they were not fearless, that they were not different than their chief, Napoleon, or that they had lost France – and thus everything was lost. After all, this was satire. While race is significant here, gender emerges as equally important, for both “Bartmann” and Amelia “save” the nation from inept men such as Adolphe and Napoleon. But Bartmann’s words as a black woman would have stung more deeply, given her already obvious unsuitability.

Scientific Discourse and Gender Politics in France

... there were by the late eighteenth century established opinions on these matters, combining religious traditions and philosophical ideas on the ‘chain of being’, human nature, and history, with new theories and techniques of classification in natural and social science. In our period this was expanded, altered, and elaborated by the use of a rapidly growing body of empirical and descriptive material produced by European visitors to non-European societies, but also by the development of the ‘scientific’ disciplines of biology, ethnology, and anthropology.⁴⁹⁶

The importance of so-called hard sciences in France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a means to explain “nature” cannot be underestimated because the empirical knowledge provided by scientific study increasingly became a way to make sense of many distressing political and cultural reorganizations. Longstanding discussions about race merged with these studies. France was surrounded by images of and references to black people. European scientific communities (particularly French and German) made considerable efforts to evaluate and classify people of African descent via medical journals and conferences, anthropological studies, and legal statutes.⁴⁹⁷ In her essay “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham asserts that “gender itself was both constructed and fragmented by race. Gender, so coloured by race, remained from birth to death inextricably linked to one’s personal identity and social status. For black and white women, gendered identity was reconstructed and represented in very different, indeed antagonistic, racialized contexts.”⁴⁹⁸ As a result, questions about acceptable societal boundaries could be worked out, this time, under the guise of “impartial” scientific rhetoric. Why does the Hottentot female become conflated with sexual pathology? Why are the genitalia of Hottentot women utilized both as a means of asserting absolute difference from European women and re-asserting patriarchal hegemony? Was “*La Femme Noire*” truly knowable?

Sander Gilman writes that “while many groups of African blacks were known to Europeans in the nineteenth century, the Hottentot became representative of the essence of the black, especially

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Joanna De Groot, “‘Sex’ and ‘Race’: The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century” in *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 94.

⁴⁹⁷ See my discussion on scientific racism in this dissertation’s introduction.

⁴⁹⁸ Although Higginbotham is discussing African-American women, the analysis about the metalanguage of race is useful here as well. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 189.

the black female.”⁴⁹⁹ Gilman posits that the Hottentot Venus “served as the emblem of black sexuality during the entire nineteenth century, a sexuality inherently different from that of the European.”⁵⁰⁰ Sharpley-Whiting concurs, stating that the Hottentot Venus provided an “immense influence on nineteenth-century Western racial-sexual science.”⁵⁰¹ Enlightenment ideology was based on the dominant hierarchy of the lowest to highest in the so-called “chain of being,” and the importance of aesthetics in determining how these placements could be understood added significant elements to Enlightenment rhetoric. George Mosse contends that in the eighteenth century, Hottentot Africans were considered by anthropologists to be among the lowliest “creatures” in the link between animal and man.⁵⁰² Within other eighteenth century European debates (such as William Cheselden’s perception theory and anthropologist Christian Meiners’ chain of being assertions) and articulations about “blackness,” Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s aesthetic theory consolidated and provided a template for linking “ultimate filth,” aesthetics, and blackness into a single but far reaching archetype: Hottentot Africans.⁵⁰³ If Greeks had the ultimate aesthetic standard of beauty in the eighteenth century, Hottentot Africans provided the repugnant antithesis.⁵⁰⁴ There is a correlation, of course, between these ideas and the treatment of blacks throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁴⁹⁹ Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature”, 225.

⁵⁰⁰ Gilman, “Black Sexuality and Modern Consciousness”, 112-113.

⁵⁰¹ T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus*, 17.

⁵⁰² George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978), 15. See also David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century*, Picturing history series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁵⁰³ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), a German dramatist and critic, was one of the leading contributors to the writings of the German Enlightenment. Lessing, who studied theology, philosophy, and medicine, was also a significant contributor to literature on aesthetic theory during the eighteenth century. In 1766, Lessing published *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* which, in addition to various musings on the beauty of the Greeks, also included lengthy quotations from the tale of two Hottentot Africans, named Tquassouw and Knonmquaiha. Lessing’s publication included a detailed story about these two lovers with this aside:

The drollest strokes of this kind occur in the Hottentot tale, Tquassouw and Knonmquaiha in the *Connoisseur*, an English weekly magazine full of humour, ascribed to Lord Chesterfield. *Everyone knows how filthy the Hottentots are* and how many things they consider beautiful and elegant and sacred which with us awaken disgust and aversion. A flattened cartilage of a nose, flabby breasts hanging down to the navel, the whole body smeared with a cosmetic of goat’s fat and soot gone rotten in the sun, the hair dripping with grease, arms and legs bound about with fresh entrails—let one think of this as the object of an ardent, reverent, tender love; let one hear this uttered in the exalted language of gravity and admiration and refrain from laughter!

What is intriguing is why Lessing takes Lord Chesterfield’s musings and inserts them into *scientific* dialogue. According to historian H.W. Debrunner, in his important text *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe (A History of Africans in Europe before 1918)*, Chesterfield’s story was a “flippant English parody of foreign customs as delightfully dirty, ridiculous and funny.” Debrunner states that the story is “obviously a parody of Paul and Virginia!” See Hans Werner Debrunner, *Presence to Prestige: A History of Africans in Europe before 1918*, 293. Moreover, Sander Gilman states that “Lessing, seeking a counterweight to [Edmund] Burke’s view of the Black as innately horrifying, found its polar opposite in the comic Black. He chose for this category the figure of the Hottentot, in whom ethnologists of the late seventeenth century supposedly found a ‘link between man and the apes’ and whose ‘brutish appearance and bestial customs became stereotyped in the literature of the following century.’” Gilman further posits that Lessing’s choice to highlight Hottentots was an astute one, claiming that “the sense of racial and cultural superiority inherent in Lessing’s choice is clear. {Lessing} chose the antithesis of the civilized concept of beauty in the stereotype of the Hottentot and therefore, saw, as a source of the comic, the juxtaposition of these contradictory norms.” See Sander L. Gilman, *On Blackness without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co.), 27.

⁵⁰⁴ Much can be learned, I believe, from the examples of the cross-pollination of ideas between European philosophers and anthropologists via the “chain of being” assertions.

The use of the Hottentot Africans in racial ideologies shows how popular ideas of racial inferiority were given legitimacy when placed within a “scientific” context. Joanna De Groot posits that

The founding of learned societies, journals, and academic institutions for medicine, anthropology, geography, and linguistic studies brought the study of human characteristics, differences, or cultures firmly into the sphere of science, rationality, and professional expertise. . . . This is by no means the only or even the most powerful source of images of ‘sex’ or ‘race’, but it certainly constituted one of the most authoritative and influential ways of grounding the ‘Otherness’ of femininity or ethnic identity in ‘real’ knowledge wielded by prestigious professionals (doctors, academics, ‘experts’).⁵⁰⁵

While eighteenth century scientists believed that blacks were inferior because of their environment, nineteenth century science emphasized race itself as the cause of black inferiority. Moreover, because race was biologically determined, inferiority was an inherent characteristic.

In the nineteenth century there was also a distinctive shift in the French gaze from blacks in general to the Hottentot *female* specifically, focusing first on her “sagging” breasts and “disgusting” nose, and then on her genitalia – particularly what was viewed as her abnormal labia minora – and her protruding buttocks (called steatopygia). Why the shift downward in gaze? Why was it useful to move blacks from disgusting, comic, and aesthetically displeasing to sexually pathological? And why use women as the example? Previously, black differences had considered essential and fixed in nature. Scientific study provided a new means by which nature could be truly understood. If blacks were locked into their inferior state, then external factors or assistance could not alter them. Therefore, what was applicable to one of them must be applicable to all of them: the homogeneous black. The Hottentot female provided an opportunity to conflate issues of femininity and race by focusing on a specific area: her so-called abnormal genitalia.

Constant discussions regarding the so-called inferiority or the ugliness of “the Hottentot African” grow tiresome without constant reevaluations or reworking by those controlling the conversations. Furthermore, if the observers are experiencing any type of passion for something (or someone) that has been determined to be disgusting, there is the risk of rendering the *subject* problematically abnormal by association. One covets what one sees: if the gaze elicits desire, there must also be a shift in thinking to justify that desire. In order to protect the viewer’s own identity and objectivity, the gaze must be narrowly focused and specifically directed, explained as a means of identification and classification, nothing more – and, as we saw earlier, presented in the sort of images that make Bartmann ripe for ridicule. So, if the eighteenth century aesthetics movement was chiefly interested in explaining racial inferiority by the visual, the nineteenth century illuminated the next step: “To meet their scientific standards, a paradigm was needed which would technically place both the sexuality and the beauty of the black in an antithetical position to that of the white.”⁵⁰⁶ hence the shift downward in the name of science. Sarah Bartmann, as the infamous Hottentot Venus, became extremely useful as a means to this end. She was not only a public spectacle, but now also a scientific specimen.

What must be contemplated then is the notion that, by virtue of their alleged expertise, scientists had the privilege of expressing themselves in an idiom that laymen perceived as authoritative. Because of this claimed objectivity, any projections of sexual interest could be explained as being strictly in the name of science. A fixation on the genitals of black women therefore became acceptable because it was a means of uncovering and reinforcing the unchanging

⁵⁰⁵ De Groot, 95.

⁵⁰⁶ Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” 231.

nature of blacks and their sexual uncontrollability, nothing more. This information could then be used to understand other forms of sexual pathology. Thus, if scientists could understand the Hottentot Venus, they could understand black sexuality in total. This was particularly important as the medical establishment rapidly conflated the “abnormality” of black sexuality with disease.

When, in the late nineteenth century, medical literature likened the genitalia of the black female to those of the infected prostitute, the fear (and fascination) accompanying the one became associated with the other. Thus by the time Peter Altenberg began to write *Ashantee* [in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century] the idea of black sexuality as pathological was well implanted in European consciousness. The black woman had become doubly unapproachable: unapproachable both because of her difference as a member of an inherently different race and because of her pathological character.⁵⁰⁷

What de la Grave suggested (see chapter two of this dissertation) about the correlation of black women and diseases, here returns with the added benefit of scientific authority.

Scientists Georges Léopold Cuvier and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach were among those credited with the establishment of the field of physical anthropology.⁵⁰⁸ A perfect opportunity presented itself to Cuvier (appointed Surgeon General by Napoleon Bonaparte) when Sarah Bartmann died in Paris on 29, 30, or 31 December 1815 (there are some who believe she actually died on New Year’s Day of 1816) – he requested and received permission from the police to obtain her body. His work included making a plaster cast of her body (see fig. 3.11), dissecting her buttocks and pickling her brain and her genitals (which he put in jars as prize specimens). Bartmann’s usefulness, unfortunately, did not end after she died of tuberculosis.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁷ Sander L. Gilman “Black Sexuality and Modern Consciousness,” in *Blacks and German Culture*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986) 112-113.

⁵⁰⁸ See Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s essay, “The Degeneration of the Races” and Georges Cuvier’s essay “The Race from Which we are descended has been called Caucasian . . . the handsomest on Earth” from his work, *Animal Kingdom*, in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwedi Eze, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997).

⁵⁰⁹ Cohen says she died of tuberculosis, 239. According to Lindfors, her smallpox was misdiagnosed by the doctor who treated her, in “‘The Hottentot Venus’ and Other African Attractions in Nineteenth-Century England”, 89. “Parisian newspapers wrote more obituaries about Sara Baartman than any other African women throughout the nineteenth century.” Crais and Scully, 138.



Fig. 3.11. *Bartmann Body Cast*, 1816, courtesy *Musée de l'Homme*, Paris.

The real prize of Cuvier's anatomical dissection, however, was found when he finally had the opportunity to see between her thighs.⁵¹⁰ Cuvier explained: "We did not at all perceive the most remarkable particularity of her organization; she held her apron carefully hidden; it was between her thighs, and it was not until her death that we knew she had it."⁵¹¹ It is not surprising that he would have been so anxious to see it:

The famous Hottentot apron is a hypertrophy, or overdevelopment, of the labia minora, or nymphae. The apron was one of the most widely discussed riddles of female sexuality in the nineteenth century. There is nothing more famous in natural history than the apron of the Hottentots, and at the same time nothing has been the object of so many debates.⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ Apparently he had tried to see her "apron" close-up while she was alive, but she would not let him. See Henri de Blainville, "Sur une femme de la race hottentote," *Bulletin des sciences, par la Société philomatique de Paris*, 183-90.

⁵¹¹ Georges Cuvier, "Extraits d'observation faites sur le cadavre d'une femme connue à Paris et à Londres sous le nom de Vénus Hottentote," in *Discours sur les révolutions du globe* (Paris: Passard, 1864) 215-216, quoted in "Writing Sex, Writing Difference: Creating the Master Text on the Hottentot Venus," *Black Venus*, 27.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 27-28.

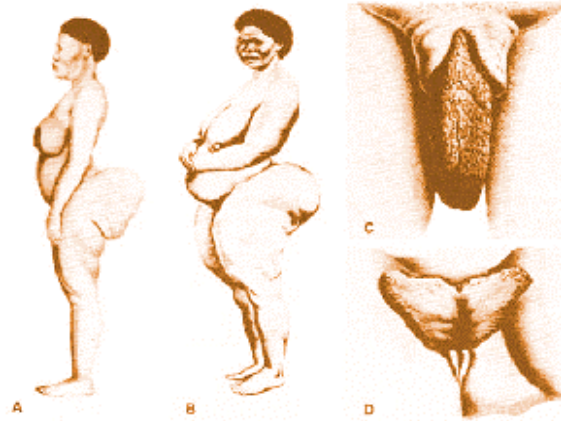


Fig. 3.12. Unknown, *Saartjie Baartman called the Hottentot Venus*
(Photo by Apic/Getty Images)⁵¹³

Although Cuvier had made his “amazing discovery” between the infamous Hottentot Venus’s legs, he still needed to fully *enter* her “darkness” to really feel he knew her. As Anne McClintock aptly stated: “All too often, Enlightenment metaphysics presented knowledge as a relation of power between two gendered spaces, articulated by a journey and a technology of conversion: the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its ‘secrets’ into a visible, male science of the surface.”⁵¹⁴

So “Cuvier examined the interior of her vulva and womb, and finding nothing particularly different, he move[d] on to her ‘compressed’ and ‘depressed’ skull and pelvic bone”, which he likened to that of a monkey.⁵¹⁵ “In 1816, closing his chapter on the black female body, he ‘had the honor’ of presenting the genital organs of this woman to the [French] Académie, prepared in a manner so as not to leave any doubt about the nature of her apron.” He stated that the “secrets” that the Hottentot hid between her legs had now been definitively uncovered and analyzed.⁵¹⁶ Having arranged to have her sketched and examined for three days at the *Jardin du roi* (along with Henri de Blainville) in March 1815 (fig. 3.13), these new findings added a certain weight to his final conclusions.

⁵¹³ Caption with image (the information is incorrect): “Unspecified - December 31: Saartjie Baartman called the Hottentot Venus (from Namibia) she was flaunted as a freak and curious sex object because of her enlarged hypertrophic genital organs and prominent buttock bottom. She died in 1815 after a life of misery and prostitution (Photo by Apic/Getty Images).” <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/89858580/Hulton-Archive> (accessed October 2, 2010).

⁵¹⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

⁵¹⁵ Sharpley-Whiting, “Writing Sex, Writing Difference,” 27-28.

⁵¹⁶ Georges Cuvier, *Extraits d’observation faites sur le cadavre d’une femme connue à Paris et à Londres sous le nom de Venus Hottentote*,” 266.



Fig. 3.13. *La Vénus Hottentote*, Sara, a woman of the Hottentot race, 25 years old, observed, drawn and painted in the National History Museum in March, 1815, Musée de l'homme, Paris.⁵¹⁷

In revealing his discoveries, Cuvier took pains to compare her with European women, by highlighting the difference in genitalia.⁵¹⁸ Tellingly, he also compared and contrasted Bartmann's genitalia to monkeys. He determined that she was much closer to monkeys than to European women, simultaneously elevating the latter. Meanwhile, Blainville spent time reminding viewers (and future readers) that Bartmann "drank, smoked, and was alleged to be sexually aggressive – all considered stereotypically masculine characteristics."⁵¹⁹ But Cuvier's gaze at Bartmann was not entirely scientific. Although he stated that her movements resembled an orangutan, he also noted

⁵¹⁷ Steatopygia is an affliction that not all South African women share, yet, in the painting done of Bartmann in Paris, all the women have enlarged buttocks and the painting is in *Africa*. On sale in Paris at Réaux's, Cour des Fontaines, and at Martinet's, rue du Coq. 42 x 29.7 cm. Engraved by Louis-Jean Allais from the painting by J.-B. Berré, now at the *Musée de l'Homme*, Paris; image courtesy of the *Musée de l'Homme*.

⁵¹⁸ Cuvier, "Extraits d'observation," 269.

⁵¹⁹ See Henri de Blainville, "Sur une femme de la race hottentote," *Bulletin des sciences par la société philomatique de Paris*, (1816), 183-190.

that “she spoke several languages, had a good ear for music, and possessed a good memory.”⁵²⁰ He also believed that her neck and arms were somewhat “graceful,” and that her hands were “charming.” Yet he takes pains to state that her face repelled him.⁵²¹ His own gaze reveals interesting slippages – for she was clearly fascinating to him in ways that went beyond his scientific authority, and exceeded his preconceived notions of black women.

Anne Fausto-Sterling points out that “Cuvier most clearly concerned himself with establishing the priority of European nationhood; he wished to control the hidden secrets of Africa and the woman by exposing them to scientific daylight.”⁵²² In addition to the scientific findings, Cuvier asserted French power to “know” the other, thereby helping to further legitimize France’s colonial project. Cuvier “proved” the Otherness of Sarah Bartmann, showed her as a deformed being in comparison with white French women, and re-asserted European white male scientific dominance over both white and black women. The superiority of (male) whiteness was proved within and outside of the academy. As it became increasingly clear that France needed to assert that superiority – even if by force of arms – in Africa, the infamous Hottentot Venus could provide a crucial component in the colonialist discourse. This is why it is particularly poignant that the only word we “hear” Bartmann say is “no.” While Cuvier was able to manipulate her while she was alive, and then desecrate her dead body, Bartmann had one moment when she refused to allow him total access to her body, and he capitulated.

* * *

This chapter highlighted how black female identity became increasing and scientifically centered on manageable body parts – in Bartmann’s case, her genitalia (see fig. 3.12). What we also see is how Bartmann became a teaching tool of sorts, in order to have larger discussions about blackness, whiteness, and acceptable gender roles. The process of establishing gender norms was particularly interesting during this period, because the solidification of certain male/female gender roles happened through racialized, as well as gendered, discourses. The previous examples reveal that the production of Sarah Bartmann as a “type” functioned to establish and regulate normative French behaviors, specifically the need to reverse what was seen as degenerating white French male virility, and, on the part of white French women, increasingly inappropriate gender behavior. Crais and Scully remind us that “white women, even the most civilized, were able to fall victim to their instincts and passions, to revert [as they perhaps exaggerate] to their Hottentot selves.”⁵²³

We see that the Hottentot Venus moved from scientific discourse into the realm of popular culture and finally back to science – which packaged it for articulation by the masses. What became explicit was that, while France’s national identity was “natural,” black identity was not. The two were incompatible. Furthermore, Africans functioned as a type of pollutant, a contaminant that represented the French middle class’s epitome of the degenerate and deviant Other. The Hottentot Venus was made the icon that showcased this. Her nakedness transcended and subverted boundaries. It invited the gaze, even as it repelled the viewer. Her flagrant public nudity was proof of her corruption. It was important that she be seen with both white men and women in order to showcase gender differences. If the goddess Venus represented the epitome of love and beauty, then the ironic moniker for Bartmann was obvious. Bartmann was not a goddess – she inspired revulsion towards the grotesque, and possibly lust, but nothing close to love or beauty. Bartmann represented the antithesis of Frenchness – inappropriate sexuality, female aggressiveness, and excess.

⁵²⁰ Cuvier, “Extraits d’observation,” 269.

⁵²¹ Ibid.,

⁵²² Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race and Nation,” 35.

⁵²³ Crais and Scully, 147.

By highlighting these differences, the menacing power of *all* females was revealed, and the need to dominate them was thereby reinforced.

The connections between Bartmann and the threat she represented to white self-identity have been clarified. She was a danger to white women because white men's attentions were fixated on her. And she was a threat to white men because they lost control around her. Their desire (as evidenced in the prints of her) showed that white men were capable of experiencing an uncontrollable sexual attraction to black women. Racial purity was thus in jeopardy. The black woman must, therefore, be physically caged in the metropole in order to contain all the problematic desires that were attributed to her – or be removed entirely. Additionally, if white women are exposed to either her sexuality or to the sexual response she “provoked,” perhaps they might begin to think about their own desires (sexual or otherwise) – thus rendering them unfeminine by placing them outside of male control.

Moreover, representation of the Hottentot Venus could re-establish controlled patriarchy.

Europe's ‘conquering’ of Africa and the ‘new world’, and its exploration and discovery of different cultures, created ‘primitive’ types and functioned as a kind of collective therapy to maintain European esteem and belief in its various nationalisms. In a sense, Western cultural arrogance could be assured and sustained only through the exercise of colonialism. Beyond Europe's primary motive to exploit Africa's human and environmental resources, conquering ‘the dark continent’ allowed Europeans to act out roles and to reinforce notions of control.⁵²⁴

The Hottentot Venus became the terrain for projecting what was dangerous for French national identities such as gender inappropriateness (women behaving badly), class transgressions, and racial miscegenation. These fears are especially interesting since these tensions were more prominent in the French colonies than France itself, though the rhetoric itself was being produced in Paris proper. At the same time, command over her made up for the losses of empire, and gave further justification for the colonial project, it expanded in the final decades of the nineteenth century. White control was now uneasily in place, and national honor re-established (at least until the war with Prussia in 1870).

Within the discourse of science, this subjugation could be claimed as empirical and, therefore, objective and intellectually based, without emotion or bias. Bartmann (and thus all blacks) had to be kept locked up for their own (and French) protection – as with the colonial project, it was for their “own good.” Lowering their gazes upon Sarah Bartmann reminded the French middle class that Africans needed to be known and then resisted, if Africa were to be dominated.

* * *

In the following chapter, less than ten years after Bartmann's death, the memory of a girl from Senegal was recreated. Her presentation could not have been more unlike the spectacle of Sarah Bartmann. But in many ways, Bartmann remained the template of the type of black womanhood that was imposed upon her. Young Ourika, to whom we now turn, may not have been anything like Bartmann – but to the people who created and represented her, she and Bartmann were merely two sides of the same inauthentic coin.

⁵²⁴ Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920's* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 13.

CHAPTER FOUR:

A VORTEX OF CONTRADICTIONS:
OURIKA AND THE CHALLENGE TO RACIAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES

Fig. 4.1. Sophie de Tott, *Portrait d'Ourika*, c. 1793⁵²⁵

⁵²⁵ Repr. dans "Ourika" de Madame de Duras, étude et présentation de Roger Little, Textes littéraires n°CV, Presses Universitaires d'Exeter, nouvelle édition revue et augmentée, 1998. Coll. part.

*The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to the splendid (European) and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him.*⁵²⁶
 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

Around 1788, a girl of two or three years old was purchased by the Governor of Senegal, Stanislas Jean, the Chevalier du Boufflers, and given to his aunt, Madame la Maréchale de Beauvau.⁵²⁷ However, the Chevalier simultaneously expressed his distress over her enslavement: “I feel moved to tears when I think that this poor child was sold to me like a lamb.” Yet celebrating his prize, he cavalierly wrote that he had “a parakeet for the queen, a horse for the maréchale de Castries, a little captive for Mme de Beauvau, a sultan hen for the Duke of Laon and an ostrich for M. de Nivernois.”⁵²⁸ Although Françoise Massardier-Kenney finds that du Boufflers showed an “unconscious prejudice” in his conflicting statements, I see nothing particularly unconscious; for the Chevalier, Ourika is classed among the other animals he brought from Senegal, and she was destined to be a house pet for his aunt.⁵²⁹

Baptismal records show “Charlotte Catherine Benezet Ourika,”⁵³⁰ a young black girl, in the company of the Chevalier. Ourika, raised by the maréchale, died in 1800 between the age of sixteen and twenty.⁵³¹ Apparently the maréchale’s affection for Ourika was genuine: « *Elle était née avec beaucoup d’esprit, et la qualité la plus remarquable de son esprit était une justesse et un gout naturel, qui me surprenaient a tout moment dans les lectures que nous faisons ensemble. Sa pureté ne pouvait se comparer qu’à celle des Anges.* »⁵³² The list of Ourika’s qualities noted by the maréchale included « *une fierte douce et modeste, une pudeur naturelle,* » a pleasing figure, beautiful eyes, grace, and charm.⁵³³ At some point, possibly 1793, a portrait was painted of Ourika by Sophie de Tott (fig. 4.1). Note that the bracelets high on her arm and ankles and her bare feet all refer the viewer to slavery and Africa. Her non-Europeaness is emphasized by the contrast with the ornate furniture, her benefactor’s white marble bust, and her laurels for and to him, even as it distances her from it metaphorically. Was Ourika really the smiling, well-adjusted child depicted by de Tott? I do not know if it is possible to ascertain whether this young girl – removed from her family, “gifted” to a woman half a world away – felt the same affection for her mistress, or if her sense of dislocation caused her sadness, or was merely a distant memory.

According to T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, the letters of the Chevalier about his adventures were widely read and discussed in Parisian salons, and this particular tale of Ourika inspired many

⁵²⁶ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, expanded edition, introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre, afterword by Susan Gilson Miller (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 120.

⁵²⁷ She came with another little black girl named Zoé, who, unlike Ourika, was raised as a servant in the home of another aristocratic family. See Marylee S. Crofts, “Duras’s Ourika: Race and Gender in Text and Context” (unpublished PhD diss., (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1992), 135. See also the excellent overview by Thérèse De Raedt, “Representations of the Real-Life Ourika,” *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009) : 57-65 for information on the chevalier, and her essay, “Ourika: l’inspiration de Mme de Duras,” *French Studies*, vol. 73 (2005) and “Ourika in Black and White: Textual and Visual Interplay,” *Women in French Studies*, vol.12, (2004) : 45-69.

⁵²⁸ Emphasis mine. Françoise Massardier-Kenney, *Translating Slavery*, 189.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 189; see also Linda Marie Rouillard, “The Black Galatea: Claire De Duras’s *Ourika*,” *Nineteenth Century French Studies*. 32, no. 3 & 4, 210.

⁵³⁰ Sue Peabody, “Ourika in the History Classroom,” *Approaches to teaching World Literature*. 107,123.

⁵³¹ Scholars disagree about the actual age of Ourika, with the majority of scholars saying she was closer to 16. Peabody believes her to be several years older.

⁵³² Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, présentation et étude de Roger Little (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), 55.

⁵³³ Ibid., 55-56.

conversations.⁵³⁴ The Duchesse de Duras, hearing about Ourika in such a setting in 1820, a few years later began writing a fictionalized story about her.⁵³⁵ Victor Hugo wrote in *Les Misérables* that “The Duchesse de Duras read to three or four friends her unpublished *Ourika*, in her boudoir furnished by X. in sky-blue satin.”⁵³⁶ In 1823, fifty anonymous copies of “*Ourika*” were privately published, but the copies – and her anonymity – did not remain in the shadows for long.⁵³⁷ By 1824, four editions and reprints had appeared – the second edition was 3000 copies with an additional 2000 copies, due to popular demand.⁵³⁸ We can examine how and why this “savage” – as de Boufflers called her – became such a potent representation, so popular that she inspired a brief but important “Ourika Mania” soon after.

Why were representations of Ourika so popular? First, she, like Sarah Bartmann, was used to teach white French men and women about racial difference. Second, she highlighted the dangers of racial mimicry, reminding white French men and women of the perils of interracial marriage (the diluter of pure blood). Third, representations of Ourika reiterated that no matter how proper the body (in this case, aristocratic), blackness precluded complete assimilation into Frenchness. Finally, her exclusion allowed for the possibility of inclusion for émigrés and refugees into the definition of Frenchness, provided certain conditions were met. What made representations of Ourika so powerful was that – at least on paper – she was flawless. Educated, erudite, and proper, she was the manifestation and personification of perfect Frenchness. It was only upon further examination that her inadequacy was revealed – her racial difference. In addition, using Ourika’s story allowed the narrative to take place in an aristocratic and, at least for much of the narrative, a pre-Haiti past. Thus, issues of slavery (and Saint Domingue) that are so central to the narrative do not require examination. In addition to Duras’s literary erasure of the institution of slavery, a world that existed after the French Revolution was also erased—eliminating the time of aristocratic exile and reinforcing the notion of a social order undisturbed. As Deborah Jenson writes, French men and women were reeling from the loss of their colonial holdings on the one hand, while refusing to

⁵³⁴ T. Denean Sharpely-Whiting, “Black Blood, White Masks, and Nègresse Sexuality in de Pon’s *Ourika*, l’*Africaine*,” *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, 52-53.

⁵³⁵ Amy Ransom writes that there is a possibility that Duras’s *Ourika* may be have, at least partially, based upon a young foreigner named Aïssé, also known as *La belle Circassienne*. Indeed, there are some very compelling similarities. However, the major difference between the two women was their race and skin color. See Amy J. Ransom, “Mademoiselle Aïssé: Inspiration for Clare de Duras’s *Ourika*?” *Romance Quarterly*, vol. 46:2 (January 1, 1999). Rori Bloom suggests similarities between *Ourika* and a heroine from a seventeenth-century French novel; see Rori Bloom, “Monkey-Girls of Old Regime France: Babiole and *Ourika*,” *Nottingham French Studies*, vol. 49:1, 19-30. Bloom suggests that “thanks to Duras’s sensitive presentation of her heroine, *Ourika*’s plight does not provoke ironic commentary on a black woman with unrealistic aspirations but rather compassion for someone suffering the torment of unrequited love.” 29. I believe that while *Ourika* may elicit some compassion from readers, she is also specifically ridiculed in the novel for inappropriately loving Charles. For additional comparisons between *Ourika* and other fictitious women, see Eileen Warburton, “Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall down: *Ourika*, Cinderella, and the French Lieutenant’s Woman,” *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 42:1 (1996) : 165-186, and Rouillard.

⁵³⁶ Hugo, *Les Misérables*; the remark about *Ourika* appears in volume one, “Fantine,” book third, chapter one. See note 15 in this dissertation’s introduction.

⁵³⁷ See Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, 97, English Translation viii, Massardier-Kenney, *Translating Slavery*, 188. See Marylee S. Crofts, 91-96, for an overview of the increasing publication status and editions.

⁵³⁸ One paper in England wrote about the success of the novel with disdain, intimating that “Curiosity was thus skillfully heated to the point of ebullition, when L’*Advocat*, the fashionable bookseller, advertised *Ourika* for publication, the profits to go a charitable institution. These precautions would be honour to the most experienced book-maker, and met with the success they had so ingeniously prepared. Some thousand copies were sold in a very short time.” See *New Monthly Magazine*, review of *Ourika*; ou la Nègresse. Par Madame la Duchesse de _____. 1 vol. (*Ourika* ; or the Negress). By Madame the Duchess of _____. Foreign Publications, with Critical Remarks, 1824, 270.

acknowledge their culpability in the colonies on the other hand. The result was a dislocation that representations like *Ourika* could help mitigate.⁵³⁹

The loss of Saint Domingue created a major crisis for the French colonial empire – And Haiti would be forced to atone for that victory. In April 1825, the ultra-royalist regime of Charles X charged the Haitian government with paying 150 million francs to “reimburse” French colonials who had lost their investments because of the revolution. Yet at that time, according to Christopher Miller, “the recognition of Haiti was hotly contested; it provoked furor among French conservatives, and, Eugène Sue reported from Guadeloupe, it plunged the planters in other French slave islands into the ‘darkest anxiety.’”⁵⁴⁰

Moreover, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, refugees had used race not only to highlight their treatment in Haiti, but also to re-incorporate themselves back into French society in the metropole. In this context, the popularity of *Ourika* is not merely coincidental.⁵⁴¹ So the challenge of colonial refugees in France would also have been very much in the minds of the monarchy (as would the failure of France to bring Haiti back into its colonial empire). Expanding the perspective, Jenson writes:

Ourika presents a nineteenth-century postcolonial mirror, in which colonialism, despite the known horrors of slavery, largely had escaped public criticism as a system or institution. . . . French consciousness after the independence of Haiti registered the violence of its loss of colonial mastery, without fully processing the ideological similarity of the slaves’ conquest of freedom and French citizens’ acquisition of revolutionary rights. This consciousness is presented in the novel as a disruption in a mirror stage of identification between blacks and whites.⁵⁴²

This chapter will examine how *Ourika*, as a symbol, spoke about certain racial and gender instabilities to white French men and women – especially those who had come back to France from the colonies or from exile abroad – concerning the importance of assimilation. It also investigates how *Ourika* reflected the aristocracy’s attempts to recover from the trauma of both Revolutions.

Claire-Louise-Rose-Bonne Lechale de Coetnempren de Kersant, Madame de Dufort, eventually the Duchesse de Duras, provides an important way of exploring this phenomenon.⁵⁴³ She herself was an émigré, having fled France with her mother after her father, a liberal deputy, was executed during the Terror. They moved first to Philadelphia and then possibly to her mother’s home in Martinique,⁵⁴⁴ eventually ending up in London, where she remained for a decade. In 1808, married to Amédée-Bretagne-Malo Dufort, the future Duc de Duras,⁵⁴⁵ she returned to Paris where,

⁵³⁹ Deborah Jenson, “Mirror Insurrections: Haitian and French Revolutions in *Ourika*,” *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* 107 (2009): 45-50.

⁵⁴⁰ Eugène Sue, as quoted in Christopher Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 251-252. Miller continues that interest in Haiti does not wane significantly until after 1826, with discussions continuing right up until the end of slavery in 1848. See Miller, especially Chapter Ten, “Forget Haiti.” See also Grisby, *Extremities*, especially Chapter Six.

⁵⁴¹ For a more in-depth discussion of how Duras and her family’s correspondence adhere to Darrell Meadow’s earlier argument of the refugee narrative of racial victimization, see Heather Brady, “Recovering Claire de Duras’s Creole Inheritance: Race and Gender in the Exile’s Correspondence of her Saint-Domingue Family,” *L’Esprit Créateur*, 47:4 (Winter 2007) : 44-56.

⁵⁴² Deborah Jenson, “Mirror Insurrections: Haitian and French Revolutions in *Ourika*,” *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009) : 47.

⁵⁴³ Peabody suggests that she may have met the real *Ourika*. Sue Peabody “*Ourika* in the History Classroom,” 126.

⁵⁴⁴ Miller says she never went to Martinique; others, including Bardoux and Pailhès, say she stopped there, see page 160.

⁵⁴⁵ Louis XVIII named him “first gentleman of the bedchamber” at the beginning of the Restoration.

as a socially prominent aristocrat,⁵⁴⁶ she hosted one of the most important salons during the Restoration at their apartment in the Tuileries. Some salons, “particularly those of the *faubourg Saint-Germain*, presided over by the Duchesse de Duras, the Princesse de la Tremoille or the Marquise de Montcalm, who ran the salon of her brother, the Duc de Richelieu, were highly restrictive, and used their social exclusivity deliberately to quash the pretensions of mere wealth or exclude those who had any association with the Revolution or Napoleon.”⁵⁴⁷ One attendee called her one of the most adept *salonnières* in Paris, knowing how “to guide a conversation without regimenting or enslaving it.”⁵⁴⁸ As such she was at the center of Parisian aristocratic high society, and she would have also known many conservative politicians.⁵⁴⁹

* * *

As indicated in chapters one and two, myriad legislation passed in the eighteenth century, in both the colonies and the metropole, sought to clarify, define, and position blacks and people of color – as well as whites – in French society. Not surprisingly, legislating failed to definitively accomplish the task. At the same time, artistic and literary representations, as well as “scientific” discourse, both reinforced and transgressed these legal bounds. As I discussed in chapter three, Sarah Bartmann’s body and image were appropriated as scientific and cultural markers to instruct white French men and women about what was “French.” Bartmann’s representations had the extra bonus of shoring up racial and gender roles. But I think the cultural interest in all things Ourika reveals larger anxieties about the lack of assimilation amongst returning émigrés and colonial refugees, especially while white French men and women in the metropole were playing with an “identity” that was in troubling contradiction to the image of Frenchness.⁵⁵⁰

I have argued that the return of whites from Saint Domingue exacerbated fears of inauthentic Frenchness, tainted as they were by colonial experiences; and also that returning exiles came back to a France which was unrecognizable to them in many ways. So the use of Ourika (and thus the black female body) attempted both to spin these anxieties and to domesticate them.⁵⁵¹ Such efforts had unintended consequences, however. Domesticating returning refugees re-asserted the nation’s prowess and power, even as it simultaneously revealed certain problems which (re)assimilation on home soil could not fix: the growing incoherence of acceptable racial and gender boundaries in the metropole. The fact that some of these citizens – both male and female, in the colonies as well as the metropole – insisted upon what I call the appropriation of black female

⁵⁴⁶ Monsieur de Choiseul, discussed in chap. 2, is also mentioned in the novel, *Ourika*: “As a friend of M. de Choiseul, she had been able, during his long ministry, to help many people.” See Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, translated and with a foreword by John Fowles, introduction by Joan DeJean and Margaret Waller (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1994), 23.

⁵⁴⁷ Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799-1914*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 116.

⁵⁴⁸ Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 180.

⁵⁴⁹ Duras did, at one point, fear she was losing Chateaubriand’s affection because of his liaison with Juliette Recamier; she lamented his so-called social infidelity by this association. Chateaubriand, who may or may not have been Duras’s lover, nevertheless benefited from her prominence in French society. He used both women to elevate himself. See Kale. Duras’s salon attracted people like George Curvier, infamously linked to Sarah Bartmann. See also Frederick Lawton, *Balzac* (London: G. Richards, 1910; Gardners Books, 2007), 5. For writings on Chateaubriand and Duras, see Gabriel Pailhès, *La duchesse de Duras et Chateaubriand d’après des documents inédits* (Paris: Perrin et Co, 1910); and Alain Parailous, “Chateaubriand et la duchesse de Duras,” *La Revue de l’Agenais* (1995), 271-86.

⁵⁵⁰ In making this argument, I am not arguing that “blackness” is an inherent or essential trait, though white French men and women believed that the qualities associated with race *were* inherent. I am suggesting they many believed that race could and should be written and seen on the body. Past sumptuary laws had even attempted to legislate this belief.

⁵⁵¹ See Leona Aushlander and Thomas C. Holt’s assertion of the domestication of images and objects in twentieth-century France, “Sambo in Paris: Race and Racism in the Iconography of the Everyday,” in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, 163-164.

identity (or racial “drag”) was further evidence of this incoherence.⁵⁵² While it could be argued that Ourika unsuccessfully mimicked white French aristocratic society, in essence white French men and women problematically copied Ourika as well. Homi Bhabha writes that mimicry is “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”⁵⁵³ Representations of Ourika reveal the underlying tensions. As Bhabha states:

colonial mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continuously produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. . . . Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance that coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent [sic] threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers.⁵⁵⁴

In order for this type of appropriation to be even tacitly tolerated, one’s “true” racial and gender identity have to remain clear. So how could France deal with citizens who have lived in the colonies or abroad, adapted to life there (with all the racial and gender implications), and who now had re-entered the national fold?

In this chapter, I investigate the political and cultural implications of this type of racial drag by focusing on the preponderance of writings about and commodities referencing Ourika, examining specifically the ways in which they allowed both white men and women to assume, yet again, the mantle of black female identity to comment upon past and present issues concerning French society. As France’s colonial endeavors in Saint Domingue continued to haunt everyday life in the metropole and further destabilize gender roles for French men and women, race became increasingly important in shoring up definitions of Frenchness. In nineteenth-century society, elite white French women employed stereotypical perceptions of blackness (via the black female body) to compensate for their own gender subjugation, while white French men often used blackness in order to contemplate black female *and* white female bodies. Representations of Ourika were a means through which these phenomena played themselves out.

In other instances, white men were writing/creating the “black female” reconfigured to comment on black *and* white womanhood. This appropriation of black female identity for a remarketing to white women exposed a possible problem: that white men were fantasizing about black women, thus needing to fashion them into a palatable reconfiguration of white womanhood. Because of the way that bourgeois white French men accepted and even encouraged such discussions, these appropriations emphasized long-troubling attractions between white French men and black women and long-standing animosities between white men and white women.

⁵⁵² See chap. 1 for discussions on white French women dressing like women of color in the colonies.

⁵⁵³ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1997), 153.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

The Fictional Ourika

The novel *Ourika* recounts the story of a dying Franco-Senegalese nun.⁵⁵⁵ Told in the first person, Duras's novel marks the first known appearance of a black female protagonist in European literature or, as John Fowles problematically states, "the first serious attempt by a white novelist to enter a black mind."⁵⁵⁶ I find Fowles' assertion of Duras's ability to "enter a black mind" – or even his allusion to that type of essentialism – disturbing.⁵⁵⁷ It is true that this was France's first novel with a black female protagonist, and that Duras presented her as sympathetic, during a time when blacks were not often considered so. Yet Duras was also able to explore her own anger and disappointment about both the French and Haitian Revolutions, and to displace the sting of those words by putting them into the mouth of a black character (instead of her own).⁵⁵⁸

Nevertheless, it is not the reliance on *Ourika* as a storyteller that should surprise us. France's use of the black female body as both teaching tool and as example of inappropriate behavior has already been explored throughout this dissertation. Nor was the acknowledgement that blacks in France were necessarily problematic. Blacks were already a presence in the French court, something that the Duchess de Duras would have known, having seen them in many a stately home.

Unlike the actual *Ourika*, who died as a young woman, her fictional counterpart's survival into adulthood enabled Duras to explore a number of provocative themes, including the French Revolution, its bloody aftermath, the Revolution in Saint Domingue, and the political transitions taking place in France in the early nineteenth century. Like the use of Sarah Bartmann, whose own fictional conversations were directed by whites to whites, having *Ourika* speak about things so intimately "French" allowed the author a certain ability to hide behind another body, albeit one deemed completely inappropriate to speak at all. Moreover, *Ourika*'s crisis of faith and subsequent death were reduced not to the problems of race, but to an unrequited love for an inappropriate man. Ultimately the novel reveals *Ourika*'s loathing of her own blackness. The slave trade was completely sidestepped by the literary device of having *Ourika* "rescued," rather than forcibly taken. So France has not been at fault.

⁵⁵⁵ The novel *Ourika* has undergone a resurgence in the past decade in terms of its importance in both literary and historical circles. In addition to the scholarship listed throughout this chapter, see Katri Tuori, "La femme déracinée chez Claire de Duras et Gisèle Pineau," unpublished thesis, San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 2003; Sylvie Romanowski, *Through Strangers' Eyes: Fictional Foreigners in Old Regime France* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005); Michael Taormina, "L'*Ourika* de Claire de Duras: allégorie révolutionnaire, allégorie de la Révolution," *L'Afrique du siècle des Lumières: savoirs et représentations* (Voltaire Foundation, Oxford: University of Oxford, 2009); Kim Mignogna, "L'étrangère dans la société parisienne chez l'abbé Prévost, Mme de Graffigny et Mme de Duras," unpublished thesis, (Montréal : Université de Montréal, 2002), especially the chapter "Ourika ou l'échec des Lumières;" Damon DiMauro, "Ourika as an Inversion of the Pygmalion Myth," *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, Volume 107, January 1, 2009, 103-109; Kari Weil, "Telling Stories of Melancholia: René and *Ourika*," *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009) ; 79-84; and Adrianna M. Paliyenko, "The Literary Frames of *Ourika*, then and now," *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009) : 97-102. I am concerned, however, even within very strong analysis about Duras and her rendering of a black heroine, how many writers regurgitate the idea that *Ourika* was "rescued" from slavery, even though she was *purchased* and brought involuntarily from Senegal.

⁵⁵⁶ Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, Fowles edition, xxx.

⁵⁵⁷ If one were to claim that a work entered the "Jewish mind" for instance, one would (and should) expect an instant backlash to the assumption. I categorically refute Fowles supposition that there is such thing as a monolithic mindset based upon race or any other category.

⁵⁵⁸ David O'Connell writes that Duras' work advances "the cause of abolition." I question whether Duras advances an anti-slavery cause, or simply shores up her own precarious status as a refugee and émigré. See David O'Connell, "Ourika: Black Face, White Mask," *The French Review*, special issue, no. 6, (Spring, 1974): 47-56.

Many others have praised Duras's text for its progressive stance on race via the heroine, Ourika.⁵⁵⁹ I subscribe to Sepinwall's concerns that the novel "purports to be an African woman's voice, but is instead that of a white aristocrat in the post-revolutionary era."⁵⁶⁰ In this way, and for purposes of my examination, it is important to investigate the impact of both the French and Haitian Revolutions through the eyes of a white woman who mitigates those experiences through a black protagonist – and then to see how other whites in France expanded upon those themes for myriad reasons.

Furthermore, I also share the more pragmatic view of Pratima Prasad, who writes that she "wish[es] to draw attention to the specific type of subject that Claire de Duras constructs—that of the black (European) aristocrat—which tends to be lost in more generalized discussions of race. . . . We can test the efficacy as well as the limits of the novel's emancipatory politics of race, and thereby the efficacy and limits of French Romanticism's imagination of black subjects."⁵⁶¹ As my analysis of the novel asserts, Ourika's race becomes increasingly subsumed under the guise of an impossible love affair.

⁵⁵⁹ Christopher Miller writes that *Ourika* was a "startling modern commentary on race" and that "what it says about slavery has been largely ignored," *The French Atlantic Triangle*, 159. Miller also states that the novel is a "critique on [Duras's] own class," 158-159.

⁵⁶⁰ Sepinwall, as quoted in Peabody, "Ourika in the History Classroom" *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* 107 (2009): 126.

⁵⁶¹ Pratima Prasad, *Colonialism, Race, and the French Romantic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2009), 102. She also writes: "To be sure, it would be erroneous to claim that Ourika's blackness is just a structural variation within the master plot of sentimental and Romantic alienation, one that could be easily replaced with "class" or "sexuality." Nor would it be entirely correct to say that the novel's treatment of race is without a social project of emancipation. Rather, the erasures I have highlighted in the plot of the novel point to the inadequacy of discussing race as a broad category of identity without full attention to the specific components that constitute Ourika's subjectivity. Ourika occupies the impossible position of a black European aristocrat. This position is further complicated by her gender, for, as a woman, her social integration is predicated upon her marriageability," 108-109. See also Earl G. Ingersoll, "The Appropriation of Black Experience in the *Ourika* of Claire de Duras," *The CEA Critic*, 60 (Spring/Summer 1998) : 1-13 who writes that "Ourika may be lent the author-ity [sic] to tell her own story, but those who appropriate that story for their own purposes, however praiseworthy those purposes may be, render this text a problematical representation of black experience," 2. Ingersoll also comments on Fowles' interpretation of "entering the black mind," 9.



Fig. 4.2. Anon., *Portrait anonyme d'Ourika*⁵⁶²

As a girl who grows up indulged and privileged, Ourika sees herself as French. She becomes aware of her blackness after a hushed conversation with her patron, Mme la Maréchale de B. and Madame's friend, a Marquise, discussing her unsuitability for marriage to a "true" French man. By this they mean a white and aristocratic French man. As she grows more and more despondent, both because of her blackness and the wedding of her "brother" Charles (Mme de B.'s grandson) to a white woman, her story takes on a more tragic tone. That the person to whom Ourika details her story is a doctor is calculated. As a white male scientist, his rendering not only corroborates Ourika's story, but his presence also validates her tale.⁵⁶³ The young doctor attempts to comfort her and cure her malady, but ultimately, he is unsuccessful. Ourika, who seeks solace in a dilapidated convent, is beyond saving – she succumbs to her illness and dies.

The reappearance of the convent – a recurring narrative in my project – situates representations of black women within a specific Christian discourse – one that often emphasized Christian charity on the part of white French men and women, and redemption and inclusion into an alternative place for black women who chose to submit themselves to an ultimate authority: God.⁵⁶⁴ Either way, Frenchness – and thus full participation in the French nation – remained out of bounds for black women in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like Pauline Villeneuve,

⁵⁶² Note that Ourika wears pearls, but she wears some of them as a high armband – in an unconventional manner that reflects the symbolically important armband of the real (house-pet) Ourika (fig. 4.1). Also her dress is falling off one shoulder, giving her a slightly unkempt – seductive – appearance.

⁵⁶³ Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, "Ourika and Women's Literary Tradition in France," 74-75.

⁵⁶⁴ For a discussion on the black-veiled Ursuline nuns in the order that Ourika finds a place, see Christine De Vinne, "Religion under Revolution in Ourika," *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009) : 37-44.

Ourika was sequestered and happily out of sight (and mind).⁵⁶⁵ Duras's placement of Ourika in the convent also provided the opportunity for the doctor to assert his "scientific superiority" over religious fervor, especially since Ourika is perishing under its tutelage: "the anticlerical prejudices of my early years had been reawakened."⁵⁶⁶

The act that begins the story, the actual purchase of Ourika, is quickly skimmed over, with the claim that Ourika was in fact "rescued from slavery, placed under the protection of Madame de B.—it was as if my life had been twice saved."⁵⁶⁷ The first time was when the Chevalier de B. "took pity and bought me."⁵⁶⁸ The fictional Ourika believes herself to be a legitimate member of Madame's family; in fact, her first memories are "of Mme de B's drawing room. I spent my life there, loved by her, fondled, spoiled by all her friends, loaded with presents, praised, held up as the most clever and endearing of children."⁵⁶⁹ She also details the dress — "oriental costume" — that she wore as a child.⁵⁷⁰ Later, when Ourika is older and a talented dancer, Madame holds a ball, which Ourika realizes afterwards, was "really to display me, much to my advantage, in a quadrille symbolizing the four corners of the globe. I was to represent Africa."⁵⁷¹ She is made to dance a national dance of Africa, with a white partner who covers his face in black crepe, "a disguise," Ourika remarks, "I did not need."⁵⁷² Yet even in the midst of these required performances, Ourika does feel herself deeply cared for, and her life as one of gentility and grace.

"What kind of man would marry a negress?"

On a fateful day, Duras's Ourika is brought face-to-face with her race, and thus her unsuitability for the life for which she has been exquisitely prepared. She overhears a conversation about herself, and suddenly the scales fall from her eyes: "I comprehended all. I was black."⁵⁷³ The marquise plainly states, wishful thinking of Madame de B. or no, that one "is powerless against evils that arise from deliberately upsetting the natural order of things. Ourika has flouted her natural destiny. She has entered society without its permission. It will have its revenge."⁵⁷⁴ In actuality, it is Madame de B. who has "flouted" Ourika's "natural destiny," which was neither nature nor destined. Nevertheless, it is Ourika who will be punished by Madame's folly. Ourika has been, for the majority of the story, somewhat contemptuous of those not aristocratic — ironic since her race now precludes her admission to nobility. With this new-found knowledge, Ourika is thrust into an identity crisis. "My face revolted me, I no longer dared to look in a mirror. My black hands seemed like monkey's paws. I exaggerated my ugliness to myself, and this skin color of mine seemed to be like the brand of shame."⁵⁷⁵

Republic and Revolution

In Duras's text, Ourika's crisis of faith coincides with the French Revolution. As she realizes the hopelessness of her own situation, Ourika also sees the false hopes of the Republican idea: "I

⁵⁶⁵ Ourika ending up in a convent here also gestures to the ongoing scenario of hiding embarrassing people, and those one wanted out of the way, into convents and monasteries. See also chap. 2 of this dissertation for a discussion on Pauline Villeneuve and the Black Nun of Moret.

⁵⁶⁶ Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, 3-4.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 8. The irony of wearing this costume is initially lost on Ourika.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

soon stopped being the dupe of their false notion of fraternity. Realizing that people still found time, in all their adversity, to despise me, I gave up hope.”⁵⁷⁶ And then a major moment occurs that solidifies Ourika’s self-hatred: the Revolution in Saint Domingue.

About that time talk started of emancipating the Negroes. Of course this question passionately interested me. I still cherished the illusion that at least somewhere else in the world there were others like myself. I knew they were not happy and I supposed them noble-hearted. I was eager to know what would happen to them. But alas, I soon learned my lesson. The Santo Domingo massacres gave me cause for fresh and heartrending sadness. Till then I had regretted belonging to a race of outcasts. Now I had the shame of belonging to a race of barbarous murderers.⁵⁷⁷

The Revolution in Saint Domingue removes for Ourika her last place of possible refuge. “Sometimes I used to tell myself that, poor negress though I was, I still belonged with all the noblest spirits, because of our shared longing for justice.”⁵⁷⁸ Using Ourika to verbalize the barbarity of blacks in Saint Domingue keeps the discussion within blackness. The atrocities at the hands of whites remains invisible, as does a discussion that, by her education and upbringing, Ourika should not belong to any group of outcasts. It is her race, in Duras’s estimation, that keeps Ourika there.

Likewise, Ourika is appalled at the execution of the King – she calls it, “that outrage.”⁵⁷⁹ She, like her patroness, is a monarchist. Duras’s Ourika also tells of the murder of Madame de B’s friends (Madame herself is spared prison because of her political alliances): “Every evening we read of the sentencing and guillotining of friends of Mme de B. . . . We learn later that she had indeed been about to suffer [death by guillotine] when Robespierre’s death brought this nightmarish time to an end.”⁵⁸⁰

During the story, Charles marries a suitable young woman (a rich white heiress named Mademoiselle Anaïs de Thémînes), whose wealth restores his fortune, and with whom he has a son. Ourika is both devastated by the loss of him in her life, and angered by his cluelessness that she cannot achieve a similar next phase in her life: “I was never to be a sister, a wife, a mother myself.”⁵⁸¹ As the Terror ends and friends return, Ourika sees the glances and asides from whites as a constant rebuke:

Naturally the presence of a black woman enjoying the close confidence of Mme de B. had to be explained. These explanations martyred me. I should have liked to be transported back to my uncivilized native land and its savage inhabitants—less frightening to me than this merciless society that declared me guilty of a crime that it alone had committed.⁵⁸²

As the hopelessness of her existence grows, she becomes increasingly ill. She believes that even enslavement is better than the life she is now leading:

What did it matter that I might now have been the black slave of some rich planter? Scorched by the sun, I should be laboring on someone else’s land. But I would have a poor hut of my own to go to at day’s end; a partner in my life, children of my own race who would call me their mother, who would kiss my face without

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 21. It is interesting that Duras chose the Spanish spelling of “Saint Domingue.” Was it perhaps a way of further distancing French involvement, and thus culpability?

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 17-18.

⁵⁸² Ibid., 28-29.

disgust, who would rest their heads against my neck and sleep in my arms. I had done nothing—and yet here I was, condemned never to know the only feelings my heart was created for.⁵⁸³

In Ourika's estimation, even the enslaved have more freedom than she does in France. At the very least, if she were a slave, she would be with her "own kind" and have at the least the possibility of love of a husband and children.

The marquise confronts Ourika, telling her the real reason for her melancholy: her love for Charles. Ourika remarks that it is her race and social situation that brings her such unhappiness. The marquise, unconvinced, venomously declares that "all your misery, all your suffering comes from just one thing: an insane and doomed passion for Charles. And if you weren't madly in love with him, you could come perfectly well to terms with being black. I wish you good day, Ourika. I'm going now. And make no mistake, with far less sympathy for you than when I entered this room."⁵⁸⁴ Inexplicably, Ourika concurs: "But all through this, a mysterious voice cried deep in my heart: she is right."⁵⁸⁵

For all practical purposes, the Ourika that Duras creates *is* a French woman, raised with what she calls "all that is considered essential for a girl's perfect education."⁵⁸⁶ Thus, she learns to sing, to paint, to speak multiple languages, to read poetry, to dance, and to exercise her ability to converse.⁵⁸⁷ Under Madame's tutelage, nothing is held back from Ourika, and thus, nothing is beyond her reach – so much so that she states: "There was nothing to warn me that the color of my skin might be a disadvantage."⁵⁸⁸ Given the ideology of the time that maintained that blacks were unable to be more than slaves, her way of thinking called into question the surety of such a trajectory. It was not blackness that impaired progress among blacks, but *opportunity*.⁵⁸⁹ But in equating Ourika's sadness with the triviality of love, Duras turns her back on this stunning realization. It is not race that holds back Ourika. It is unrequited love! Her only option is to turn away from her folly and becomes a nun (fig. 4.3).

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸⁹ Dorothy Kelly takes this idea even further, writing that "no matter how exceptional Ourika is, how well brought up and educated, she cannot escape the social machine that defines her as a nonaristocratic black woman—a person with no social or economic capital, nothing to give to any prospective family." See Dorothy Kelly, "Ourika and the Reproduction of Social Forms: Duras and Bourdieu," *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009) : 88.



**Gravure d'après un tableau du baron Gérard
(1823):
"Ourika raconte son histoire et ses malheurs"**

Fig. 4.3. François Gérard, *Ourika raconte son histoire et ses malheurs*, Gravure d'après un tableau du baron Gérard, 1823, oil on canvas⁵⁹⁰

In Duras's novel, the discourse on race remains unfinished, being dismissed for the sake of unrequited love. Meanwhile, gender roles remain unquestioned. Ourika's status precludes her from wanting anything more than a proper marriage and motherhood.⁵⁹¹ It never occurs to her to reject these gender boundaries. Nothing else can fulfill her.⁵⁹² Thus the female reader is offered the model that gender remains stable for her as well. Women are not to imagine anything more than a husband and children.

Duras and her Colonial Origins

Duras was an émigré; her mother was a white Creole from Martinique and her father had a "colonial enterprise" in Haiti, while her in-laws "were major landowners in Haiti." Heather Brady writes:

Claire may have never visited Martinique or Saint-Domingue but her exile experience gave her direct knowledge of the plantation system and the shifting power relations in the transatlantic world. It is no longer

⁵⁹⁰ See Thérèse De Raedt, "Ourika in Black and White: Textual and Visual Interplay," 45-69 for a detailed discussion of Gérard, the official painter of Napoleon.

⁵⁹¹ For a discussion of the importance of marriage for French aristocracy and the taboo of miscegenation, see Barbara Woshinsky, "Teachings of *Ourika*," *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009); and Michelle Chilcoat, "Civility, Marriage, and the Impossible French Citizen: From *Ourika* to *Zouzou* and *Princesse Tam Tam*," *Colby Quarterly*, 37:2 (June 2001).

⁵⁹² Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, "Ourika and Women's Literary Tradition in France," 76; a similar view is also voiced by Carolyn Fay, "He Said, She Said: *Ourika* in a Gender Studies Course," 145-150, both in *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, vol. 107 (January 1, 2009). Dorothy Kelly writes that Ourika "does not reject her society; rather, she mourns the fact that she is not able to be included in it," 89.

necessary to imagine what lessons the impressionable young writer might have learned or rejected from her mother's colonial family, who worked to suppress the slave revolts in Haiti. In place of the author's own memoir, the Rouvray family letters offer insight into *Ourika's* nostalgic, colonial worldview along with its condemnation of the Haitian Revolution.⁵⁹³

For Duras, it did not seem crucial to identify the exact date when the story begins because, for her, the changes in this historical period conflate into an unspecified conglomeration of political trauma and instability. Jenson writes that "this instability [during the Napoleonic era and the Restoration] of historical memory in *Ourika*, in which different regimes are collapsed into one ruined historical edifice, arguably bears greater significance than a well-defined date either before or after 1804 [when the story of *Ourika* supposedly begins]." Moreover, Jenson correctly notes that the timing is the only "direct allusion to this insurrection [in Saint Domingue] – to its early phases rather than to the moment of its triumph in 1804."⁵⁹⁴ Her reluctance to see Saint Domingue in its entirety, or in a period of black power over white forces spoke to the level of denial about what actually had happened there.⁵⁹⁵

However much Saint Domingue was erased from her narrative, and no matter how much guests were said to have enjoyed her storytelling, not everyone greeted Madame de Duras's story with amusement or appreciation. O'Connell writes that some looked upon Duras's work with "suspicion." He states that in "championing social outsiders . . . [Duras] attacked the assumptions upon which the stratified social system of the Restoration regime was based."⁵⁹⁶ Stendahl hated it, as did the plantocracy in Martinique.⁵⁹⁷ In fact, she was a source of "ridicule and notoriety" – women at other salons in Paris "nicknamed her Ourika . . . and her two daughters [Félicie and Clara] Bourgeonika and Bourika."⁵⁹⁸ The normal types of salon snipping aside, and beside the fact that as a woman in the public arena she would not be immune to criticism, the addition of race to this gossip adds another dimension. It is interesting that in order to negate the Duchess, her detractors chose to chastise her – not for usurping gender roles by the fact of her writing – but by equating her with her black protagonist. This mostly likely would have been her greatest vulnerability. In doing so, they referenced Duras's ties to the colonies (thereby implying colonial blood), calling her very Frenchness into question. Moreover, this rendered both her and her daughters unsuitable for the benefits of their noble stations. For white women accused of blackness, the results could prove devastating.⁵⁹⁹ Her own aristocratic status could not fully protect her – even though she was a

⁵⁹³ Brady, "Recovering Claire de Duras's Creole Inheritance: Race and Gender in the Exile's Correspondence of her Saint-Domingue Family," 53. Brady states in note 17, that "interestingly, *Ourika* never identifies Madame de B. as her mother only as her benefactress." Most likely because she was *not* her mother! Nor apparently, could Duras see a way for *Ourika* to do so in the novel.

⁵⁹⁴ Jenson, 46.

⁵⁹⁵ David O'Connell, "*Ourika*: Black Face, White Mask," *The French Review*, Special Issue, No. 6, Studies on the French Novel (Spring, 1974): 48, 50. O'Connell also states that Duras' work was more concerned with psychological rather than social issues. I wonder whether the two can or even should be separated in this case. See also Deborah Jenson, 46.

⁵⁹⁶ David O'Connell, "*Ourika*: Black Face, White Mask," 49.

⁵⁹⁷ See Crofts, 99 and also 117-118.

⁵⁹⁸ Bourika is also slang for "donkey." Françoise Massardier-Kenney, 189, footnote 8. Massardier-Kenney writes that in calling Duras "*Ourika*," they were . . . perhaps more perceptive than they knew," 165. Marylee Crofts calls the names "affectionate," but I don't see how they could be!

⁵⁹⁹ There was the additional problem, Crofts writes, for women writers – their work was seen as autobiographical. This would be even more problematic for Duras given that her protagonist was a black, and thus, inauthentic aristocrat. See Crofts, 100-104.

woman of some power.⁶⁰⁰ In this case, her writing on Ourika threatened to exile her as others manipulated her story.

While Duras's colonial origins surely mattered, her choice to "speak for," or through, a black character provided license to ridicule and slander her.⁶⁰¹ The text was both a rebuke at civility and race, and a reinforcement of racialized attitudes and practices. Even though she was not a refugee from Saint Domingue, she remained just as tainted by virtue of her so-called colonial past, thus it is not surprising that this is the way that her contemporaries chose to attack her. The accusation of blackness on French soil was charged – a sure sign of diminishment – and was used to encourage silence on the part of the offender. However, slippages often emerged. White French women claiming blackness could use Ourika's piety and sacrifice as proof of their own. Or more dangerously, French women could present an understanding of the so-called power of black female sexuality to white French men (so strong in French colonial rhetoric) as a means of asserting their *own* sexuality. These responses spoke to the larger tensions within French society arising from the reintegration of colonies and metropole.

It is interesting to contrast the reactions to Duras herself and to the representations of Ourika she created: Duras's appropriation of Ourika's voice caused her social standing to come under intense scrutiny, while at the same time her fictionalized Ourika became a seed for other writers and artists. To the returning refugees who must have felt that their Frenchness was not in question, Ourika reminded them that that stance was precarious, at best.

Racial Drag

Historian Philippe Perrot's history of fashion during the Second Empire does much to situate the importance of clothing in nineteenth-century French society, including a brief discussion of transvestism.⁶⁰² I find that Perrot's boundaries need to be expanded to include race, specifically racial cross-dressing – not just through fashion, but also in practices and behaviors – to examine the implications of using the black body to denaturalize and renaturalize racial and gender boundaries. While white women were able to "play" at other identities through their clothing – portraying black women on stage; writing as if in Bartmann's hand (ten years after her death); or dressing as Ourika – dangers existed in this type of mimicry. I argue that doing so allowed white French men and women to take popular (mis)conceptions of black womanhood and manipulate them. I also explore the issues that can arise from such appropriations, particularly their impact on a very gender-specific brand of French national identity.

⁶⁰⁰ "As a friend of M. de Choiseul, she had been able, during his long tenure a Minister of the Marine, to help many people." See the novel, *Ourika*, 23.

⁶⁰¹ Empress Josephine endured gossip due to her colonial origins as well, although there is no evidence that she was partially black. In a memoir of Napoleon Bonaparte, his private secretary, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, took pains to include a caveat about Josephine's colonial origins, writing, "The reader must remember that the term 'creole' does not imply any taint of black blood, but only that the person, of European family, had been born in the West Indies." Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte*, ed. by R.W. Phipps (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1885), 43. The conversation about her alleged blackness continues to this day. I also refer back to the caricatures of Madame Tallien in the introduction. Madame Tallien was often accused of influencing or dominating her husband, Jean-Lambert Tallien, when it came to political questions. He was an influential deputy in the National Convention and she was suspected of telling him what to say, do, how to vote, etc. Having said that, the picture is from 1796, by which point Tallien's star had waned somewhat. However, at that time Madame Tallien was both running salons and having affairs with other important politicians.

⁶⁰² Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 6, 19.

On 29 October 1793 (8 Brumaire, Year II), the Convention declared that what a person could or could not wear was no longer legally mandated.⁶⁰³ Significantly however, the law required that, while one had more choices of clothing, attire still had to be sex/gender appropriate. A subsequent law in 1800 forbade Parisian women from wearing trousers without permission.⁶⁰⁴ It was already apparent that dressing outside of one's sex denaturalized rules about social order. As it had been necessary to see one's status through clothing in *ancien régime* France, it was now necessary to legislate identifying one's gender through clothing in the post-Revolutionary period. And while it might not be possible to fully control the inner desire of citizens (which cross-dressing could be used to express), it was possible to control the outward manifestation of it. In *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber writes that in the case of black transvestites,

We are dealing here with a power differential on a sliding scale, a cultural rhetoric of difference as doubly inflected by race and gender, so that 'passing' becomes the key word to describe the ways in which each crosses over into the terrain of the other (black to white, or white to black, male to female or female to male), then we should expect that the political valence of male-to-female transvestism in African American culture might contrast even more vividly with that of female-to-male transvestism than it does when racial inequality is not a complicating factor.⁶⁰⁵

She cautions, however, that once one set of boundaries is crossed, fears of crossing other boundaries, and thus destabilizing cultural behavior, abound.⁶⁰⁶ Based on the legislation enacted, the act of cross-dressing was fraught with peril. Anne McClintock argues the way that cross-dressing works as an “historical phenomenon” – a type of “sumptuary panic” – whereas style acts as a reaction to “periods of social turbulence.”⁶⁰⁷

In other words, racial transvestism⁶⁰⁸ on the part of white French peoples reveals both the turbulent political environment of France's post-colonial crisis and the myriad reactions to it. I am arguing that white French men and women did more than simply cross-dress using the black female body. Rather, they performed a type of racial drag that allowed them to appropriate the black female identity as a means toward their own racial uplift. This brings us back to a problem first discussed in chapter one: that while blacks were denigrated, white French women were playing at being more like them in certain ways. As this chapter discusses, there were ways of attempting to mitigate this problem, even if they were not always successful.

The remainder of this chapter looks at Ourika Mania, particularly racial drag via white representations of Ourika. While the freedom to adopt a black female identity could conjure up titillation and transgression, it might also be seen by some as empowering and courageous. In the case of white French women, it was both a question of how successfully one crossed traditional boundaries of race, class and gender – how well they did it, perhaps even better than the “original” –

⁶⁰³ “No person of either sex can force any citizen or citizeness to dress in a particular fashion. . . . Each is free to wear such clothing or attire of his sex that he chooses.” See Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (London: Oxford/Berg, 1998). 48. See chap. 1 for a discussion on sumptuary laws.

⁶⁰⁴ Jeanne d'Arc is only one of several women who could technically be called cross-dressers. Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, Barrone Dudevant (George Sand) was one of the more famous nineteenth-century French women who commonly dressed in trousers.

⁶⁰⁵ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 274. Garber is writing about black transvestites in American culture, so I am mindful of the cultural differences here. However, I am most interested in her notions of “boundary crossing” based upon race.

⁶⁰⁶ And vice versa. See Garber, 274.

⁶⁰⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 174.

⁶⁰⁸ Racial transvestism is not a new concept. For a discussion, see Greg Tate, *Everything but the Burden*, discussed in the introduction of this dissertation.

as it was of making sure that everyone still knew who they “truly” were.⁶⁰⁹ The ultimate challenge could be that when one is done playing with his or her new identity, they had not completely alienated their fellow citizens and permanently marked themselves as different. In the case of white French men, understanding that the actual mimic was white was helpful in distancing them from an inappropriate sexual response to a black body, while reinforcing the stance that a racialized body could not be accepted as authentically French.

Ourika Mania

In the opening chapter of his biography of Balzac, Frederick Lawton wrote that Balzac’s novels brought to light the fragility of French cultural and political life after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire and the restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy. Comparing the former regime with the latter (Napoleon had recognized the old nobility and also instituted his own), Lawton cited the resumption of a specific type of female-centered salon as proof of these changes. It was as if the return of the Monarchy, in Lawton’s estimation, had highlighted the instability of the post-Revolutionary world. Lawton goes on to discuss a kind of “fashion globalization,” where white French men and women now had the choice of an array of exotic materials and designs. He then makes a remarkable statement:

With the re-establishment of peace, literary and toilet pre-occupations began to assert their claims. The *Ourika* of the Duchess de Duras took Paris by storm. Her heroine, the young Senegal negress, gave her name to dresses, hats, and bonnets. Everything was Ourika. The prettiest Parisian women yearned to be black, and regretted not having been born in darkest Africa.⁶¹⁰

Lawton’s belief that all Parisian women actually wanted to be black is hardly credible, especially given longstanding French colonial rhetoric about the inferior savages in Africa and France’s black colonies. Nor is it likely that Ourika “gave” her name to much of anything. Rather, I take his assertion to mean that many white women in Paris, in their desperation to be *au courant* or scandalous, were willing to go to absurd lengths, even as far as to imitate black characters. Yet it is also true that works about Ourika contributed to a brief Ourika craze.

1824-25 was a busy year for all things Ourika. Fashionable Parisians were able to access Ourika as a commodity via such foods as Ourika cutlets and Ourika biscuits.⁶¹¹ There were at least four plays (some say six plays, but if so, not all of their names survive).⁶¹² Two opened 24 March 1824: *Ourika, ou La Nègresse, drame en un acte*, by Ferd. de Villeneuve and Ch. Depeuty (which ran until 4 April) at the Théâtre du Gymnase-Dramatique, and *Ourika, ou La Petite Nègresse, drame en un acte*,

⁶⁰⁹ McClintock writes that “cross-dressers seldom seek the security of a perfect imitation; rather, they desire that delicious impersonation that belies complete disguise: something readable, a foot that is too big, a subtle gesture or the peculiar grain of the voice,” McClintock, 175.

⁶¹⁰ Frederick Lawton, *Balzac*, 5. I need to explain my use of Lawton here. Lawton was neither French, nor did he live in the time of Ourika mania in France. Moreover, there is nary a footnote in Lawton’s text, so there is no way to verify his assertions. Lawton was hardly a scholar; his work reads more like a biography of gossip about Balzac than a history of his life. His overstatement about Ourika further strengthens my assessment. However, as in the case of the purported memoirs of the Duchess du Barry, the work is interesting to me because of its representation of blackness through Ourika, a popular nineteenth century topic. And it is accurate that Ourika did inspire numerous fashion trends in France at the time the book bearing her name was being spoken about in France.

⁶¹¹ Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 1997), 347. A note about Ourika food; as of this time, I have found no additional information about Ourika biscuits and ham other than they existed. In addition, I have been unsuccessful in finding advertisements in French journals or newspapers for any of the products.

⁶¹² Another one, by someone named Alexandre Duval, was to open at the *Comédie-Française*, but I do not believe it did. See Sylvie Chalaye, *Les Ourika du Boulevard* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2003), xiii. See also Crofts, 153-154.

mêlé de couplets, imité du roman, by Mélesville and Carmouche at the Théâtre des Variétés (which ran ten days longer). In addition *Ourika, ou l'Orpheline Africaine*, by Merle and De Courcy, ran eight performances (3-13 April) at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin. A one-act musical appeared named *Ourika, the Orphan of Senegal*.⁶¹³ *La Pandore* stated: « *Comblée d'éloges dans les cercles du noble faubourg, Ourika est venue échouer sur les théâtres de la ville, et ce que tant de personnages titrés avaient applaudi a été sifflé par les public.* »⁶¹⁴ There were several poems as well: “Ourika élégie” by Mme Emile de Girardin (née Delphine Gay) and Madame Pierre-Ange Vieillard’s “Ourika, stances élégiaques” both in 1824. *Ourika, l'Africaine*, by Count Gaspard de Pons was published the following year. Literary scholar Roger Little writes that author Ulric Guttinger also wrote a poem about her.⁶¹⁵ A novella by Mme M.-A. Dudon, titled *La Nouvelle Ourika, ou les avantages de l'éducation*, appeared as well. The painter Gérard rendered her in 1825 (fig. 4.3); while Alfred Johannot created an etching.

My project is not to examine all of these texts for their literary or theatrical merit, for others have done this eloquently.⁶¹⁶ I will rather examine the whole Ourika mania in its historical context by looking into one of the most important journals of the Restoration. In the *Journal des débats politique et littéraires* in 1824, there were a total of forty-four specific mentions of blacks. As the chart shows (fig. 4.4), Africa was mentioned a total of four times for the year, including one specific reference to the slave trade; Guadeloupe was discussed twice, also including a mention of the slave trade. Men of color were listed four times, in this case only because of a spectacle called « *Le Mulâtre*, » with neither elaboration nor reviews for the show. The two colonies (or former colonies) that received the most ink were Martinique and Saint Domingue, with eleven and seven mentions respectively.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ *Ourika, the Orphan of Senegal*, a petite drama, in One Act with songs, music by George Perry of the Haymarket; published and translated from the French by Joseph Ebsworth, 30 pages.

⁶¹⁴ *La Pandore*, 4 avril 1824 no. 264, as quoted in Chalaye, ix.

⁶¹⁵ Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, introduction. Hoffman concurs, calling it « *L'insipide romance* » but it seems to have been a musical: « *mise en musique par Amédée de Beauplan.* »

⁶¹⁶ Mary Jane Cowles, “The Subjectivity of the Colonial Subject from Olympe de Gouges to Mme de Duras,” *L'Esprit Créateur*, 47:4 (2007) : 29-43, Michelle Chilcoat, “Confinement, the Family Institution, and the Case of Claire de Duras’ *Ourika*.” 38:3. (Fall 1998) : 6-16. Damon Dimauro, “*Ourika*, or Galatea Reverts to Stone,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, (Spring-Summer 2000) : 187. David O’Connell, “*Ourika*: Black Face, White Mask,” 47-56. Rouillard, 207-22. Eileen Warburton, 165-186, Weil, 111-27. See also Barbara T. Cooper, “Staging *Ourika* and the spectacle of difference”, in *Ethnography in French Literature*, ed. B. Norman, Rodopi (Amsterdam: Eds. Rodopi, 1996), 97-114. There is also a 2008 paper by Michelle Cheyne, entitled “Love no Other: Staging Race and Desire in French Restoration Drama.” Presented at *L'Année balzacienne* 2009.

⁶¹⁷ There had been a slave insurrection in Martinique in 1822, with mass deportations following in 1824. Perhaps this accounts for some of the increased conversations about Martinique in France.

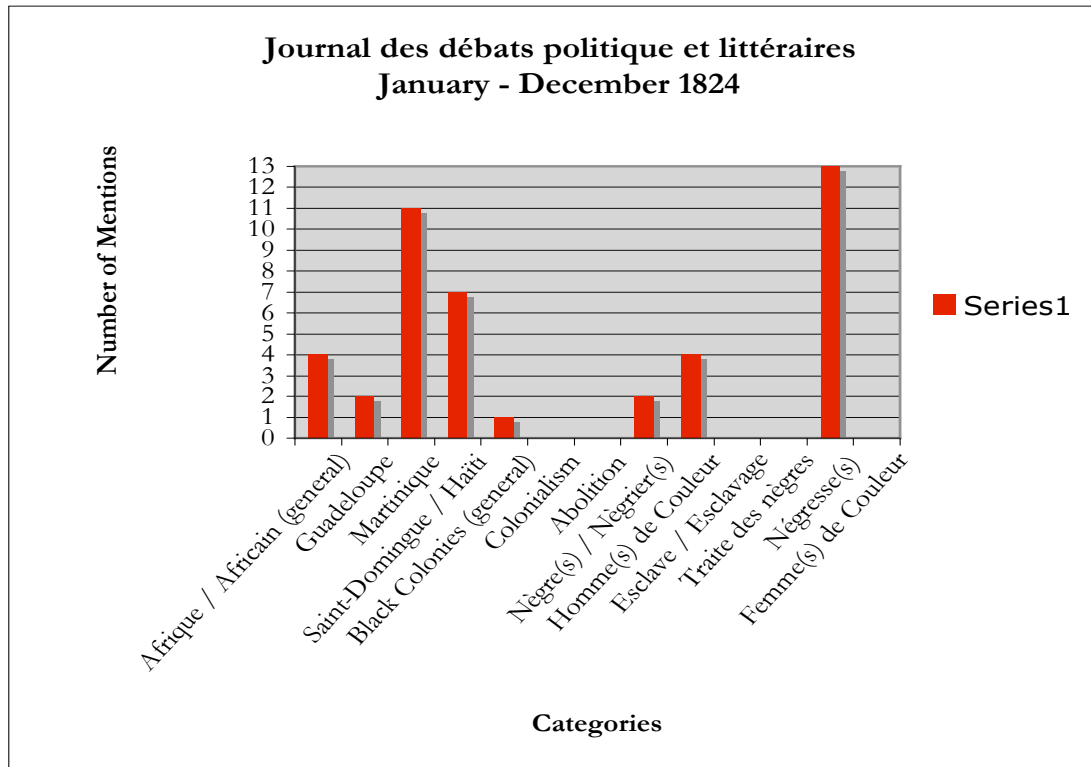


Fig. 4.4. Mention of black issues, the entire year of 1824, *Journal des débats politique et littéraires*

Mentions of black women in the *Journal des débats politique et littéraires* were particularly high, but the numbers alone are a bit misleading because of several stage productions about one subject: Ourika. In fact, twelve of the thirteen references about black women were in reference to her. Literary critic Sainte-Beuve stated that « *les romans-nouvelles de Mme du Duras ont donné naissance à tout un petit genre.* »⁶¹⁸ Several newspapers in Great Britain also spoke of the Ourika craze. A review of *Ourika* in *The Literary Magnet* noted that “At Paris, ‘Ourika’ is a kind of talisman, that excited both the high and low, and rich and poor. You hear of nothing but ‘Ourika bonnets’ and ‘Ourika dresses.’ In short, all Paris is ‘Ourika’ mad, so great an interest has this little story excited.”⁶¹⁹ The review goes on to state, however, that the British reviewer did not share in France’s excitement in Ourika’s goodness: “she represents herself as being considered the personification of a union of the Muses and Graces. In short, if it was not for her unfortunate complexion, she would be nothing less than a divinity.”⁶²⁰ Nor did he share France’s overall taste in literature: “There is a commonplace tone about the story not at all to our heathenish English taste. We are stubborn enough to remain unmoved at all the mawkish sensibility and high-flown sentimentality of the heroine; and are hard-hearted enough to affirm, we did not shed one tear during the whole of her melancholy recital.”⁶²¹

New Monthly Magazine wrote an equally sarcastic review, stating both that “This romance has one incontestable merit, that of being short,” and “on the whole, for a first attempt, and that by a Duchess, it is rather a credible production. There are, however, a thousand and one stories of equal

⁶¹⁸ Sainte-Beuve as quoted in Duras, Little edition, 98.

⁶¹⁹ Tobias Merton, ed., *The Literary Magnet of the Belles Lettres, Science, and the Fine Arts* (London, 1824), 3.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

merit written by female hands, many of which are infinitely superior.”⁶²² *The Morning Chronicle's Literary Gazette* wrote:

About a month ago, a very pretty story, under this title, was published in Paris. It soon not only attracted attention, but became ‘quite the rage;’ and every thing in fashion, and drama, and picture, has since been Ourika. There are Ourika dresses, Ourika vaudevilles, Ourika prints. Every month and every Journal has rung, and is ringing with Ourika.⁶²³

While not as quite as overwrought as Lawton’s description of the popularity of all things Ourika, it does strongly suggest that the influence of Ourika was far-reaching enough that other countries felt compelled to comment upon it.⁶²⁴ Duras’ response proved that imitation was not the best form of flattery. In a letter to a friend she wrote: « *on en a fait cent comédies plus ridicules les unes que les autres.* »⁶²⁵

Appropriating and Imposing Black Female Identity: Ourika Fashions

Items such as jewelry, use of color, and hairstyles entered into conversations about Ourika as well. A number of clothing items or styles were named after Ourika. In chapter 22 (in the late nineteenth century) of *The History of Fashion in France or The Dress of Women from the Gallo-Roman Period to the Present Time*, the authors, Mrs. Cashel Hoey and Mr. John Lillie, recount the fashions during the “reign of Louis XVIII and Charles X.” The “lamentable presence of the allied armies in our capital” forced French society to “adopt some fashion from abroad,”⁶²⁶ yet France still found time for style.

In 1824, the Duchess de Duras brought out her romance, ‘Ourika,’ which was already known and admired at court, at the Royal Printing House, as if it were a scientific work. It was received with rapture by the general public, and was spoken of as the ‘Atala of the Salons.’ There were ‘Ourika’ bonnets, caps, gowns, Ourika shawls, and a colour named Ourika. This sort of passing enthusiasm recurred very frequently; and no sooner had a book or a circumstance obtained the notice of the public, than it received consecration, as it were, from the fashionable world.⁶²⁷

Then to emphasize the fast moving and oft-silly styles, the authors of *The History of Fashion in France* identify other brief color trends, including “Trocadéro, amorous toad, spider meditating crime, and frightened mouse.”⁶²⁸ Yet I think it unwise to gloss over this Ourika phenomenon by relegating it to the same pile of nonsensical trends with unfortunate names.

Fashion experts also spoke of Ourika collars, feathers, cuffs, and ribbons; the “Ourika” colors were a light chocolate, as well as shades of blue, orange and red. This style was known as “à la Ourika or à l’Ourika”.⁶²⁹ An article entitled “Les Ourikas” in the *Journal des Dames et des Modes*

⁶²² *New Monthly Magazine*, review of *Ourika; ou la Nègresse*, 270.

⁶²³ *The Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, 3 June 1824.

⁶²⁴ In England, articles on Ourika were also published in *The Literary Gazette* on 17 January, and 22 and 29 May 1824; in the *Kaleidoscope; or, Literary and scientific mirror*, 8 and 15 June 1824; the *Weekly Entertainer and West of England Miscellany*, 7, 14, 21, and 28 June 1824; and in the *Lady's Monthly Museum, or, Polite repository of amusement and instruction*, 20 July 1824. In America, writing about Ourika appeared in *The Atlantic Magazine* on 1 October 1824; *The United States Literary Gazette* on 15 October 1824; and *The New-York Mirror: a Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts* on 29 January 1825; and 23 July 1831.

⁶²⁵ Chalaye, xv.

⁶²⁶ Challamel, Augustin, *The history of fashion in France; or, The dress of women from the Gallo-Roman period to the present time*. From the French of M. Augustin Challamel. By Mrs. Cashel Hoey and Mr. John Lillie. (New York : Scribner & Welford, 1882), 197.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 201. I, of course, do not believe that fashion is silly. Fashion, as my analysis makes clear, is equally historical as socially defining expression, and from an aesthetic perspective, equally inexplicable.

⁶²⁹ Crofts, 5.

under the heading of “Modes Parisiennes” on 25 April 1824 stated: « *Les petites filles, les demoiselles toutes jeunes portent en collier, un grand nombre des perles de corail, montées à plat et retenus dans cette disposition par une plaque oblongue aussi en corail. Ce collier se nomme à l’Ourika.* »⁶³⁰ If, as the *History of Fashion* posits, “it is therefore perfectly true to say that a history of fashion in women’s dress in France has a singular likeness to a history of the French female character,” what does it mean if that character is voluntarily clothed in “blackness?”⁶³¹ What if that which had begun as simply fashion accelerated, with transgressions extending beyond dress?

Through the popularization of certain styles marketed to white bourgeois women – notably the bustle, which drew attention to the buttocks – fashion embodied the fascination directed so obsessively at the backsides of black women like Bartmann. If we think back, the play about Bartmann picks up on this form of appropriation:

Amelia: Chevalier, no doubt they speak of her a great deal?

Chevalier: It is a question only of her She has some little Hottentot songs that are so gay! She takes little Hottentot steps that are so light, and in Paris they so cherish all that which is exquisite. All our ladies have already ordered for this winter dresses and overcoats in Hottentot styles.⁶³²

While I can find no direct evidence that these dresses and overcoats actually existed, there was already a discussion (see the 7 November letter in the *Journal de Paris*) that white French women are susceptible to altering their existing fashion (and their sense) to mimic the latest stylistic whims – to say nothing of white French women ignoring sumptuary laws designed to differentiate and elevate them in order to dress like their “colored” counterparts. The play makes clear that Bartmann as a spectacle had far-reaching appeal. I believe that fashion was already working out its preoccupation with black female bodies (or parts of their bodies), as in the form of the bustle. For those who saw Bartmann’s ample bottom on stage, here was the same silhouette on a white female body – but covered for propriety’s sake. However, one could imagine – without retribution – what was beneath it.⁶³³ This phenomenon was echoed some ten years later with “Ourika.”⁶³⁴

As I discussed earlier, sumptuary laws stipulated that gender and noble standing needed to be written on the body.⁶³⁵ Racial legislation demanded that race also needed to be seen on the body.

⁶³⁰ April 25, 1824, “Modes Parisiennes,” *Journal des Dames et Des Modes*, 447. Information also was detailed in the *Petit Courrier des dames*. See Crofts, 155.

⁶³¹ *History of Fashion*, 4.

⁶³² “The Hottentot Venus, or Hatred of Frenchwomen,” appendix, *Black Venus*, 138.

⁶³³ Jill Fields writes that “the core of Hottentot eroticism was the much discussed Hottentot apron, the extended labia minora. An apron is also an article of clothing, and Sara Baartman was famously caricatured wearing a small apron that shielded her genitals from probing, fascinated gazes. Sharpley-Whiting, Jan Pieterse, and Anne McClintock direct attention to the apron’s erotic meaning in association with a related figure of male desire and fantasy, the domestic servant. Sara Baartman herself worked as a domestic servant, and, during the nineteenth century, there were increasing numbers of domestic servants working in middle-class households. By 1880 54% of American women who worked for wages in cities were employed as domestic servants. Similar trends occurred in Europe.” Jill Fields, “From Black Venus to Blonde Venus: The Meaning of Black Lingerie,” *Women’s History Review*, 15:4 (September 2006) : 611-623. See also Jill Fields, *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie and Sexuality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). 126.

⁶³⁴ Perrot writes that fashion can “endow the individual with a new identity, realized through new forms of expression. Exploiting various techniques and artifices, this elaboration of and on the body multiplies its real and factitious aspects over time, always holding back from a complete revelation to maximize partial glimpses, concealing what had been displayed while uncovering what had been concealed. In the nineteenth century, female bosoms and behinds were emphasized. . . .”, Perrot, 11.

⁶³⁵ Ffoulkes writes: “In 1802, Napoleon made formal dress (elaborate gowns for women, breeches for me) mandatory for receptions at the Tuileries, and the coronation in 1804 confirmed a new style of court dress that included the elaborate use of embroidery. The restored Bourbon courts of 1814 under Louis XVIII and Charles X in 1824 continued this use of luxury and incorporated many of the Napoleon’s elites.” Fiona Ffoulkes, “Quality always distinguishes

Fashionable forms of drag, then, exposed all of these precautions as ineffectual. Race could often not been seen – and that was a problem. Thus, perhaps biological notions of race and gender as natural were fallacies as well? Garber writes that “one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male,’ whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural.”⁶³⁶ And McClintock writes that “one of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture is to indicate the place of what I call ‘category crisis,’ disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social or aesthetic dissonances.”⁶³⁷ I argue that Ourika fashions contributed to a racial category crisis in France.

If one could appropriate racial identity, one could take that further – to changing or adapting gender identities. This type of drag encouraged trying on many different identities. What if the participant were unable or unwilling to leave the chosen identity behind? What if this were more than a “phase”? Indeed, that one might so effectively change race that the original (and privileged) race (or gender) was erased exposed serious problems: for instance, the unsettling notion that neither race nor gender was biologically determined. What if participants were too good at performative blackness? I return to Amelia, who successfully “became” Sarah Bartmann. Her ability to conjure Bartmann was what won her Adolph. As you will see in the next section, actresses were deemed to be too pretty to play Ourika, and were often afraid to wear blackface, mindful of what donning blackface could mean to their careers. What if these outward expressions of racial transgressions on the part of white women somehow revealed an *inner* desire, both in the “transvestite” and the lovers who desired them in this inappropriate manifestation? Clothing could alter a body, to be sure. But clothing also allowed public fantasy of white women in a way that a naked black body did not.

Appropriating and Imposing Black Female Identity: The Ourika Plays

One thing is clear about the Ourika plays: none were well received by critics or audiences.⁶³⁸ What is more interesting to me is that they were created and staged at all, and that writers were ready to capitalize on the craze of Ourika. While the names and characters changed depending upon the play, Ourika was always Ourika by name and by problem. She was in love with a man she had grown up with, he loved another, and her ultimate problem was one of race. All adhered to the notion that the races must be separate, or at least separated. The outrageousness of the plot surrounding this dilemma – the melodrama – was predicated only upon the imagination of the writers.

Ourika, ou La Nègresse, by Ferd. de Villeneuve and Ch. Depeuty, takes place in Marseille, not Paris. Ourika (played by Mlle Florigny) is “adopted” by the master of her father, who leaves her his fortune! Ourika is in love with Édouard, while Édouard loves only Élise. A black seaman named Captain Jack is in love with Ourika, but she remains steadfastly uninterested. Ourika believes that Édouard is going to tell her he has feelings for her – after all, he asks her to address him familiarly. She is certain she wants to marry him and be his “faithful slave”⁶³⁹ – which is ironic, since technically she is already his property. At one point, Ourika sings a “Creole” song, although it is unclear how

itself: Louis Hippolyte LeRoy and the luxury clothing industry in early nineteenth-century Paris”, *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*, eds. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 184.

⁶³⁶ Garber, 10.

⁶³⁷ McClintock’s definition of a category crisis is: “a failure of definitional distinctions, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossing from one (apparently distinct) category to another: black/white,” 16.

⁶³⁸ Chalaye, introduction.

⁶³⁹ *Ourika, ou La Nègresse*, in Chalaye, 13.

she knows it or why she would sing it. If true to the novel (and Ourika's upbringing), it would be much more likely that she would sing a French song. But doing so would make her seem too much French and not enough black.⁶⁴⁰ Audiences would have the expectation that a black character would sing something in keeping with their "true" character, but that should be an *African* song, since Ourika was from Senegal.

Black Jack loves Ourika and wants to take her back to « *notre pays* »⁶⁴¹ – for when they are home she will find him less ugly.⁶⁴² Élise sees the intimacy between Ourika and Édouard and believes he in fact does love Ourika.⁶⁴³ But when she tells him, he is horrified at the suggestion. They discuss Ourika's good qualities – but, he says, she is outside of society. When Ourika realizes Édouard's true love is not for her, she leaves her newly acquired fortune to the happy couple, and she and Jack sail away toward Africa, her *true* country. Édouard calls out to her from the shore, too late to stop her.

Ourika, ou La Petite Nègresse, by Mélesville (Anne Honoré Joseph de Duveyrier) and Frédéric Adolphe Carmouche, used the same names as the novel, though the work also removes itself from Paris to the slave port of Bordeaux. "Pauvre Ourika" (played by Mlle Vertpré) – as she will be known throughout the play – shares the stage with Madame de Beauval and her Creole brother, Franville.⁶⁴⁴ Ourika believes herself to be the adopted child of Madame de Beauval, with which Madame concurs. To entertain Charles, Ourika sings to him, assuming a "Creole" air.⁶⁴⁵ The main conflict, other than the obvious issue of race, is a misunderstanding between Charles and his intended. His jealousy – which causes another character to refer to him ironically as « le petit Othello »⁶⁴⁶ – threatens to tear them apart. It is selfless, *pauvre* Ourika, who reunites them. Naturally, Ourika's heart is broken at Charles' lack of love for her, and she goes back to Africa. Anaïs, Charles' bride, gives birth to a lovely girl, albeit one who constantly recoils in horror when Ourika attempts to embrace her or even to touch her.⁶⁴⁷ The play maintains the religious foundation first introduced by Duras. Werner Sollors claims the play has "a vaudeville of Amazons [who] give voice to Christian universalism, comforting Ourika with the observation that there is Someone (in the sky) who never forgets the unhappy ones."⁶⁴⁸

Ourika, ou l'Orpheline Africaine, by Merle and De Courcy, is set in Saint-Germain. The biggest difference from the other plays is not the message of segregation, but that the need to separate the races is delivered by a black *slave* named Zago. Ourika (played by Mme Dorval) is reminded of her status as neither a mistress of her own circumstances nor a slave. In short, she is between two opposing worlds that can never be reconciled. Zago assures her that slavery is better, but Ourika's response to this dilemma is the ultimate decision of hopelessness and despair: she commits suicide.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁴² Ibid., 16.

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁴⁴ Franville talks about the natural order of things for much of the production. *Chalaye*, 53-54.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 51, 69.

⁶⁴⁸ Werner Sollors, 347.

⁶⁴⁹ The "tragic mulatto/a" is a common figure in (especially American) popular culture. The following are merely a sampling of the available scholarship: see Bridget T. Heneghan, *Whitewashing America: Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Shirley Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, New Expanded 21st Century Edition (Continuum Intl Pub Group, 2011); Eve Allegra Raimon, *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-*

Racial Impersonation

There is a particular issue that seems to have occupied both critics and actors: that of the women playing the role of Ourika to either refuse or disdain to color their faces for the role. In the twenty-first century, in an era when actors will go to such absurd lengths to make their character “authentic,”⁶⁵⁰ this reluctance deserves some scrutiny, because this dynamic beautifully illuminates the danger of racial impersonation. Actresses would play the part of Ourika, but only to a point. Fashion could be taken off and one could resume one’s position; clearly, the actresses here did not feel the same way about blackface. And neither did the critics.

Of Mme Dorval playing Ourika, *Le Corsaire* stated that her physiognomy « *avait été si bien enduit de noire de fumée, qu’elle n’a pu en faire ressortir la mobilité qui la distingue.* »⁶⁵¹ The make-up (like smoke from a chimney), according to the critic, completely overwhelmed the actress to the point that she was almost unable to move. The *Journal de Paris* wrote that:

Les jeunes comédiennes en vue qui jouaient Ourika devaient se peindre le visage et les coquettes ne le faisaient pas sans répugnance. Pour le *Journal de Paris*, cette mascarade, aussi réussie fut-elle, condamnait la pièce. Car elle n’est jamais qu’une métamorphose réprouvée par le goût, puisque, ne pouvant jamais être complète, elle n’offre aux yeux que le spectacle repoussant d’une belle nature dégradée, et non la perfection d’une nature différente.’ Et le critique ajoute un peu plus loin : ‘que Mlle Mars, que Mlle Bourgoïn, dont Mlle Anaïs se barbouillent le visage d’une composition chimique, plus ou moins habilement préparée, le public ne verra jamais qu’un travestissement de carnaval.’⁶⁵²

The natural beauty of the actresses was irreversibly harmed by blackness, thus rendering them degraded. Even they believed themselves tainted – in more ways than one – by donning Ourika’s color. It was clear to the audience even in her eyes. There was another replacement for the role of Ourika, with, according to Chalaye, Mademoiselle Brocard, who took the role instead of a Mademoiselle Bourgoïn in a production, but that show was never realized.⁶⁵³

The *Literary Gazette* wrote that Mademoiselle Mars turned down the role: “Madlle. Mars blacked her face to perform Ourika, but did not like her appearance in the glass, and refused the character. Such an event, like Mad. George’s insult, was enough to set all that sensitive metropolis in a flame.”⁶⁵⁴ Chalaye corroborates the reluctance of actresses to don the make-up:

C’est à qui de nos jolies actrices, se mettra du noir sur le visage pour reproduire l’héroïne du petit roman à la mode. Mlle Mars, seule et plus prudente que les autres, parce qu’elle a plus à risquer, refuse avec esprit de soumettre sa charmante figure aux désagréments de cette opération. . . . En la noircissant, on ferait disparaître ces avantages, sans y suppléer par le seul de tours qui pût les remplacer dans un rôle de négresse, c’est-à-dire par la singularité, le piquant, l’aire simple, naïf, naturel et original de ces sortes de figures.⁶⁵⁵

Century Antislavery Fiction (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004); and Werner Sollors, *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁵⁰ I am reminded of the film *Tropic Thunder*, where the joke lies in Robert Downey, Jr.’s blue-eyed Australian character, Kirk Lazarus, a five-time Oscar winner, being so invested in method acting that in insisting on “authentic blackness,” he undergoes an operation to change his pigment to play the African American character, Sergeant Lincoln Osiris. The joke is that he “transforms” so much he forgets that he is white, even though his exasperated black co-star constantly reminds and mocks him. *Tropic Thunder*, directed by Ben Stiller, Paramount Pictures and DreamWorks, 2008.

⁶⁵¹ *Le Corsaire*, 4 avril 1824, no. 269, as quoted in Chalaye, xxvi. Chalaye devotes a section of her introduction to this phenomenon; however, she does not place this within the same historical context as my work.

⁶⁵² *Journal de Paris*, 13 mai, 1824, as quoted in Chalaye, xxvii.

⁶⁵³ Chalaye, xxviii.

⁶⁵⁴ From the *Literary Gazette*, Sat, 12 June 1824 – at the end of the text, John Hughes, “Itinerary of Provence and the Rhone made during the Year 1819.” I have been unable to find anything about Mad. George or her insult.

⁶⁵⁵ Chalaye, xxvii.

The incredulity that France's actresses would stoop to wear blackface (for a play of little merit, no less) which would rob them of their "natural" beauty, eliminating all that made them great!

Since the type of racial/gender crossing I have been discussing was predicated upon everyone knowing one's true racial status (however constructed that might be), it was different from commonly understood notions of "passing," which relied upon invisibility. All of France seemed to believe in the beauty and the talent of the actresses playing Ourika. However apparent it was that these women were in blackface, no one would let them forget that to truly play Ourika, they would be somehow diminished. Because some felt that the content of the plays were beneath them, they would be covering up all that made them great – their whiteness – and the ramifications might last beyond the final curtain.⁶⁵⁶

I cannot help but reflect upon the Creole women returning from Saint Domingue and the imposition of blackness upon them. It is no surprise that the vast majority of Creoles returning from Saint Domingue initially chose to separate themselves within a distinct community of other Creoles.⁶⁵⁷ Crofts writes that "Race alone is the dominant factor in Ourika's destiny. If she failed in her ultimate effort to be French, by being a French mother, how could anyone without her advantages—of not having to deny a former culture, of not having to overcome a foreign accent, and of not having to learn a new behavior—expect to succeed?"⁶⁵⁸

Appropriating and Imposing Black Female Identity: The Ourika Poems

Verse was also employed to elaborate on the tragedy of Ourika's story. At least three poems follow Duras's basic premise: Ourika falls in love with Charles (her brother figure), discovers her blackness, realizes her race precludes a relationship with him, undergoes an existential crisis, becomes ill and dies. All three writers, interestingly, chose to remove any references to the French or Haitian Revolutions – an odd choice, given that so much of Ourika's angst in the novel is exacerbated by these events. In doing so, any issues that Ourika must face are only connected to her relationship (or lack thereof) with Charles. In addition, Gay and de Pons's renditions give much attention to Charles's wife, a character who is somewhat peripheral for Duras. In doing so, they allow a black woman to speak of white womanhood in the same way they – via their own white subjectivity – speak of black womanhood.

Delphine Gay positions Ourika (like Duras, to whom she dedicates her poem) as floundering under the realization of her difference.⁶⁵⁹ In her despair, she rejects Charles's attempt at proper inclusion in his life: « *L'ingrat ! Il m'appelait sa sœur !* »⁶⁶⁰ Although Ourika believes her heart is pure and that there is "nobility" in her suffering, it is she who ungratefully (and ungraciously) turns her back on the possibility of French familial bliss as Charles's *sister*, choosing to exile herself, and to die. Gay gives Anaïs a great deal of agency, which Anaïs surely never had in the novel. She, as

⁶⁵⁶ Rousseau, in his *Lettre d'alembert*, discusses the political importance of the arts, in particular theatre. Yet he feared that actors could lose a sense of self in taking on roles. For more about this idea, see David Osipovich, "What Rousseau Teaches us about Live Theatrical Performance," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62:4 (Fall 2004).

⁶⁵⁷ See Darrell Meadows' discussions about colonial refugees in the introduction of my dissertation.

⁶⁵⁸ Crofts, 298.

⁶⁵⁹ Delphine Gay, or Delphine de Girardin, was a popular writer during the Bourbon Restoration period, sometimes even publishing under a man's name, writing for a time for *La Presse* as the Vicomte de Launay. She ran a popular salon (from 1834-1839), welcoming such luminaries as Theophile Gautier, Balzac, de Musset, and Victor Hugo. See Gretchen Schultz, ed, *An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry from France*, trans. Anne Atik and others (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2008), 66. Duras had her read several times at her salon. See also Kale, 103, 234.

⁶⁶⁰ Delphine Gay, "Ourika élégie," *An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry from France*, 2.

opposed to her rather clueless bridegroom, sees Ourika's love for Charles: « *Elle avait vu mes pleurs, et les avait compris.* »⁶⁶¹ But in true Christian charity, Anaïs pities Ourika and is not the least bit jealous. She has no need to be – her whiteness trumps Ourika's blackness, so she is not threatened. The mode of “seeing” is quite present. It is Ourika's ability to see her own blackness and thus her unsuitability for Charles that sends her to the convent. It is Charles's “blindness” that prevents him from seeing Ourika or her love for him. Finally it is Anaïs's ability to actively see (and understand) Ourika's feelings for Charles that allows her to be benevolent. It is perhaps not surprising that Gay would choose to concern herself with the dynamics of the love story, while barely touching on the realities of Ourika's enslavement, for Duras's novel does the same. The poem is equally about Anaïs's suitability as a proper mate for Charles. All the elements of proper French womanhood are here: Anaïs is kind, she is watchful, she is demure, and most importantly, she instinctively understands that Ourika's blackness eliminates her from feminine competition.

Count Gaspard de Pons knew of Gay's poem, referring to it as “charming,”⁶⁶² yet, his own interpretation of Ourika's story, as Sharpley-Whiting astutely proclaims, is steeped in the language of black female hypersexuality and rapid black degeneration. De Pons posits that because Ourika can never have the love of Charles, her transformation into a cultured Frenchwoman is revealed for the farce that it is. It is only mimicry. Ourika brazenly offers herself to Charles (as well as the sexual services of a *hundred* black women): « *Lá, cent noire beautés viendront briguer ton choix ; / C'est moi qui te plairai, car je suis la plus belle.* »⁶⁶³ But he turns away, choosing the love of Anaïs, his white beloved. His refusal both confounds and infuriates Ourika, causing her to berate him – and then beseech his pardon. Charles's rejection of Ourika – like Adolph's ultimate rejection of the Hottentot Venus – reinforces his Frenchness. Like Gay's depiction, de Pons's Ourika inexplicably references Anaïs as “her rival.” In fact, Charles is oblivious to her affection for him, and his wife appears as a reminder of proper French womanhood; she is never a rival. That Ourika thinks her one confirms the ridiculousness of her claims.

However, unlike Sharpley-Whiting, I am suggesting that the tenor of de Pons's poem shifts with the notion that, while referencing Africa, de Pons is also gesturing to France's West Indian colonies.⁶⁶⁴ For when we refer back to Duras's tale, it is the terror in *Saint Domingue* that finally convinces Ourika of her innate barbarity and solidifies her downward spiral. In focusing on Africa (Ourika's birthplace, after all), de Pons is able to gloss over many of the problems and anxieties that took place in Saint Domingue, displacing and distancing France from its losses there. Two issues speak to my hypothesis: the problematic, and still remembered, nature of miscegenation in the colonies; and re-assertion of white womanhood for refugees returning from Saint Domingue, which was much closer to the French imagination than Africa.

As I discussed in chapter one, white French women coming to the colonies often found themselves in an uncomfortable competition for the favors of white French men. The preponderance of the literature cautioning men to beware of the sexual power of black women and women of color spoke to those fears, as did the interesting transference of the accoutrements of black femininity to white women via accessories like the *tignon*. But in light of Ourika's transformation in de Pons's work, the charge that black women often found themselves unwitting sexual pawns in white male hands loses some of its moral outrage (and believability). Leon Hoffmann in *Le Nègre Romantique* posits that de Pons's *élégie* is the most interesting – and Hoffmann

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶² Sharpley-Whiting, “Black Blood, White Masks, and Nègresse Sexuality in de Pons's *Ourika, l'Africaine*,” *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears and Primitive Narratives in French*, 55.

⁶⁶³ Count Gaspard de Pons, “Ourika, l'Africaine” *Inspirations poétiques*. Paris: Urbain Canel, 1825, 215-224.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

further asserts that de Pons « *imagine Ourika au lit, tourmentée par le désir.* »⁶⁶⁵ After all, it was already documented that black women were usually the sexual aggressors in the black colonies. So there is no opportunity for de Pons to explain miscegenation, because Charles chooses whiteness. It is quite simply, like Ourika's love for him, completely off his radar. In having Charles choose a white wife – on French soil – de Pons restores the balance of power so often perceived as missing in places like Saint Domingue. And predictably and necessarily, Ourika dies, thus removing her from further discussion. Imperative in de Pons's new rendering of history is one that references a somewhat idyllic Africa of "baobab trees" and "green oases" – which erases the horrors and loss in Saint Domingue. It also casts a colonial eye toward those oases.

Pierre-Ange Vieillard's « *Ourika, stances élégiaques* », which she dedicated to Charles Nodier,⁶⁶⁶ provides an interesting middle ground. Love and slavery are so entangled in this rendition that both are lessened by the comparison. Blackness separates Ourika from the possibility of Charles' love: « *Ab ! la couleur qui souille mon visage, / Symbole affreux de honte et de malheur.* »⁶⁶⁷ It is unclear whether Vieillard feels her worthy of love at all. She is, however, full of sadness at the loss of Charles, and is melodramatically determined to end her life: « *Seule, je vais marcher . . . vers le tombeau / Mourir . . . voilà mon partage.* »⁶⁶⁸ Moreover, she tells him that God is his only rival: « *Aime Anaïs, ta belle et noble épouse, / Charles, Ourika, dont tu reçus l'adieu, / De vos liens ne sera plus jalouse . . . / Et, pour rival, je vais te donner Dieu.* »⁶⁶⁹ As in de Pons's rendering, Ourika reflects upon African landscapes, not French ones which would have been more familiar: « *Triste Ourika ! . . . sous le brulant tropique.* »⁶⁷⁰ As if her Frenchness was so permeable that crisis could cause a distant land to impose itself upon her current worldview, rendering it useless.

It appears that the women writers stay fairly close to Duras's story: good girl becomes a nun and dies. The entire theme of religion and Christian charity of white French women remains intact, as does the relegation of black women to a sequestered convent or back to Africa. An underlying current of blackness subdued and white French womanhood asserted also permeates these poems. The men, on the other hand, insert a heavy dose of sex into the narrative. Once Ourika knows who she is (black) and is divorced from the life she has been raised in, her so-called African behavior comes rapidly forth: the hypersexual black woman. Sharpley-Whiting asserts that men referenced sex – while it would have been improper for women to write about sexuality so explicitly.⁶⁷¹ We know that they are men because they *can* invoke sexuality into the narrative. In asserting or exposing Ourika's hypersexuality, Ourika is removed from true womanhood (which is based on motherhood and heterosexual marriage). Sexual promiscuity is revealed as hiding under a thin veneer of civilized behavior. Her civilized presentation is not inherent, only imitation.

⁶⁶⁵ Léon-François Hoffmann, *Le Nègre romantique, personnage littéraire et obsession collective*, Le Regard de l'Histoire. (Paris: Payot, 1973), 224-226.

⁶⁶⁶ Charles Nodier, a well-known Royalist and Romanticist, was appointed to the librarianship of the *Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal* in 1824. He also counted de Musset and Victor Hugo as friends.

⁶⁶⁷ Pierre-Ange Vieillard, *Ourika: stances élégiaques*, par Mme P. V. de L. B. Paris: Pillet aîné, 1824, 2.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁷¹ Sharpley-Whiting.

Ourika as a Marker of all Africans, and as Empire Come Home

The fascination with Ourika extended outside of Paris to the Café Ourika in Lyon.⁶⁷² Launched in 1824 and replacing the café de l'Europe, Café Ourika was both a spectacle and a reminder of the colonial project. Denise Davidson's essay⁶⁷³ about the Café states that it was presented as having servers that included two "'African' beauties."⁶⁷⁴ The *Journal du commerce* writes: "A red scarf draws out the ebony of their skin; and without braving the heat of the tropics or the dangers of the desert, the shy, Lyonnais finds himself in *Nigritie*. Celebrated, and complimented, our two *Africaines* need not lament the slave trade."⁶⁷⁵ While they might not have needed to "lament the slave trade," chances are high that the women were actually enslaved while in France, a point that the writer appears to have neglected.

The term "shy Lyonnais" seems not to be just a reference to social timidity, but a description of one too shy to go to the colonies. The "heat of the tropics" – that old chestnut – returns: beware of the heat because it will make you more susceptible to the wiles of black women. Here at Café Ourika you do not have to worry about being seduced as in the colonies; here the colony is brought home for you. The location of "our" Africans in *Nigritie* is telling, because it was, according to Robert Harms, considered a region where the French purchased slaves. In reality, Harms concluded that "*nigritie* was, in short, an imaginary construction of European mapmakers."⁶⁷⁶ So was Café Ourika.

The *Journal du Commerce* wrote that patrons would be attended to by black women (Ourikas): "Served by their ebony hands, sugar seems whiter and perhaps sweeter. . . . Hasten then, *Messieurs les amateurs*: the most exquisite products of our colonies will be offered and served to you by *les naturels du pays*."⁶⁷⁷ Everything – the sugar, the mocha and the alcohol is *more* than it is on its own because of its juxtaposition with the hands that serve it. "Les amateurs" – the virgins who had never been to the colonies – could experience all the exquisiteness of the colonies without exposing themselves to the dangers therein. It is also apparent that the "exquisite products of our colonies" include the hands (and bodies) holding them.

Pleasure and exploitation are intertwined at Café Ourika: "While waiting for the theaters to procure us the pleasure of being moved by the difficulties of the sensitive Ourika," the paper states, "this personage à la mode is being exploited in an altogether different manner. . . . Two charming Ourika[s], who have nothing black about them but their skin, work in concert with a male Ourika at this establishment. . . . By simply having a few glasses of punch in your head, it will be easy to persuade yourself you are in the New World, even though you have not left the place des Jacobins."⁶⁷⁸ Since blackness is more than skin color to the reviewer, what about them should or would normally designate them as black? Is it their beauty that the author is trying to emphasize? And why would blackness conjure up images of the New World when slaves (and slavery) existed both in France and in its black colonies? Does one need to be intoxicated in order to persuade oneself otherwise? Finally, it is also curious that Ourika, the name of the girl from Senegal, here is

⁶⁷² There is a modern-day Café Ourika in Morocco.

⁶⁷³ Davidson writes that "sufficient numbers of black men and women lived in France during the period to justify Napoleonic legislation creating a special surveillance apparatus for them." Denise Z. Davidson, *France after Revolution*, 159. In fact, according to Peabody, the numbers of blacks were in disproportionate numbers to the rhetoric about them.

⁶⁷⁴ *Journal du Commerce*, No. 59, 18 April 1824 and No. 60, 30 April 1824, as quoted in Davidson, 159.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ Robert Harms, 16.

⁶⁷⁷ Davidson, 159.

⁶⁷⁸ Davidson, 161.

applied to an African *man*: “a male Ourika.” Ourika has again slipped through the boundaries of its origin, becoming simultaneously a place, a name, and a gender.⁶⁷⁹

* * *

In chapter three, I wrote about an image of Sarah Bartmann entitled *Les Curieux en extase ou les cordons des souliers*.⁶⁸⁰ In that image, Bartmann was compared to food and to nature run amok. Ourika, the young black aristocrat, could not be more dissimilar, yet food was named after her even while she was, by virtue of her presence in aristocratic society, nature out of control. However different the two women were, in essence they were two sides of the same coin. Both were inauthentic French women by virtue of their race. Unlike the historical Ourika, who had died at a young age, the fictional Ourikas had to either leave or die; she could not remain in France. Her blackness needed containment (in the convent) or removal (by departure or death). *Now it was Ourika herself who realized this*. So her departure was not France’s fault, for it was she who decided upon her own exile. Ourika must remove herself from Frenchness by her own action. She can run away or die. While those were her only choices, whites had a few more – white refugees could slough off their colonial taint and assimilate. Ourika exposed the price for failure to do so. Her removal also reiterated the dangers of interracial marriage, and prevented it.

The final chapter of this project shows that the problem of situating black women in nineteenth-century France remained, even after the fall of the Bourbon monarchy. Jeanne Duval, as we shall see, suffered some of the same indignities as her predecessors: she was represented by others and demonized via her blackness in order to elevate the white French man who would be her common-law husband, Charles Baudelaire. Her importance in his life would be minimized in order to maximize his accomplishments. However, it was not completely erased – either by Baudelaire’s contemporaries or his subsequent biographers. Why was it necessary to so distort Duval in the historical record of Baudelaire, and thus, in the period when she lived? How can we see this as a metaphor for the problematic black female body, and also the removal of blackness from France at the nadir of its slave institution?

⁶⁷⁹ I would, however, like to comment on Davidson’s belief that “in addition to confirming the widespread enthusiasm for the novel and its main character, the café Ourika’s choice of employees demonstrates the prevalence of “Orientalism,” as men rushed to enjoy the experience of being served by exotic women.” I am curious as to why she chooses to link this phenomenon so specifically to Orientalism instead of acknowledging the prevalence of negrophobia and negrophilia *in conjunction* with Orientalism, 160.

⁶⁸⁰ See fig. 3.5 of this dissertation.

CHAPTER FIVE:

ERASING JEANNE DUVAL: REPRESENTATIONS OF
A BLACK WOMAN AT THE END OF FRENCH SLAVERY

Fig. 5.1. Jean Désiré Gustave Courbet, detail, *L'Atelier du peintre, allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique et morale*, entre 1854 et 1855 ; Huile sur toile ; H. 361 ; L. 598 cm ; Musée d'Orsay, Paris⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸¹ “The figure on the extreme right is the French poet [Charles] Baudelaire; his image is based on a portrait that Courbet had painted of the poet in 1848. Just to Baudelaire’s left is the erased image of Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire’s quadroom mistress. Her erased presence was seen during a recent x-ray cleaning of the painting. Courbet painted over her image at the specific request of his friend Baudelaire.” <http://impressionist1877.tripod.com/realism.htm> (accessed October 1, 2010). This foreshadows Soviet figures that were erased in works in the 1930s Russia. See David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 1997). Thank you to Tyler Stovall for bringing this interesting connection to my attention.

Once she had certain qualities, but she has lost them, and I myself have gained insight. TO LIVE WITH A PERSON who never shows any gratitude for your efforts, who thwarts them by being clumsy or deliberately spiteful, who only considers you as her servant, and her property, with whom it is impossible to exchange a word on politics or literature, a creature WHO DOES NOT ADMIRE ME, and who is not even interested in my studies, who would throw my manuscripts into the fire if that would bring her more money than publishing them.⁶⁸²
 Charles Baudelaire in a letter to his mother

In Gustave Flaubert's novel, *A Sentimental Education, The Story of a Young Man*, the protagonist Frédéric sees and falls instantly in love with Madame Arnoux. Mesmerized by what he calls her "magnificent brown skin," he stops to behold her. Suddenly, a black woman approaches with Madame's child. Frédéric "imagines that this beautiful white woman lived in the West Indies, and has brought the black woman back with her from 'some tropical island.'" Later, in Paris, he sees a random black woman in the Tuileries Garden who reminds him of Madame Arnoux's maid: "So every time he walked through the Tuileries his heart would beat faster in his hope of meeting her."⁶⁸³ In this peculiar way, his memories of love (or lust) are ignited through a combined but disavowed association of black womanhood with his fantasies about a "magnificent brown skinned" white woman. Thus, Frédéric's narrative echoes the story that follows, the erasure of blackness in order to elevate and explain whiteness.

* * *

While describing the "otherworldly" hold Jeanne Duval had over writer Charles Baudelaire, biographer François Porché seems at a loss to explain how someone so talented (Baudelaire) could possibly be ensnared by a second rate, mixed-race nobody (Duval). His convoluted explanation (which I will detail later in this chapter) begins a trajectory from which Duval never really recovers. One of his most important assertions, however, sums up so much about the rhetoric about Duval: "Jeanne was a native of San-Domingo. That is all we know of her origin, and even that is doubtful. But what does it matter? It is better thus. Whence she came no one knows, and after Baudelaire's death she disappears. Her beginning and her end are hidden in shadow."⁶⁸⁴ Of course it is not "better thus," nor does she disappear after his death, the concerted attempts of his contemporaries notwithstanding.

This chapter seeks to examine what has been "hidden in shadow." Duval was clearly not invisible. Rather than trying to read Duval's life solely through Baudelaire, I seek to read her life as clearly as possible, with him a participant among others. It does not mean that Baudelaire is unimportant; nay, most of the first-hand descriptions of her life and theirs together come from him. Yet I use him to attempt to illuminate *her* life, rather than the other way around. Given that most of the women in my dissertation have been subjected to a hyper-visibility, why did the contemporaries of Baudelaire so want to erase her? I argue that what separates Duval from these other women is that she is not outside of French culture. Duval had at least one French parent, grew up in France, and spoke French as a native. In short, she was a fully integrated French working class woman (in contrast to the fictional aristocratic upbringing of Ourika).

But she is more than that. She has larger symbolic value as well, both in her time in France, and in the re-writing of her. In fact, Duval's life represents a bookend of sorts to my work, for

⁶⁸² Charles Baudelaire, in a letter to his mother, concerning Jeanne Duval, March 27, 1852, as quoted in Therese Dolan, "Skirting the Issue: Manet's Portrait of *Baudelaire's Mistress Reclining*," *Art Bulletin*, 79, Issue 4 (December 1997) : 613.

⁶⁸³ Gustave Flaubert, *A Sentimental Education, The Story of a Young Man, 1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6-7, 25-26.

⁶⁸⁴ François Porché, *Charles Baudelaire*, trans. John Mavin (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1928), 71.

representations of her enunciate the anxieties that accompanied death throes of slavery in France in 1848. This dissertation began within the realm of French slavery, where black women in Saint Domingue were presented as whores who threatened the pure blood of France. The move to France and the shift in circumstances for some black women expanded the depictions of them: they were nuns, science experiments, oddities, and inauthentic French women. With Duval, representations have returned to the hyper-sexualized black woman: Duval as whore.

It is both the life and the script of Duval – for such strong adjectives have been assigned to her – that I find so compelling. This chapter attempts to do three things. First, to create a biography of sorts of Duval in France, we need to see her as a person in her own right (however hazy those glimpses are) and not existing only for Baudelaire’s pleasure. From the woman struggling to make a living as an actress, as well as her life as a part-time prostitute/mistress, might we attempt to fashion an identity for her – projected from the lifestyles of other such working class women living a comparable existence? Much has been written about Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal* poems (including the so-called *Black Venus* cycle), with Duval generally relegated to her presence in them. I have no desire to add much to that staggering cacophony of voices.⁶⁸⁵ Nor do I simply want to re-imagine a relationship between Charles Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval. Rather, I want to examine Duval’s life, as much as I am able).

Next, this chapter investigates her contemporaries’ perceptions of Duval. It is important to understand what Baudelaire’s circle thought of her, how they interacted with her, and how they wrote about her. It is unfortunate that most of what survives of Jeanne Duval is via Baudelaire’s letters to his mother. They are decidedly one-sided, and often distorted by Baudelaire’s need for money, affection, sympathy, and support. Rosemary Lloyd writes, “Whatever the truth may be, he regarded Jeanne in later life as a responsibility it behooved him to bear. It is almost the only one he would accept.”⁶⁸⁶ But there exist some opinions of Duval from his friends and colleagues, and they help shed light on subsequent representations of her.

Finally, I discuss Jeanne Duval as a modern-day *lieu de mémoire*. Here, I am primarily interested in biographers of Charles Baudelaire who create or erase Jeanne Duval from the historical record, and how (mis)conceptions of Duval persist. Victoria Tillotson remarks on the efforts of biographers to “demonize and malign Duval,”⁶⁸⁷ writing that revisionists like Angela Carter and other critics have “fail[ed] to foreground the historical conditions that massively overdetermined both Baudelaire’s relationship with Duval and Duval’s subsequent denigration. These historical

⁶⁸⁵ For works more specific to Jeanne Duval, see Emmanuel Richon, *Jeanne Duval et Charles Baudelaire : Belle d'abandon*, (Paris, France: L'Harmattan, 1999); W. Napoleon Rivers, “Black Venus-Jeanne Duval and Baudelaire's Sonnets,” *Opportunity* 14, no. 1 (Jan 1936); Marc-A. Christophe, “Jeanne Duval: Baudelaire's Black Venus or Baudelaire's Demon?” *CLA Journal* 33, no. 4 (June 1990); Claude Pichois, “A propos d'un poeme de Baudelaire: du nouveau sur Jeanne Duval,” *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, LV, 1955, 191-205; P.M. Pasinetti, “The ‘Jeanne Duval’ Poems in Les Fleurs du Mal,” *Yale French Studies* volume 0, no. 2 (1948): 112-118; Michel Deguy, “Le corps de Jeanne,” *Poitzque*, I, 1970, 334-47; Edward J. Ahearn, “Black Woman, White Poet: Exile and Exploitation in Baudelaire's Jeanne Duval Poems,” *French Review*, LI, Dec. 1977, 212-20; Maggie Tonkin, “Musing on Baudelaire: Angela Carter's ‘Black Venus’ and the Poet as Dead Beloved,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, Volume 17, Issue 3 & 4 July 2006, 301-323; Freeman G. Henry, “Baudelaire’s ‘Chanson D’apres-Midi’ and the Return of Jeanne Duval,” *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 24 (1977), 95-107; Eugene Crépet, “Une femme à enterrer,” *Propos sur Baudelaire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957); Eugene Crépet, Charles Baudelaire et Jeanne Duval, *La Plume* (15 April 1898); Beatrice Stith Clark, “Elements of Black Exoticisms in the ‘Jeanne Duval’ Poems of ‘Les Fleurs Du Mal,’” *Black Studies: International Dimensions: A Special* no. 14, no. 1 (Sept 1970) 63-65; Anna Balakian, “Those Stigmatized Poems of Baudelaire,” *The French Review*, Vol. 31, no. 4 (Feb., 1958), pp. 273-277; and Michael Ferrier, “Histoire de Jeanne Duval, La ‘Belle d’abandon,’” *L’Infini*, Issue 110 (2010).

⁶⁸⁶ Rosemary Lloyd, *Charles Baudelaire* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 44.

⁶⁸⁷ Victoria P. Tillotson, “A Materialist Feminist Reading of Jeanne Duval: Prostitution and Sexual Imperialism from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present Day.” In *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women’s Lives*, ed. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (New York: Routledge, 1997), 292.

conditions,” she continues, “are the relations of capitalism and hyperbole imperialist conquest and domination, at their apex in the mid- to late nineteenth century. These economic and political conditions ushered in the era of exoticism and primitivism that would enjoy a hegemony in the realm of literature and the fine arts well into the twentieth century.”⁶⁸⁸ Although Tillotson is correct in many of her assertions, as my dissertation has shown, these types of relationships of conquest and domination began well before this era. And, in 1848, the relationships of conquest and domination were about to come to an end, at least in one very specific arena.

This chapter looks at the bile of the representations of Duval at the hand of Baudelaire scholars, and suggests ways that they parallel anxieties about the end of slavery. One way to mitigate those anxieties was to erase it for an alternate narrative of France bestowing freedom upon blacks via the abolition of slavery. The real tensions between those who advocated the end of slavery and those who wished it to continue, and of those who debated whether the seeming inevitable end of slavery should be accomplished gradually or immediately, are erased as Flaubert’s black maid must be, in order for young Frédéric to see his true love. It is also one of the reasons that readers of Baudelaire know so much about his short-term infatuation, Apollonie Sabatier (also known as *La Présidente*) and so little about his long time companion, Duval. This *Vénus Blanche* from his poetry is allowed the designation of courtesan – as one that is elevated – for Sabatier was a white mistress, not a black whore, like Duval. Yet even Sabatier knew the score. She carried with her a drawing by Baudelaire of Jeanne Duval, infuriated that he would consider Duval “his ideal.” In fact, she scrawled those words over Duval’s face.⁶⁸⁹ Apollonie Sabatier we know about.⁶⁹⁰ Even as France was being forced to consider a land where slavery no longer existed, blackness was still being erased. But like the shadow of Duval (fig. 5.1 and 5.2), blackness discursively remained.⁶⁹¹ As with the black women who have preceded this final chapter, we take what we can, and attempt to make sense out of it historically. This time, we search for Jeanne Duval.

⁶⁸⁸ Tillotson, 292.

⁶⁸⁹ Enid Starkie writes that Sabatier “could not refrain from a feeling of jealousy” about Duval, that it “remained a mystery how the poet could retain love for the mulatto woman, with her haggard and dissolute face. She once found a picture of her, which she kept always with her, and on it she had written the naïve and revealing remark, expressing her amazement. ‘His ideal!’” Enid Starkie, *Baudelaire*, (New York: A New Directions Book, 1958), 333-334. In a letter to Baudelaire, Sabatier lamented, “What am I to think when I find you avoiding my embraces, except that you are thinking of the other whose spirit and whose black face come between us?” See Martin Turnell, *Baudelaire: A Study of his Poetry* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1972), 68.

⁶⁹⁰ Gérard de Senneville, *La Présidente: Une égérie au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Stock, 1998); Hoyle; Marie Heather, *The Changing Images of Madame Apollonie Sabatier: Emblems of Sexualité, Égalité, Fidélité, and Fraternité*, (MA Thesis, Michigan State University, Dept. of Art and Art History, 2004); François Porché, *Baudelaire et la présidente* (Genève: Editions du Milieu du monde, 1941); Louis Mermaz and Aglaé Joséphine Savatier, *Madame Sabatier, Apollonie au pays des libertins* (with Portraits), (Laussane, 1967); Théophile Gautier, *Lettre à la présidente* (Monaco: Sauret, 1993); Virginia Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales: The Lives and Legends of Marie Duplessis, Cora Pearl, La Païva and La Présidente* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003); Louis Mermaz, *Madame Sabatier, Apollonie au pays des libertines* (Lausanne: Éd. Rencontre, 1967); André Billy, *La présidente et ses amis* (Paris: Flammarion, 1945); Armand Moss, *Baudelaire et Madame Sabatier* (Paris: Nizet, 1978).

⁶⁹¹ Apparently, after a fight with Duval, Baudelaire asked his friend Courbet to erase her out of the painting.

Removal of Jeanne Duval from French discourse



Fig. 5.2. Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *L'Atelier du peintre, allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique et morale*, 1855, oil on canvas, 361 x 598 cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay⁶⁹²

Emmanuel Richon writes that « *bon nombre de connaisseurs nous ont souvent dissuadé dans ce projet, jugeant les sources soit trop peu nombreuses, soit trop peu sûres.* »⁶⁹³ Griselda Pollock, in speaking about Duval's presence in Courbet's work (fig. 5.2), asserts that "her erasure does suggest the continuing 'problem' of the presence of a 'black' woman in this attempted allegory of modern life – precisely the artistic, political and intellectual issue Manet would resume in his paintings, *Laure and Jeanne* in 1862."⁶⁹⁴

Contemporary black women artists and fiction writers have inserted her into their works – putting her, in fact, in starring roles – in an attempt to "give her voice:" to make her exist in the realm of Baudelaire as an agent in her own right, as she exists in his representations of her.⁶⁹⁵ The

⁶⁹² In fact, Apollonie Sabatier is included in Courbet's painting; she is wearing the elaborate shawl, and shown with her lover, Alfred Mosselman – see fig. as well – and ignored by Baudelaire.

⁶⁹³ Emmanuel Richon, *Jeanne Duval et Charles Baudelaire*, 8.

⁶⁹⁴ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 264.

⁶⁹⁵ See Angela Carter, *Black Venus's Tale* (London: Next Editions in association with Faber & Faber, 1980); novelist Nalo Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads* (New York: Warner Books, 2003); and the late Maud Sulter's exhibition about Jeanne Duval entitled "Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama," ran from May 30-August 31, 2003 at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. For comments on Carter's take, see Maggie Tonkin, "Musing on Baudelaire: Angela Carter's 'Black Venus' and the Poet As Dead Beloved," *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 17, no. 3-4: (2006) and Rebecca Munford, "Re-Presenting Charles Baudelaire/Re-Presenting Jeanne Duval: Transformations of the Muse in Angela Carter's 'Black Venus.'" *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004) : 1-13.

idea seems to be that, since he wrote of her as an out-of-control sexpot, perhaps we as black women can re-write her back into historical being with some level of dignity. Yet it is often our own anger, sorrow and voice that is being worked out – a substitute for that of Jeanne Duval who is, yet again, written onto. She is metaphor, a stand-in. She is everything/anything but Jeanne Duval.

In both past and contemporary representations of Jeanne Duval, she is presented alternately as angry, strong-willed, fragile, and any other number of emotions. Her lack of “true” image allows such folly for speculation, because it is all that there is. She is offered as fat, thin, dark, light, frizzy-haired, smooth-haired, an angel, a devil, his muse, his wife, his whore, his devil woman, a prostitute, a second-rate actress, and a sexual temptress of such biblical proportions that he was a carcass without agency, she a diabolical vampire who sucked everything of value from him. Yet she left him just enough to create the masterpieces that occupy literary scholars to the point of nausea – oh, and she was also a lesbian⁶⁹⁶ – so that Marc-A. Christophe asks if Duval is Baudelaire’s “venus or demon?”⁶⁹⁷

It is the vitriol surrounding Duval’s relationship with Baudelaire, by both their contemporaries and current writers on Baudelaire, that interests me. She has been called by turns his whore, common law wife, “mistress of mistresses,” *Vénus Noire*, perfume, a drug addict, a Negress, a mulatto, stupid, and shrewish. She is found amongst Baudelaire’s own whining words about lack of money or proper homage due him. In his poetry – designed to share his own feelings about desire or nature or sex – he loves her or he hates her, often in the same sentence. Why should his friends and colleagues not have felt the same? Why should they not begin erasing her the second it became possible (or practical) after Baudelaire’s death? His mother had to burn their letters because if Duval had truly loved – or even cared for – her son, she would have allowed them – and, for us, a part of Duval – to survive.

While it is difficult to determine the exact nature of their relationship (discussions being decidedly one-sided in letters to his mother or step-father), most agree that the long-term relationship between Charles Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval was contentious at best. Baudelaire, given to extreme declarations about his feelings of animosity toward Duval (see the epigram that begins this chapter), was also not above overwrought declarations of love for her. In 1856, after they had again broken off their relationship, he wrote:

this woman was my sole amusement, my only pleasure, my only companion, and in spite of all inward shocks of a turbulent liaison the thought of a permanent separation had never clearly entered my mind. I have used and abused her; I have taken pleasure in torturing her; and now I have been torturing myself.⁶⁹⁸

By Baudelaire’s accounts, she gave as well as she got – a punching bag for him and simultaneously his tormentor.⁶⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the behavior of Baudelaire and Duval toward one another frequently was sentimental, even loving, with moments of kindness between them. A glimpse of this can be seen in the only surviving letter between the two of them, dated 17 December 1859

⁶⁹⁶ Nadar claimed she lived with a blonde maid, see Felix Nadar, *Charles Baudelaire Intime: Le Poète Vierge* (Paris, 1911), 16. There are several works that have taken up this theme of late. Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon write that “Jeanne Duval was certainly bisexual,” see Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon, eds. *Who’s Who in Gay and Lesbian History: From Antiquity to WWII*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 158; Mary Gedo says that Duval was “probably a lesbian,” Mary Mathews Gedo, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Art: PPA 2* (1987): 72. So she was presented both as a vampire of men and a lover of women.

⁶⁹⁷ See Christophe, 428, 435. Christophe claims the negative image of Duval comes from the comparison with Sabatier.

⁶⁹⁸ Charles Baudelaire, in a letter to his mother, Starkie, 283.

⁶⁹⁹ In Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire*, additional research by Jean Ziegler, trans. Graham Robb (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), he writes that Baudelaire recalls a time when he “opened her head on a sideboard.” 199.

Ma chère fille, il ne faut pas m'en vouloir si j'ai brusquement quitte Paris sans avoir été te chercher pour te divertir un peu. Tu sais combien j'étais extenué par l'inquiétude. De plus ma mère qui savait que sur ma terrible échéance de 5.000 fr. Il y avait 2.000 fr. Payables a Honfleur, me tourmentait beaucoup. D'ailleurs elle s'ennuie. Tout s'est arrangé heureusement; mais figure-toi que la veille il manquait 1.600 fr. De Calonne s'est conduit très généreusement et nous à tires d'affaire.—Je te jure que je vais revenir dans quelques jours; il faut que je m'entende avec Malassis, et d'ailleurs j'ai laissé tous mes cartons à l'hôtel. Désormais je ne veux plus faire de ces énormes séjours a Paris qui me coûtent tant d'argent. Il vaut mieux pour moi *venir souvent et ne rester quelques jours*. En attendant, comme je puis rester une semaine absent, et que je ne veux pas que dans ton état tu restes privée d'argent même un jour, adresse-toi à M. Ancelle. Je sais que je suis un peu en avance sur l'année prochaine, mais tu sais que malgré ses hésitations il es assez généreux. Cette petite somme te surira pour m'attendre, et les environs du jour de l'an enveloppe, et puisque tu n'as pas le courage d'écrire de la main gauche (2), fais écrire l'adresse par ta domestique. N'oublie pas de mettre *Avenue de la Révolte, en face la chapelle du duc d'Orléans*. Tu sais qu'il est sans cesse par monts et par vaux. Donc, inutile d'envoyer chez lui, si ce n'est de *très bonne heure*.—Tu recevras ceci dimanche, mail il est plus prudent de n'envoyer chez lui que *Lundi*, a cause de la Messe, et parce qu'il sort avec sa famille le Dimanche.—Je sais que Malassis sera a Paris Mercredi. Donc je suis presse. J'ai trouvé mon logement transformé. Ma mère qui ne peut pas rester une minute en repos a arrangé et embelli (elle a cru embellir) mon logement.—Je vais donc revenir, est si, comme je le crois, je suis doué de quelque argent, je tacherai de t'amuser.—Puisque le papier me manqué, j'ajoute ici un mot directement pour Ancelle.—*J'ai feuilleté le livrets d'exposition et je n'ai pas encore trouve l'adresse de SON PEINTRE*. S'il t'est désagréable qu'il liste tout cela, déchire en deux et ne laisse que le Reçu.—Pour moi, ça m'est égal.—Avec ces chemins glissants, ne sors pas sans être ACCOMPAGNEE.—NE PERDS PAS MES VERS ET MES ARTICLES.

Reçu de M. Ancelle la somme de quarante francs pour Mad. Duval.⁷⁰⁰

Even when the romance had waned after several years, Baudelaire took great pains to provide for her when he could, begging his mother to take care of Duval after his death. She in turn sold her jewelry numerous times to provide always-needed funds for him. Duval also hand delivered letters on his behalf in his never-ending quest for money, including to his mother who apparently despised her. This is not to dismiss their acts of violence toward one another – Baudelaire speaks of physically attacking her and writes that she did the same; but these small moments do add some nuance to a relationship that spanned most of their adult lives.

⁷⁰⁰ 17 décembre 1859 ; de Honfleur à Jeanne Duval, , *Correspondance générale*, recueillie, classée et annotée par M. Jacques Crépet, Tome seizième, 1833-1856 (Paris : Éditions Louis Conard, 1947).

Looking for Jeanne Duval

Jeanne Duval, by her associations with Charles Baudelaire, had the privilege (or misfortune) of being surrounded by acquaintances – and possibly friends – more lofty than she: the painters Courbet and Manet, as well as the writers Flaubert and Balzac. Duval was also the mistress of one of the most prolific photographers of the nineteenth century, Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, also known as Félix Nadar – yet the picture he is said to have taken of her does not exist in his archive. Duval was the common law wife of one of the most important writers in French history – yet it has seemed unimportant for scholars of these men to know much about her.

Attempting to recreate a life – from incomplete (and non-existent) records outside of the reactions and opinions of famous men in her life – is hazardous at best. The conflicting information about Jeanne Duval makes this exercise even more precarious. I am mindful of the contradictory evidence that can be expected to exist for a woman of color leading such a bohemian life. But we can contextualize her story from others of her status and circumstances. While the data is incomplete, we can attempt to look for Jeanne Duval.

* * *

Most researchers conclude that Jeanne Duval was born in approximately 1820, although this has not been confirmed;⁷⁰¹ some believe her grandmother, Marie Duval, to be African, and it was said that she came through Nantes, although no solid records have been found of her birthplace thus far.⁷⁰² Her mother was born 25 July 1789⁷⁰³ and named Jeanne-Marie-Marthe Duval,⁷⁰⁴ though it also might have been registered as Jeanne Lemaire or Jeanne Lemer.⁷⁰⁵ It has been written that she was a prostitute in Nantes.⁷⁰⁶

It is also believed that her father, and grandfather as well, were both white Frenchmen: thus, she is truly a product of Haiti and France.⁷⁰⁷ Baudelaire's biographer Jacques Crépet believed she was born in France (most likely Nantes).⁷⁰⁸ Her date of death, depending on the source, was between 1870 and 1878, with no definitive record of it ever located. Richon states that he wrote to every cemetery in Paris looking for her grave, as well as looked in the records of the deceased in the BHVP, to no avail.⁷⁰⁹ Several last names have been associated with Duval: Lemer, Lemaire and Prosper. Her alternate first name "Berthe"⁷¹⁰ seems to have also been used when she performed.

⁷⁰¹ I doubt very seriously that she was born in 1827 as has been suggested; it would have put her on the stage at the age of eleven!

⁷⁰² Frederick William John Hemmings states that her grandmother was "almost certainly born on the Guinea Coast, where she had the misfortune to be taken captive and sold into slavery. In the eighteenth century French traders who for one reason or another found they could not sell a female slave sometimes shipped them to Nantes where they disposed of them to brothel-keepers. Apparently this was the fate of the miserable black girl, Jeanne's grandmother, whose owners had chosen to name her Marie Duval." See F.W.J. Hemmings, *Baudelaire the Damned: A Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), 50.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁰⁴ Louis Ménard described her as "an old, respectable looking negress, with thick greasy hair which tried in vain to twirl over her cheeks and ears." Quoted in Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 203-204.

⁷⁰⁵ According to Jacques Crépet, her mother's death certificate lists the name Lemer or Lemaire; also that she died on 15 November 1853 at the age of 63. See Jacques Crépet, « une femme à enterrer, » *Propos sur Baudelaire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957), 203-4.

⁷⁰⁶ Hemmings, 50.

⁷⁰⁷ Given her lineage (her father and grandfather were white), Duval should not have been classified as a "mulatto."

⁷⁰⁸ See Jacques Crépet, « Charles Baudelaire et Jeanne Duval, » *La Plume* (Paris, 1889), 242; see also Pollock's note 40, 309.

⁷⁰⁹ Richon, 160.

⁷¹⁰ Claude Pichois has done a good deal of research on Jeanne Duval; he states that her name was really Berthe (at least as a stage name). He also recounts Duval's roles in each of her plays, and the lines attributed to the actress "Berthe." Moreover, he found a "Berthe" in the *Dictionnaire des comédiens français* that showed Berthe appearing in works exactly

Jeanne Duval does not appear in any record until she would have been about 18 and living in Paris. She was working, at least part of the time, as an actress. That would have put her socially, and perhaps physically, squarely within a bohemian milieu. Elizabeth Wilson asserts that “from the 1830s onward, generations of women who had rejected the protection of the traditional family carved out meaningful roles for themselves in the alternate world of the arts.”⁷¹¹ Duval, lacking in traditional family, would have had no such protection anyway. Wilson writes that “even working class women, such as [Jeanne Duval], invariably written off as a prostitute, seems to have tried to make a living as an actress. Admittedly, this was an ambiguous profession for a woman in the mid-nineteenth century.” Lenard Berlanstein is stronger, attributing acting as a “deviant path” for women in the nineteenth century.⁷¹² Despite the challenges, it does appear that Duval hoped to find success on the stage. That never happened for her.

In 1838, Nadar supposedly saw Duval for the first time, when she performed at the Théâtre du Panthéon as Mlle Berthe.⁷¹³ In 1838-1839, Duval also appeared at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Antoine under the name Berthe. She performed in *Rose et Colas, ou une pièce de Sedaine*, vaudeville in two acts, in the role of “La Comtesse.” She played “Thérèse: Domestique de la maison” in *Le Système de mon oncle, vaudeville en un acte mêlé de couplets*, (2 December 1838), her role “une utilité.”⁷¹⁴ Nadar claims that this is the period in which Duval became his mistress.⁷¹⁵

Duval again played a role in *Le Système de mon oncle* in 1840; and in 1842 she was performing again at the Théâtre du Panthéon when, according to most biographers, Charles Baudelaire first saw her. Their relationship would then last in various forms for the rest of their lives. By the end of October 1843, Duval lived at *6 rue Femmes sans-Tête* (with her mother) where (see fig. 5.3), presumably, she tended Baudelaire when he was ill (though his primary residence was the *l'Hotel de Pimodan*). From there he wrote the first letter that mentioned her, and begged his mother, “Do come now, *come immediately*—no prudishness. I am with a woman, and I am ill and I cannot move.”⁷¹⁶ Baudelaire and Duval were together, at least in the early 1840s, when she “frequented [Honoré] Daumier’s home on the rue de l’Hirondelle” with Baudelaire.⁷¹⁷

associated with Jeanne Duval between 1844 and 1846. He lists Duval as a “quadroon.” See Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire Études et Témoignages* (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1967), 72.

⁷¹¹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: the Glamorous Outcasts* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 85. Other works on bohemians include Jerrold Siegel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁷¹² Lenard R. Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve: A Cultural History of French Theater Women from the Old Regime to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 24.

⁷¹³ There are, as there will be with most things concerning Duval, debates on dates and places. Nadar, for example, seems a bit flexible in his memories. Pichois disputes many “facts” of Nadar. Pichois also disputes whether Nadar met Duval first, or if Charles Baudelaire claims that distinction. Pichois, *Études*, 75.

⁷¹⁴ She apparently had only one line in the play: “Dinner is served, Madame.” Starkie, 84; Porché, 69-70.

⁷¹⁵ « Jeanne habitait 15 ou 17, rue Saint-Georges. Nadar est bientôt dans la place et devient l’amant de cœur de la dame, entretenue par un protecteur platonique : Baudelaire.» See Pichois, *Études*, 73 ; Nadar, *Charles Baudelaire Intime*, 16.

⁷¹⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire to his Mother* (Haskell House, 1928), 13.

⁷¹⁷ Gerald Weissmann, *Darwin’s Audubon: Science and the Liberal Imagination* (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1998), 287.



Fig. 5.3. *rue Le Regrattier* (formerly 6, *rue de la Femme-sans-Tête*), 2002, Auteur : Julia Briend⁷¹⁸

There were no known acting jobs again until September 1844, when Duval performed at the Théâtre de Belleville. Pichois has located a woman named Jeanne who went with her friends to the Théâtre du Panthéon regarding payment owed: « *Il reste aussi qu'une mystérieuse Jeanne reclame en 1844, avec ses camarades du T du Pantheon, l'argent que leur doit le directeur Blanchard.* »⁷¹⁹ He believes this was Duval. She performed again in August and September 1845, at the Théâtre Beaumarchais (formerly Porte Saint-Antoine). At this time Baudelaire attempted suicide with a knife while sitting next to Duval in a Paris café (undetermined whether or not it was a 'sincere' attempt).⁷²⁰ Then he requested that Duval deliver a suicide note to his financial advisor Ancelle: « *Quand Mademoiselle Jeanne Lemer vous remettra cette lettre, je serai mort.* »⁷²¹ In January of 1846, she performed again at the Théâtre Beaumarchais.

1848 brought the end of Louis-Philippe and the Bourbon monarchy, and on 27 April the decree officially ending French slavery. From August until July the next year, Duval stayed with Baudelaire in Neuilly, not far from Ancelle,⁷²² and they traveled together that October to Chateauroux.⁷²³ In 1850, Baudelaire visited Dijon, where Duval joined him. In April 1852, they split so radically that Duval was erased from Courbet's *L'Atelier* at the request of Baudelaire, according to Delacroix's journal.⁷²⁴ Baudelaire wrote a rather angry letter to his mother about the separation, saying that Jeanne was sick and again out of money.

⁷¹⁸ The plaque on the wall of the building has nothing to do with either Duval or Baudelaire; it is actually for *Jean Baptiste Coffinhal*, vice president of the French Revolutionary Tribunal, who lived there until his execution by guillotine. For more on Coffinhal, see Jean Tulard, Jean-Francois and Alfred Fierro, ed. *Histoire et dictionnaire de la Révolution française 1789-1799*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1988), 657-8.

⁷¹⁹ Pichois, *Études*, 79.

⁷²⁰ Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 122.

⁷²¹ Charles Baudelaire, suicide letter to Narcisse-Désiré Ancelle, 30 June 1845, *Correspondance générale*, recueillie, classée et annotée par M. Jacques Crépet, Tome Premier, 1833-1856 (Paris : Éditions Louis Conard, 1947), 70-73; Ancelle was his financial guardian, whom Baudelaire would later accuse of flirting with Duval. See Christophe, 434.

⁷²² Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 168.

⁷²³ Hemmings, 107.

⁷²⁴ It is unclear if Duval sat for Courbet, especially since Baudelaire's likeness was taken from an earlier image. See Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix, *Journal de Eugène Delacroix: Tome 1, 1823-1850* (Paris: Adfamant Media Corporation, 2001).

A year ago I left Jeanne as I said I would, which you doubted and so wounded me. For some time I went to see her two or three times a month, to take her money. But now she is seriously ill and in the most complete poverty. I never speak of this to M. Ancelle, it would make the miserable creature too glad. It is obvious that a small part of what you send must go to her. I am sorry now that I said that, because you are capable, in your crudely maternal fashion, of sending her money, through M. Ancelle, without letting me know. That would be a great nuisance. You do not, I know, wish to wound me again—but this idea will now increase and settle my mind and obsess me.⁷²⁵

In 1853, Duval was in bad health; then in November her mother died. Baudelaire paid the expenses for the funeral and burial at Belleville cemetery. He recounted it thus: “My dear mother, the day before yesterday, I had to bury someone. I gave all that I had, but the total cost came to 140 fr. 60 of which I still owe and which I promised to pay in two days time, in other words this morning.”⁷²⁶ Baudelaire wrote on 26 December that “money was needed for ‘the exhumation and reburial of a woman who gave me her last savings without a murmur, without a sigh comma, *and especially without giving any advice.*’”⁷²⁷ On the 31st he responded to a letter from his mother, remarking: “You wrote me a very sad and charming letter, but it still bore the mark of your incurable tendency to exaggerate. The dead woman was someone I almost hated. But I let her die in the most genuine poverty.”⁷²⁸

It appears Duval and Baudelaire separated again in December 1854: “I shall not take up concubinage again, and if on the 9th I am not living with Mlle Lemer, I shall be with *the other.*”⁷²⁹ That did not last long – their relationship resumed in January at 18, *rue d’Angoulême-du-Temple*. By the following year, probably around September, relations between the two had broken down again. Baudelaire wrote: “*ma liaison, liaison de quatorze ans, avec Jeanne est rompue.*”⁷³⁰ But she was bound to him forever with the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in which Duval was represented as the so-called “Black Venus.” The cycle of poems 22 to 39 are about or influenced by her. (The book was quickly condemned on grounds of obscenity.)

By February 1859, Duval had moved to 22, *rue Beautreillis* (see fig. 5.4)⁷³¹ and in March, Baudelaire spent about six weeks living with her.⁷³² On 5 April, she suffered a stroke and was cared for at the Workhouse Hospital (*La Maison Municipale de Santé*) on *rue du Fauborg Saint-Denis* (records were destroyed in a fire.)⁷³³ Her hospital statistics were listed as follows:

⁷²⁵ Charles Baudelaire, letter to his mother, March 26, 1853, *Selected Letters to his Mother: The Conquest of Solitude*, trans. and edited by Rosemary Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 54-57.

⁷²⁶ Charles Baudelaire, letter to his mother, November 18, 1853, Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 202.

⁷²⁷ Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 202-203; her mother many have been temporarily buried, and then re-interred.

⁷²⁸ Charles Baudelaire, letter to his mother, December 31, 1853, *Ibid.*, 203.

⁷²⁹ Charles Baudelaire, December 4, 1854, *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire to his Mother*, 77.

⁷³⁰ Charles Baudelaire September 11, 1856. He also said she had been his “sole distraction and pleasure,” *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire to his Mother*, 95.

⁷³¹ Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 255; and Richon, 149

⁷³² Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 250.

⁷³³ Richon, 7.



Fig. 5.4. 22, rue Beautreillis⁷³⁴

« 32 ans; sans profession; célibataire, domicile rue Beautreilly [sic], 22, née a Saint Domingue. Chambre 8. Entrée le 5 avril, sortie le 15 mai 1859. » Crépet believes her age to actually be at least 34 at this time.⁷³⁵ In May, she also suffered paralysis of her leg.⁷³⁶

In the years 1860 and 1861 she lived at 4, Louis-Philippe in Neuilly – for a time with Baudelaire, for a time with a man alleged to be her brother. He was mostly definitely not her brother, and that relationship deepened the discord with Baudelaire. They split definitively in February 1861. In March, Baudelaire wrote that Duval had gone around him in attempts to get money.

Last January something quite monstrous happened which made me quite ill. I said nothing to anyone. I do not wish to say anything, it would tear my heart.

Some days ago, Malassis told me that Jeanne had come to ask him to buy some books and drawings from her. . . . I suspect vaguely that she chose Malassis to intimidate me, to wound my vanity. It is all one to me, if she chooses to sell souvenirs which every man leaves with a woman he has lived with for years, but I had the

⁵⁴ *Sur les pas des écrivains: Paris des amours*, <http://www.terresdecrivains.com/Paris-des-amours> (accessed October 20, 2010).

⁷³⁵ Crépet, “Charles Baudelaire et Jeanne Duval,” 242-3.

⁷³⁶ Richon, 98; I believe she remained there until June of 1859.

humiliation of having to supply my publisher with vague explanations such as these you constrain me to give you now.⁷³⁷

At the end of March, with Duval financially desperate, Baudelaire reported to his mother that “I have not written to Jeanne, I have not seen her in nearly three months; and naturally, since, it is impossible, I did not send her one penny. (She came to me yesterday; she had been in hospital, and her brother, on whom I thought she could rely, sold part of her furniture in her absence. She means to sell me the rest to pay some debts.)”⁷³⁸ They never saw each other again. In May, however, she was still in his thoughts:

I make a little money, it is true; if I had no debts, and *if I had no money of my own*, I SHOULD BE RICH. Meditate that phrase. I could even give you money, I could, without danger, be charitable to Jeanne. I shall refer to her again, but you have provoked me into these explanations. . . . (Jeanne will go into a nursing-home, where only what is strictly necessary will be paid.) But I shall talk of her again in a moment. . . . From the beginning of next year, I shall consecrate to Jeanne the income of what capital remains. She will retire somewhere so as not to be completely alone. This is what happened to her; her brother pushed her into a hospital to get rid of her, and when she came out she discovered he had sold some of her furniture and clothes. In four months, since my flight from Neuilly, I have given her seven francs.⁷³⁹

Manet painted her as *La maîtresse de Baudelaire allongée* (fig. 5.10, p. 29) in 1862 - a paralyzed and sickly figure. And Baudelaire clearly did not stop thinking of his former mistress, writing to Ancelle in May 1864 that « je tacherai de trouver le temps de vous écrire cette semaine. Mais je vous supplie d’envoyer 50 francs à Jeanne, sous enveloppe. (Jeanne Prosper, 17, rue Sauffroy Batignolles). . . . Je crois que cette malheureuse Jeanne devient aveugle. » . . . « Je vous envoie ce reçu fait d’avance, pour éviter tout contact entre elle et vous. »⁷⁴⁰

In 1865, Baudelaire drew her again (from memory). Two years later, he dedicated one of his works to “A Mlle B.”⁷⁴¹ On 31 August 1867, Baudelaire died at the age of 46 in the arms of his mother. He is buried in Montparnasse cemetery in Paris. Nadar claims he saw Duval for the last time in 1870, noting that she was on crutches. The singer Emma Calvé had a meeting with Duval which occurred sometime between 1870 and 1878. She wrote of it:

Avec une de mes camarades qui la connaissait, j’allai, un jour, chez la belle maîtresse, amie de Baudelaire. Sous le nom de Jeanne Prosper, elle habitait un modeste logis, quelque part aux Batignolles. On nous introduisit dans un salon de peluche jaune. Elle arriva peu après, appuyée sur deux béquilles, coiffée d’un madras multicolore d’où s’échappaient des mèches folles, grises et frisées, aux oreilles des anneaux d’or.

Elle devait approcher de la soixantaine, mais elle avait conservé un teint dore et des yeux magnifiques, dont Baudelaire disait : « Elle possède de beaux yeux doux et nostalgiques qui semblent regretter le cocotier absent. »

- Voulez-vous bien me chanter quelque chose, dit-elle d’une voix douce et zézayante. J’ai souvent entendu la Patti, ainsi que toutes les grandes cantatrices de l’époque, car j’allais souvent à l’Opéra, seule distraction que mon poète me permettait car il était jaloux comme un tigre et ne me laissait pas sortir le jour. Il prétendait que j’étais *faite pour la nuit*, ajouta-t-elle en baissant les yeux.
- Vous devez être bien glorieuse d’avoir été aimée d’un si grand écrivain ?

⁷³⁷ Charles Baudelaire, March 17, 1861, *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire to his Mother*, 199.

⁷³⁸ Charles Baudelaire, letter to his mother, April 1, 1861, *Selected Letters to his Mother*, 164-167.

⁷³⁹ Charles Baudelaire, letter to his mother, March 29, 1861, *Selected Letters to his Mother*, 165-166.

⁷⁴⁰ Charles Baudelaire, to Ancelle, May 10, 1864, quoted in Richon, 164.

⁷⁴¹ Richon, 172.

- Oui, dit-elle en se redressant. Ah ! il m'aimant bien. C'était un bel amant, si doux avec moi, mais pas rigolo, toujours triste, avec . . . des fantaisies de l'autre monde.

Et, en soupirant :

-Je ne vous souhaite pas, mes toutes belles, d'être aimées d'un poète, fut-il le plus grand de tous. Puis elle retira d'un coffret des lettres dont elle nous lut certains passages, mais qu'elle ne nous permit pas de toucher.

- Ce sont mes reliques, dit-elle. J'en ai vendu quelques-unes, car je ne suis pas riche, mais celles-ci, les premières et les dernières qu'il m'écrivit me suivront dans le cercueil !⁷⁴²

Jeanne Duval is believed to have died soon after that meeting; although there may have been a final sighting of her around 1886. Her last known address was 17, rue Sauffroy Batignolles. No record has been found of her death, nor the place of burial.⁷⁴³

Duval lived a precarious life: more often than not a hand-to-mouth existence, fleeing from creditors (sometimes her own, sometimes Baudelaire's). She sold her furniture and clothes to survive during particularly desperate times. She was not a successful actress, and evidence seems strong that she made part of her living selling herself sexually – a not-uncommon activity of bit-part actresses at the time. For more than two decades, her life was entwined with Baudelaire's. They were lovers, friends, and caretakers for one another. Far from being a passive spectacle, she was an active participant in her own life and an integrated partner in his – because they chose to be with one another. At one time or another, she would have come into contact with writers, artists, and other bohemians such as Balzac, Maxime du Camp, Charles Toubin, Théophile Gautier, Gonzague de Reynold, Courbet, Théodore de Banville, Ernest Prarond, and Daumier, to name but a few of Baudelaire's circle. And she was certainly known to them.

Contemporary Perceptions of Jeanne Duval

Contemporary perceptions of Jeanne Duval derive predominantly from Charles Baudelaire, her common-law husband. The poet spent an inordinate amount of time attempting to find money (and avoiding bill collectors), with most of those efforts directed toward his mother, Madame Aupick, and his financial guardian (who took over his affairs at the behest of his mother). Several scholars have attempted to make sense out of the extraordinary, close relationship Baudelaire had with his mother, which in his letters at least, was loving, desperate, hateful, exasperating, and playful – often within the same correspondence. Most scholars also agree that Baudelaire was not above using the written word to manipulate her to obtain what he needed. Why would this not extend to his descriptions of ill treatment at the hands of Duval? Therefore, we must look critically at claims that Duval was financially debilitating him, that she was duplicitous and frequently evil, or any other of the numerous indictments he made against her.

The following is the representation of Duval gleaned from the portrayal of her by Baudelaire and his contemporaries – including Nadar, Théodore de Banville, Ernest Prarond, and Charles Toubin. Baudelaire's mother also contributed a few pointed words about Duval. I end with an image: a caricature which I believe represents Duval in a particular way. I am not implying that this portrayal is correct. Baudelaire's mother destroyed all the correspondence from Duval (Duval purportedly wrote letters directly to Madame Aupick, demanding money) and all the letters she found between her son and Duval. All that remains between the lovers is one rather benign letter

⁷⁴² Emma Calvé, *Sous tous les ciels j'ai chanté*, (Paris: Plon, 1940), p. 140. Le témoignage n'est pas daté, mais il ne peut être antérieur à 1878 as quoted in Richon, 158-59. This is the last mention of her found.

⁷⁴³ Verlaine claims he had seen or talked to her in 1890; see Pierre-Barthélémy Gheusi, *Cinquante ans de Paris*, (Paris: Plon, 1940), 386.

from Baudelaire written in the tone of father figure, but it does give a glimpse of where some modern-day biographers have rather uncritically gathered their portrait of Duval – and turned it into fact.

Baudelaire's Representations of Jeanne Duval

Baudelaire's emotions toward Duval ranged from hate and fury to love and sentimentality. He was, in turns, overwrought by her bad attitude towards him, and resigned to her behavior. He often reacted with violence and vindictiveness toward her; at times we are able to see his cruelty to her. Some of these emotions were apparent in the letters he wrote to his mother. Duval in turn is represented as being indifferent to the hurt she caused him, vindictive when he stopped giving her money, multiply adulterous in her sexual liaisons, disrespectful of his talent, ungrateful of his many sacrifices to care for her, and a concerted impediment to his well-being.

The range of feelings was conveyed in letters to his mother and his financial advisor.⁷⁴⁴ Since Baudelaire sometimes had Duval deliver them, it is possible that the bad or strange news they contained – or the feelings they engendered – were transferred to Duval, the messenger. I refer again to the letter that spoke of suicide.⁷⁴⁵ It is helpful in understanding Baudelaire's behavior in his correspondence, and it displays his love of Duval and simultaneous selfish disregard for her feelings.

Quand Mademoiselle Jeanne Lemer vous remettra cette lettre, je serai mort. Elle l'ignore. Vous connaissez mon testament. Sauf la portion réservée à ma mère, Mademoiselle *Lemer* doit hériter de tout ce que je laisserai, après paiement fait par vous de certaines dettes dont la liste accompagne cette lettre... Mon suicide ajouté aux désordres divers de ma vie ne peut que les servir pour frustrer Mademoiselle Lemer de ce que je vauX laisser. Il faut donc que je vous explique mon *suicide* et ma conduite à l'égard de Mademoiselle Lemer,-- de telle sorte que cette lettre adressé à vous, et que vous aurez soin de lui lire, puisse servir à sa défense, en cas que mon testament soit attaqué par les personnes ci-dessus nommées... Je donne et lègue tout ce que je possède à Mademoiselle Lemer, même mon petit mobilier et mon portrait – parce qu'elle est le seul être en qui j'ai trouvé quelque repos. Quelqu'un peut-il me blâmer de vouloir payer les rares jouissances que j'ai trouvées sur cette affreuse terre? ... Ma mère, qui si souvent et toujours involontairement a empoisonné ma vie, n'a pas non plus besoin de cet argent. Elle a son *mari*, elle possède un *être humain*, une affection, *une amitié*. Moi, je n'ai que *Jeanne Lemer*. Je n'ai trouvé de repos qu'en elle, et je ne veux pas, je ne peux souffrir la pensée qu'on veuille déposséder de ce que je lui donne, sous prétexte que ma raison n'est pas saine... Jeanne Lemer est la seule femme que j'aie aimée—elle n'a rien. Ét c'est vous, M. Ancelle, un des rares hommes que j'ai trouvés doués d'un esprit doux et élevé, que je charge de mes dernières instructions auprès d'elle.

Adieu!

Lisez-lui ceci.--*Je crois en votre loyauté, et sais que vous ne le détruirez pas.*

Donnez-lui immédiatement de l'argent [500]. Elle ne connaît rien de mes suprêmes intentions,---et s'attend à me revoir venir la tirer de quelques embarras.⁷⁴⁶

Baudelaire often wrote that he was with Duval only because he felt duty bound to do so (despite her ill-treatment of him). When Baudelaire's stepfather admonished him for his association with Duval, Baudelaire wrote:

With that sheer obstinacy and violence, which is peculiar to you, you were unjust to me solely on account of a poor woman, *whom for a long time now I only love from a sense of duty*, that is all. It is strange that you who so often, so continually, spoke of spiritual feelings, of duty, should never have understood this singular liaison, in which I have nothing to gain, and in which expiation and the desire to repay devotion play the greater part. However

⁷⁴⁴ Duval is referred to by her name Duval, and by her pseudonyms, Lemer, Lemaire, or Prosper.

⁷⁴⁵ Baudelaire's disastrous spending led to a court order depriving him of control over his own finances.

⁷⁴⁶ Charles Baudelaire, suicide letter to Ancelle, June 30, 1845, *Correspondance générale*, Tome Premier, 70-73.

numerous the infidelities of a woman may be, however harsh her character, when she has shown some spark of devotion and good will, it is enough for a man who is disinterested, and above all a poet, to believe himself bound to repay her.⁷⁴⁷

He also represented her as deliberately trying to sabotage him: “I have to write at night in order to have quiet, and to avoid the insupportable fussing of the woman I live with.”⁷⁴⁸ In another letter, Baudelaire wrote that “it is impossible, therefore, for me to make use of [the diplomatic bag] or you either; *so you must send your reply to Madame Olivier—I shall pay the postage—and not to M. Ancelle*; he is capable of not informing me for a couple of days—even more. I do not ask you to send your letters to *my house*. *Besides the fact that Jeanne knows your handwriting—I have a drawer I can lock.*”⁷⁴⁹

Baudelaire represented Duval as being an obstacle to his happiness. In one particularly bitter letter to his mother, he wrote that “Jeanne has become an obstacle not only to my happiness—that would be little enough, since I too can sacrifice my pleasures as I have proved—but also to the perfecting of my mind. These past nine months have proved a decisive experience for me. . . . *In the past she had some qualities*, but she has *lost* them; and I, I see more clearly.” He went on in a manner that seems to completely convey his anger at Duval, the one

who turned out that cat, my only pleasure in the house, and who brings in dogs because the very sight of them makes me ill, who is unable or will not comprehend that *not to be avaricious* for ONE month merely, would thanks to that short calm, permit me to finish my large book. I ask you, can such a state of things be? There are tears of shame and rage in my eyes as I write these lines, and I am glad there are no weapons here; I think of the times when it is impossible to remain calm, and that awful night when I cut open her head with a bracket. . . . But what can I do? A terrible vanity adds to my sufferings; that of not leaving the woman without giving her certain amount of money. . . . Since I cannot offer her a large sum, I shall continue to give her small sums of money, which will be easy, since I *gain it easily enough*, and my working hard I can gain still more BUT I SHALL NEVER AGAIN SEE HER. Let her do what she likes. Go to Hell, if she wants to. I have used up ten years of my life in struggle. All my youthful illusions have vanished. There only remains what my prove to be eternal bitterness.⁷⁵⁰

He was despondent over their multiple breakups – but she was apparently indifferent – and he represented her as being blatantly unfaithful and disrespectful to him by flaunting her “brother” in his face. The brother was “hindering me in this manner from my only pleasure which consists in conversing with an old and infirm woman.” When the brother even demanded money, Baudelaire was outraged:

“Can you conceive of any creature who had come from the end of the world, who had fallen from the moon, who had never troubled himself about his sister, who wants guarantees from one who for nineteen years had done what his duty did not command him to do? . . . A thousand pardons, my dear Malassis, for entertaining you with these shameful things. I have had to live between a rascal and a miserable woman whose brain is affected. I have escaped, mad with indignation.”⁷⁵¹

Some years later, in a letter to his mother, Baudelaire admitted that “I forbade her to come and visit me here; it was my odious pride that made me do it. I don’t want people to see a woman

⁷⁴⁷ Charles Baudelaire, letter to his stepfather, December 8, 1848, *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire to his Mother*, 34.

⁷⁴⁸ Charles Baudelaire, letter to his mother, December 9, 1851, 43.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44

⁷⁵⁰ Charles Baudelaire to his mother, March 27 mars, 1852, *Correspondance générale*, Tome Premier, 159-168.

⁷⁵¹ Charles Baudelaire, March 27, 1852, *Letters to Mother*, 165; Charles Baudelaire to Poulet-Malassis, January 16, 1861, *Correspondance générale*, Tome III, 1860-1861, 232-235.

of mine looking poor, sick, and scruffy, when they knew her as a beautiful, healthy, and elegant woman.”⁷⁵² Yet in 1856, he admonished his mother, writing that

Why do you not, like other mammas, speak to me of marriage? To speak quite sincerely, the thought of that woman has never left me, but I am so perfectly broken in to the business of life, nothing but lies and vain promises, that I feel incapable of falling again into the same inextricable snares of the heart. The poor creature is ill now and I have refused to do and see her. For a long time she avoided me like the plague, for she knew my fearful temperament, nothing but craft and violence. I know she ought to leave Paris, and I am glad, although I confess it makes me sad to think she might die far away from me.⁷⁵³

To give the man a modicum of credit, I want to close with a moment of openness and self-reflection about his long and tumultuous relationship with Duval. The poet lamented that

She caused me a lot of pain, didn't she? How many times – and to you quite recently, just a year ago – have I complained about it? But faced with a collapse of such proportions, with a melancholy as deep as hers, my eyes fill with tears, and to tell the truth my heart is full of reproaches. Twice, I've devoured her jewels and her furniture. I've made her incur debts on my behalf, sign IOUs, I've beaten her [once fracturing her skull with a vase], and finally, instead of showing her how a man of my stamp behaves, I've constantly given her the example of debauchery and instability. She suffers – and is silent. Isn't there a cause for remorse in that? Am I not as guilty in this regard as in all the other matters?⁷⁵⁴

His remorse softens my interpretation of the self-portrait he created with his own pen strokes. However, is his sentiment any more trustworthy than his manipulative – and perhaps syphilitic – mind?

⁷⁵² Charles Baudelaire, letter to his mother, as quoted in Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 210.

⁷⁵³ Charles Baudelaire, to his mother, November 4, 1856, *The Letters of Charles Baudelaire*, 97.

⁷⁵⁴ *Correspondance générale*, Tome Premier, 213-214; quoted in Rosemary Lloyd, ed. *Cambridge companion to Baudelaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6. See also Marc-A. Christophe, 434. In another instance, Baudelaire may have also shoved her head into a table.

Baudelaire's Drawings of Jeanne Duval



Fig. 5.5: Charles Baudelaire, *Jeanne Duval*, 1858-1860, dessin à la plume à l'encre de Chine, with notes by Auguste Poulet-Malassis, 62.2 x 48 cm., Source : Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Fig. 5.6: Charles Baudelaire, *Vision céleste à l'usage de Paul Chenavard*, plume et vermillon, dessin annoté par lui-même vers 1860. Source : Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.



Fig. 5.7 Charles Baudelaire, *Quærens quem devoret*, portrait de Jeanne Duval, dessin à la plume à l'encre de Chine, Musée d'Orsay. (Dated: 2 fév 1865, Labeled circa 1850), Giclée, 18 x 24 in. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Fig. 5.8. Ce portrait a été réalisé à l'encre et au crayon par Baudelaire.

Other Representations of Jeanne Duval

Marc-A. Christophe writes that “Baudelaire’s friends were not at all enthusiastic about her or her personality.”⁷⁵⁵ Most of their writings on her reflect that disdain. After being introduced to Baudelaire’s mistress (who had just a few years before been his own), Nadar exclaimed: “a negress, a real genuine negress.” This explanation of her authenticity was meant to emphasize her inhumanness by the one who characterized her as a “creature,” a “snake,” “simian-like,” and a “parlour maid.”⁷⁵⁶ His so-called knowledge of the Negress – steeped in the rhetoric of the animal-like and domestic black woman – reveals his power to render Duval invisible.

Nadar supposedly saw Duval for the first time (in a performance) in 1838; he later said it was around 1839-1840.⁷⁵⁷ He must have been charmed, for she became his mistress. His impression was quite detailed:

En tenue consacrée de soubrette, le petit tablier et le bonnet a rubans flottants, une grande, trop grande fille qui dépasse d’une bonne tête les proportions ordinaires, surtout dans l’emploi, c’est déjà quelque chose pour surprendre. Ce n’est rien : cette soubrette d’extradimension est une négresse, une négresse pour de vrai, une mulâtresse tout au moins incontestable ; le blanc écrasé a paquets n’arrive pas a plaire le cuivre du visage, du cou, des mains.

La créature est belle d’ailleurs, d’une beauté spéciale qui ne s’enquiert de Phidias, spécial ragout pour raffines. Sous le foisonnement endiable des crespelures de sa crinière au noir d’encre semblent plus noirs encore ses yeux grands comme des soupières ; les nez petit, délicat, aux ailes et narines incisées avec finesse exquise ; la bouche comme Egyptiaque, quoique des Antilles, - bouche de « l’Isis » de Pompéi – admirablement meublée entre les fortes lèvres de beau dessin. Tout cela sérieux, fier, un peu dédaigneux même. La taille est longue en buste, bien prise, ondulante comme couleuvre, et particulièrement remarquable par l’exubérant, invraisemblable développement des pectoraux, et cette exorbitance donne non sans grâce a l’ensemble l’allure penchée d’une branche trop chargée de fruits. Rien de gauche, nulle trace de ces dénonciations simiesques qui trahissent et poursuivent le sang de Cham jusqu’à l’épuisement des générations. Enfin la voix est sympathique, bien timbrée, mais dans les notes graves inusitées chez les Dorine.

L’inaccoutumée personne se meut en toute résolution sur les planches comme si elle n’avait jamais fait qu’évoluer devant une lucarne de souffleur. Mais quel que soit l’évident, imperturbable vouloir d’entrer dans la « peau du rôle », comme prononcera Bignon pour le lexique des Coquelinières futures, le sérieux, le hautain de la physionomie et ce timbre en contralto se refusent net a l’emploi. Mon siège de critique est tôt fait : il y en a la pour les trois débuts, en tout juste.⁷⁵⁸

Writer, rival and good friend Théodore de Banville remarked that “there was something divine in her as well as bestial.”⁷⁵⁹ He also claimed that Baudelaire only really loved one woman: Jeanne Duval.⁷⁶⁰ Poet Ernest Prarond observed that “Jeanne seemed a very passive girl. . . . She was a mulatto – not very black, or beautiful. . . . She was rather flat-chested, quite tall, and had an awkward gait.”⁷⁶¹ Baudelaire’s colleague Charles Toubin wrote that “his mistress, as everyone knows, was a coloured girl called Jeanne Duval whom he caught one day in flagrante delicto with her hairdresser. . . . Baudelaire was furious. ‘With anyone else’ he told us, ‘I wouldn’t have minded, but with a barber!’ Two days later, we ran into her at the Chevel-Rouge crossroads. He went straight up

⁷⁵⁵ Christophe, 428.

⁷⁵⁶ Nadar, *Charles Baudelaire Intime*, 6-7.

⁷⁵⁷ Nadar, 7.

⁷⁵⁸ Nadar, 10-11.

⁷⁵⁹ Théodore de Banville, *Petites Etudes: Mes Souvenirs* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1882), 74-75.

⁷⁶⁰ Banville, quoted in Pollock, *Skirting the Issue*, note 13.

⁷⁶¹ Letter from Ernest Prarond, Jacques Crépet, *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire... notice, notes et éclaircissements* (Paris: L. Conard, 1953), 26-27; see also Pollock, 268.

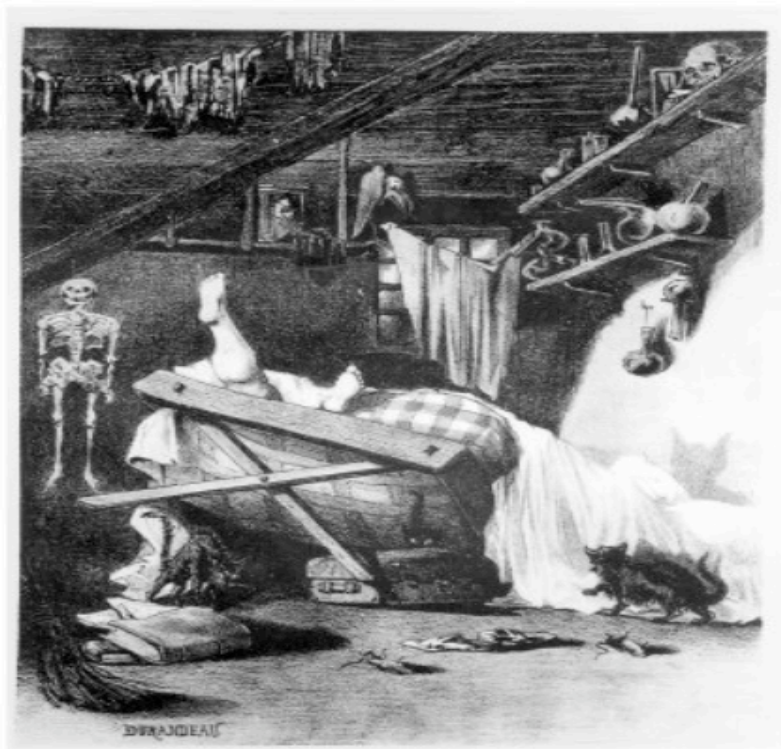


Fig. 5.9. Emile Durandeu, *Les nuits de Monsieur Baudelaire*, Le Boulevard, 1 décembre 1861

to her, and, in front of all the passers-by, gave her a severe talking-to. He took her back a few days later.”⁷⁶² Writer Gonzague de Reynold said she was a “stupid and perverse animal.” He also called her the “vampire of his existence.”⁷⁶³

In 1861 Baudelaire offered himself for consideration to the French Academy. One response was the caricature (fig. 5.9, above) lampooning his lifestyle. I am particularly interested in the cat at right in the picture. Note the shadow at the head of the bed; it does not correspond with the black cat on the floor at left (which has its own shadow). Might the large shadow in bed with Baudelaire be a hint at another “black cat” – Jeanne Duval?⁷⁶⁴

In 1862, Manet painted her (fig. 5.10) as she probably was at the time – older, fairly sick and

⁷⁶² Quoted in Pichois, 204; original text: Souvenirs d’un septuagénaire

⁷⁶³ Quoted in Pollock, 268-269.

⁷⁶⁴ Elizabeth Fallaize notes that Emile Durandeu’s “caricature depicts the poet, or rather the poet’s feet, protruding from the upturned bed and surrounded by a jumble of objects associated with black magic and witchcraft, including a skeleton, a broom, a bat, a foetus in a jar, a black cat and vessels of strange shapes holding various liquids. The shadow of the black cat’s head, ears pricked, looms on the wall. The whole is entitled, “Les Nuits de Monsieur Baudelaire” and must have been hardly the kind of advertisement which the latter would have wished for in a period of his candidacy to the Academy,” Elizabeth Fallaize, *Etienne Carjat and « Le Boulevard » (1861-1863)* (Genève : Editions Slatkine, 1987), 131.



Fig. 5.10. Edouard Manet, *La maîtresse de Baudelaire allongée*, 1862.
Huile sur toile, 500 x 406 mm, Szépművészeti Museum, Budapest.

partially paralyzed. Pollock writes of this painting that “the figure assumed to be Jeanne Duval is represented in direct opposition to the demonised, exoticised, bestialised image produced by Baudelaire’s contemporaries . . . and gives us, today’s readers and viewers, relief in imagining an other history than that given so repetitiously and maliciously in the canonical literature.”⁷⁶⁵

* * *

When Baudelaire died in 1867, scholars lost one of their last opportunities so uncover a perhaps more well-rounded view of the relationship between Baudelaire and Duval – Madame Aupick destroyed all the letters from Duval to Baudelaire and all their known associates. But Madame Aupick, a year later, did write an enduring statement about her feelings about Jeanne Duval:

La Vénus noire l’a torturé de toutes manières. Oh ! si vous saviez ! Et que d’argent elle lui a dévoré ! Dans ses lettres, j’en ai une masse, je ne vois jamais un mot d’amour. . . . Sa dernière en avril 1866, lorsque je partais pour aller soigner mon pauvre fils à Bruxelles, lorsqu’il était dans de si grands embarras d’argent, elle lui écrit pour une somme qu’il faut qu’il lui envoie de suite. Comme il a dû souffrir à cette demande qu’il ne pouvait satisfaire ! Tous ces tiraillements ont pu aggraver son mal et pouvaient même en être la cause.⁷⁶⁶

Jeanne Duval as *lieu de mémoire*

With two notable exceptions (journalist Emmanuel Richon and biographer Claude Pichois), contemporary writers on Baudelaire have been almost uniformly dismissive of Jeanne Duval. Baudelaire biographer Pichois has written the most comprehensive account of Duval’s life in the theater, painstakingly searching out theater bulletins and reviews to find traces of her bit parts.⁷⁶⁷ First he disputes highly romanticized claim that Nadar first saw her in performance, stating that « *la*

⁷⁶⁵ Pollock, 257-8. See Therese Dolan’s important work, “Skirting the Issue: Manet’s Portrait of ‘Baudelaire’s Mistress, Reclining’ (Edouard Manet),” *Art Bulletin* 79, no. 4 (December 1997), 611 for a discussion of this controversy.

⁷⁶⁶ Mme Aupick to Charles Asselineau, March 4, 1868.

⁷⁶⁷ Pichois, *Études*, see « *A propos des « Yeux de Berthe » Du Nouveau Sur Jeanne Duval?* ».

*technique du romancier cherchant à créer la vraisemblance par la multiplication des « petits faits vrais » ou crus tels est encore reconnaissable dans le billet . . . que Nadar prétend avoir reçu de Jeanne.»*⁷⁶⁸ Pichois goes on to say that « *Moralité : se méfier des précisions excessives dans les souvenirs rédigés tardivement par romanciers ou des journalistes, -- comme des excuses circonstanciées ou des hyperboles détaillées que prodigue le menteur : trop de vraisemblance finit par nuire* »⁷⁶⁹ – an astute observation that many other biographers unfortunately ignored. In fact, many modern-day scholars of Charles Baudelaire have been downright vicious:

Ce fut le début d'une liaison tempétueuse de presque toute une vie, qui inspirera de nombreux poèmes. Elle est la « maîtresse des maîtresses » dans le poème *Le Balcon*, et c'est sans doute ses charmes qui inspirèrent les vers de *Parfum Exotique*, *La Chevelure*, *Le Serpent qui Danse*, *Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne*, *Sed Non Satiata*, série de poèmes des *Fleurs du Mal* souvent citée comme le cycle de la « *Vénus Noire* ».

Vampirisé, diabolisé, à la fois ange et démon, Jeanne Duval incarne la femme sensuelle, tentatrice, dangereuse, tribade, infidèle, troublant l'âme du poète épris d'une passion charnelle, qui prend la forme d'une dépendance forte.⁷⁷⁰

It is as if Baudelaire's greatness as a writer is predicated upon her evisceration, even while his most celebrated poetry was dependent upon her existence. Of course, this dismissal of a woman of color in the life of a great white man is not unprecedented. Nor is the need to remove black womanhood in order to have larger discussions about whiteness. Two examples come immediately to mind: the first is Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson; and the second – more akin to the period at hand – is Edouard Manet and discussions of his painting *Olympia*.⁷⁷¹ It is not possible to venerate the man unless the Other is first brutally maligned – and then violently erased. Jeanne Duval is almost nowhere, yet random photographs and paintings have her name attached to them – as if she is any (and every) black woman in nineteenth-century France, since the predominant ideology seems to be that she is so interchangeable with the times that any representation will suffice. In a discussion of Jeanne Duval and Baudelaire's *Vénus Noire*, a random black naked image is inserted. In point of fact, such a picture (fig. 5.11) accompanied writing on Baudelaire and “his mistress:”

⁷⁶⁸ Pichois, *Études*, note 114, 62.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁷⁰ Charles Baudelaire website; section regarding Charles Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval, <http://baudelaire.litteratura.com/?rub=vie&srub=per&id=5> (accessed October 1, 2010).

⁷⁷¹ In *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, art scholar Timothy Clark declares that the painting of impressionist Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, most represented Paris in the nineteenth century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Clark manages to discuss the painting in minute detail, barely mentioning the maid that comprises half the painting. What was it about Olympia's maid that had to be erased in order to speak about the painting in the manner Clark does, and for him to situate it as modern? In subsequent editions, Clark admits to being admonished by a colleague for speaking about the painting *Olympia* and never mentioning the maid. See his introduction for his belated *mea culpa*.



Fig. 5.11. Jorge Tamayo, *Woman and Landscape*, 2001. Acrylic on canvas, 124 x 144 cm.
San José, Costa Rica, Galería Valanti Barrio Escalante⁷⁷²

This is not a portrait of Jeanne Duval; it is a portrait painted by Jorge Tamayo. Nothing connects the two women – time, location, ethnicity, or circumstance – except their color.

Biographers of Baudelaire

The placement of Jeanne Duval in indexes of biographies of Charles Baudelaire is revealing. In Jacques Crépet's index, under "DUVAL (Jeanne)" is the notation "*voir* Jeanne."⁷⁷³ In *Baudelaire: A Self Portrait*, there is also a heading "Jeanne," but with nothing at all under the name "Duval."⁷⁷⁴ In several cases, under "Duval, Jeanne," the reader is directed to "Jeanne."⁷⁷⁵ While it could be argued that this is due to the fact that Duval lived under several different last names, I suggest that it also

⁷⁷² The jpeg above is entitled: 379-Jeanne-Duval.gif; see http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://bp0.blogger.com/___XE-5yabazI/RyaWHqtiAbI/AAAAAAAAAqY/6YItv_69rrM/s400/jtamayo_mujerL.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.lidous.net/tag/manet/&usg=__eFW8l9q5OZreuefw3hi83CTyiw=&h=346&w=400&sz=39&hl=en&start=8&sig2=U8xXgYRISMkgS42AB2SDcw&um=1&tbnid=nLVqu7FpeLs-3M:&tbnh=107&tbnw=124&prev=/images%3Fq%3D%2522jeanne%2Bduval%2522%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG%26um%3D1&ei=CEP2SZyWCYS-swPm1cjVAQ (accessed October 1, 2010).

⁷⁷³ Jacques Crépet, *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, 413.

⁷⁷⁴ Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr., *Baudelaire, A Self Portrait, Selected Letters*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

⁷⁷⁵ See for instance Jean Prévost, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1953).

contributes to the overall lack of respect for Duval as a subject in her own right, one worthy of her own name and subjectivity.

There is disagreement over how Baudelaire and Duval first met. Anthony and Susan Glyn describe the circumstances of their first meeting (note the (re)inscription of the mysterious black and naked woman):

[Baudelaire] would stare at the Seine for hours from his window and one day he saw bathing in the river, the beautiful mulatto girl, Jeanne Duval (*La Vénus Noire*). The Seine was relatively unpolluted and bathing was permitted. Jeanne's origins are mysterious. She is supposed to have come from the West Indies, and there are conflicting accounts of her appearance: tall, crinkly-haired, graceful, farouche, full-breasted, though others have described her as of medium height, ungainly, queen-like and flat-chested. Baudelaire fell passionately in love and installed her nearby in Rue Le Regrattier; she became for him the symbol of carnal and profane love.⁷⁷⁶

Most others state that Baudelaire saw Duval first on stage, where she had an extremely minor part in a minor play, her only words: "Dinner is served, Madame."⁷⁷⁷ According to Porché, that meeting struck Baudelaire like a thunderbolt: "Suddenly, a lady's maid came on to the stage and spoke a few words. She was a mulatto. Baudelaire searched feverishly through his programme for the name of this strange apparition. He found it. Jeanne Duval. But why were his hands trembling?"⁷⁷⁸ Duval – a "strange apparition" – reduces Baudelaire to a quivering mute.

Martin Turnell also writes of the meeting of Duval and the reason Baudelaire "chose" the rather uninteresting Duval:

Baudelaire selected her for the part that she was to play in his life; not merely for her looks but for her origin and the colour of her skin. He had come back from the East with his mind stored with memories of an exotic scene, but except for the spectacle of the heaving buttocks of a black woman servant who was being publicly thrashed—a spectacle which had made a powerful impression on him—the scene was empty, and he needed an inhabited scene.⁷⁷⁹

"We have to admit," Turnell continues, "that she was chosen partly to enable him to project the morbid element in his attitude towards sexual love—she was the exotic creature whom he could worship and with whom he could indulge in strange practices." His final description of Duval: "She was indolent, rapacious, and unfaithful to him with his friends and possibly even the tradesmen who came to the house."⁷⁸⁰

Porché's descriptions are worth quoting at length, because it seems to begin a trajectory which still burdens Duval. He describes her as tall and thin, moving with a "kind of undulation." "Her head," he went on, "was it ugly or beautiful? It was impossible to say; but there was about it, as about her body, something exorbitant." Her hair, he writes, "fell on all sides, in spite of the hairpins, in furious wisps, like a writhing bunch of snakes."⁷⁸¹ Baudelaire's first glimpse of Duval, according to Porché, sent him into orgasmic expositions of her "shameless hips" and "writhing" hair. What we arrive at are animalistic expressions of sexual desire, complete with the animalistic excess that Baudelaire would use to write about her later. But there remains *nothing* that gives evidence that his first sight of Duval, in the guise of a maid, affected him with such excess. Porché goes on to state that it is only Baudelaire's "breeding" which prevented him from going backstage to

⁷⁷⁶ Anthony Glynn and Susan Glyn, *Companion Guide to Paris*, (Woodbridge: Companion Guides, 1999), 35-36.

⁷⁷⁷ Starkie, 84.

⁷⁷⁸ Porché, *Charles Baudelaire*, 70.

⁷⁷⁹ Martin Turnell, *Baudelaire*, 59-60.

⁷⁸⁰ Turnell, 60.

⁷⁸¹ Porché, 70.

meet her; instead, according to Porché, he sent her a bouquet of flowers.⁷⁸² Nevertheless, Baudelaire left the theater “in a state bordering on agony,” haunted by Duval’s voice, with “its sweetly hoarse inflections, bestially caressing, and it was the contrast of the slim waist with those insolent *haunches*, just, that, which obsessed him in that picture he had brought back with him from Mauritius.”⁷⁸³

Sharing Baudelaire’s apparent obsession, Porché describes Duval: “Stylised to-day by time, she is like one of those statues of ancient Egypt, in black marble, with enamelled eyes. At the time the sphinx lived in the rue Saint-Georges.” Porché immediately places her as a woman in search of “a serious customer. Once she had scented good game, a well-to-do young man of family, it was for her – with her ‘instinctive knowledge’ – to draw this young unsuspecting boy into her den.”⁷⁸⁴ Duval is clearly positioned as a stalking prostitute, awaiting her next victim, caring for nothing but finding her next patsy. Happily for the reader, Porché allows us to “glance through the curtains” during this sexual conquest, if only to uncover the “mystery,” which he claims to be marred only by the color of Duval’s skin.⁷⁸⁵

Her hold over Baudelaire means he is helpless; he clearly does not stand a chance to escape. She beds him, and by the time Baudelaire emerges, “a little unsteady,” “invisible bonds, strong as an iron chain, already bound him to this savage Venus, who was sitting up in bed—in the daylight and whiteness of the sheets even more akin to the shadows—delicately, with the movements of a monkey, dipping her bread and butter in her chocolate.”⁷⁸⁶ Happily for Duval, Porché continues, her supposed submissiveness toward her new lover is merely a ploy for furniture and other trinkets, as well as a more upscale address (*Femme-sans-Tête*).⁷⁸⁷ With the move, and the need to provide for his lover, Porché claims that Baudelaire “signed bills that encumbered him all his life.”⁷⁸⁸ After all, with her “subtle antennae, which, with her replaced intelligence,”⁷⁸⁹ she had begun the journey that would ruin his life. Baudelaire would suffer greatly from his affair with Duval, but Porché reminds the reader that the decision to remain with her was out of his hands:

He went to see Jeanne, he was shocked as soon as he entered the room by the half-caste’s vulgarity. But this sharp disgust was quickly followed by another kind of stupefaction. At these moments, however, passion was not the only power to which Baudelaire submitted, or rather, his imagination enriched this power with all kinds of spells—above all, if Jeanne were content to say nothing, if her insane chatter gave place to amorous, catlike purring, as she crouched naked before the fire. Then she would lose her personality of a third-rate actress, of a cunning, greedy prostitute, and become Beauty, impersonal and sacred, beyond all morality. . . . Confronted with Mlle. Duval, endlessly retailing her silly tittle-tattle, Baudelaire began to suffer cruelly from a degrading companionship: before this dark body, naked save for its jewels, which in the firelight threw an immense shadow on the wall, like that of the Genius of Evil stretched over the world, the poet bowed his head and worshipped.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸² Ibid., 70-71.

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 71, emphasis mine.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 79. Porché also insinuates that Duval made Baudelaire an alcoholic, and was an accomplice for his “schemes” to dupe his mother out of money, 88. When Baudelaire sent Duval with the letter discussing his suicide, his friends became alarmed. Porché proclaimed that his frantic friends found her “draped in yellow satin, lounging about with a cigarette in her mouth. From the lips of the sphinx herself [they] learnt that the poet had been carried, wounded back to his home,” 89.

Again, we see a Baudelaire unable to resist the charms of Duval. In relegating Baudelaire to being under Duval's quite inexplicable spell, Porché does not need to examine what sort Baudelaire must have been to be so easily manipulated by a "third-rate actress and prostitute." Like her predecessors, she was accused of stupidity, cupidity, jewel-lust, immorality and sexual power.

In the chapter "Personal Problems and Literary Beginnings (1842-1857), biographer A.E. Carter introduces the reader to Duval in this manner:

When Baudelaire first met her she was playing walk-on roles in a Latin Quarter theater and earning extra money as a prostitute. Or, more accurately, she was a prostitute who did a little acting. The theater was good advertising; anyone who liked her on the boards had only to step round to the stagedoor after the performance, she was immediately available.⁷⁹¹

Lest the reader be unclear about his sentiment, Carter continues: "She was a common slut, totally uncultivated and extremely stupid; and like most whores she lied with a deliberate compulsive mendacity which is close to paranoia."⁷⁹² When Carter compares descriptions of Duval by Nadar and Baudelaire, he notes their similarities, adding that both describe the same "aggressive breasts with their lush contours and pouting nipples."⁷⁹³ With regard to her place in the canon: "The verse Baudelaire wrote to Jeanne Duval, to Mme Sabatier, and (in a lesser degree) to Marie Daubrun, is among the world's greatest erotic poetry. Thanks to the fact a mendacious slut like Jeanne now occupies an unrivaled niche in literature and holds it on her own terms – as a strumpet pure and simple."⁷⁹⁴

According to Carter, her cruelty towards Baudelaire obviously knew no limits; Baudelaire's gifts meant nothing to her unless they were money in her pockets. Like the poor, unsuspecting young French men in the early chapters of this dissertation, Baudelaire was not at fault: "One fact emerges from all his poems to her: he understood her very little. Like many men of subtle and profound intelligence, he often missed the obvious. Perhaps he wanted to miss it."⁷⁹⁵ Why?

Like most whores, she was rather pathetic: mentally retarded, slow on the uptake, content to dwell from day to day, tolerant of her queer poet provided he paid the bills and she could occasionally get to bed with some lusty brute whose loins were stronger and his desires less finicky. She eventually took one of them to live with her and told Baudelaire that he was her brother (most prostitutes have relations of that kind). Baudelaire believed her, and she probably despised him for it. The episode completes her character.⁷⁹⁶

Unlike many other Baudelaire scholars who could be quickly dismissive of Duval's existence, Enid Starkie devotes an entire chapter to Duval ("The Black Venus, 1842-1844"), and to Baudelaire's "disastrous relationship with the mulatto woman, Jeanne Duval, who was to bring him so much unhappiness."⁷⁹⁷ Starkie does allow that Duval was the most important presence in his life – even more than his beloved mother. "There must have been some quality in her which held him to the end, and in some queer way he must have been deeply attached to her. Certainly there must have been some good in her which neither his mother nor his friends were able to perceive. . . . In their private life together, she must have been less cruel than she has been painted."⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹¹ Carter, *Charles Baudelaire*, 37.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65, 70.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁷⁹⁷ Starkie, 84.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

It is interesting that it took a woman's sensibility to look beneath the psychic kilts of Baudelaire and his opinionated male circle to want to find some humanity. Yet, Starkie also picks up on the lack of intelligence of Duval:

She, for her part, was doing all in her power to irritate and exasperate him. During the early years of their relationship, in a foolish attempt to treat her as an equal, he had tried to educate her in order to make her a more interesting and stimulating companion. . . . She had proved stupid and incapable of education, and had always expressed contempt for his interests and activities.⁷⁹⁹

Later in their relationship, she borrowed money in his name, Starkie claims, to pay for drinks and drugs. Baudelaire was too ashamed to tell his friends that he had been unaware of her actions, and thus, took on the debts.⁸⁰⁰ She also got rid of his cat and brought dogs because he did not like them.⁸⁰¹ Starkie does acknowledge that Baudelaire did, in fact, hit her badly enough to *split open her head*, but only because Duval drove him to it. She acknowledges, however, that he was terrified by his behavior.⁸⁰² On Duval's behalf, Frederick Hemmings admits, "it must be said, however, that a more cultivated woman might not have suited Baudelaire so well."⁸⁰³ Yet this hardly clears Duval's reputation.

Other scholars have written that Baudelaire was aghast at having learned in the 1860s that Duval's "brother" now living with them, was, in fact, her (former?) lover (see Baudelaire's letters in section two of this chapter). Hemmings, however, writes that Baudelaire may have been so upset because he had discovered that they were brother and sister – *and* lovers:

But it may not have been as simple as that; Baudelaire had been accustomed to her infidelities of old, and the discovery of one more could hardly have upset him so violently. What is more likely to have sickened him is that, knowing they were brother and sister (some facial resemblance, or the darkness of the man's complexion, would have been proof enough that they had the same mother at least), he found that they were sleeping together. To speak of incest might have 'scalded his tongue' where ordinary promiscuity would have been accepted with resignation.⁸⁰⁴

One scarcely knows where to begin. Hemmings does not cite this accusation, so it is unclear who actually made it. That the "brother" Duval was living with was a former lover seems to be accepted across the board. So was the fact he did sell her furniture and clothing while she was in the hospital, keeping the proceeds for himself. Baudelaire also stated that the brother sold things that belonged to Duval for his own benefit. What is astonishing is that Hemmings would conclude the two were incestuous lovers on the basis of skin color and "some facial resemblance."

Scholars, as opposed to biographers, of Baudelaire have had a difficult time situating Jeanne Duval in his life story. In the late nineteenth century, writers attempted to rehabilitate the memory and talent of Baudelaire. Edmond Lepelletier, in proposing a statue of Baudelaire, used Duval to explain Baudelaire's bohemian lifestyle, and thus excuse the poet for his folly:

Il rapporta aussi autre chose qu'une vision de la zone torride : une négresse, celle qu'il a célébrée dans les vers fameux ou il est dit que ses pieds sont aussi fins que ses mains, la bizarre déité, bonne comme les nuits, dont son cerveau demeura hante, sa vie empoisonnée, fut par lui ramenée ou retrouvée en France pour son malheur. Cette moricaude, laide, vulgaire et méchante, nomme Jeanne Duval, fut le mauvais ange du poète. Elle

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., 239.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid., 394.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 240.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Hemmings, *Baudelaire the Damned*, 52.

⁸⁰⁴ Hemmings, 184.

l'empêcha d'aller vivre, après la mort du général Aupick, a Honfleur, auprès de sa mère. Elle le poursuivait dans tous ses logis. En dernier lieu, quand il occupait, rue d'Amsterdam, a l'hôtel de Dieppe, une petite chambre de soixante francs par mois, cette Beatrix infernale venait faire du tapage et réclamer de l'argent jusque dans la loge du portier. Elle se grisait d'ailleurs abominablement et était en outre atteinte d'ulcères inquiétants. Mais Baudelaire a-t-il coiffait, comme tant d'artistes, du chapeau de Fortunatus celle qu'il daignait aimer. Elle disparaissait, elle se transfigurait. Il dégageait de cette première enveloppe grossière une forme élégante, fine et subtile à qui son hommage s'adressait. Baudelaire n'a jamais aimé réellement cette ivrognesse noire. Sa maîtresse idéale, dont Jeanne Duval incarnait par moment la vision, se dressait dans la brume du rêve sous la forme d'une brune, savoureuse et odorant fille des tropiques, dont le sein était houleux comme la mer de Ceylan et dont les cordages noirs, que figuraient ses tresses, semblaient appareiller pour un voyage au pays des extases prolongées et des artificielles voluptés.⁸⁰⁵

Duval emerges here as a woman so self-absorbed that she would deny Baudelaire the liberty of going to comfort his widowed mother – and in their long-term relationship, she reads as an unrelenting pursuer. He sums up Baudelaire's feelings for this “ugly, swarthy, evil drunk” by stating that Baudelaire never loved her.

Jeanne Duval and Charles Baudelaire as Symbolic of the End of Slavery in France

Ann Stoler, in *Race and the Education of Desire*, writes that much is revealed of colonial difficulties with the inclusion of the tensions of “destitute whites in the colonies and in dubious contract to an ambiguous population of mixed-blood origin.”⁸⁰⁶ Moreover, “what sustained racial membership was a middle-class morality, nationalist sentiments, bourgeois sensibilities, normalized sexuality, and a carefully circumscribed ‘milieu’ in school and home.”⁸⁰⁷ Even though Stoler is discussing the colonies, there are some uncomfortable parallels with Duval and Baudelaire in France, which may help to explain why representations of Duval became a fruitful site for so many racial and gender attacks.

It is curious that much of the disdain for Duval comes from both her profession and her behavior (often as a result of that profession). Duval was a part-time actress and most likely a part-time prostitute. Given the notion amongst the French bourgeoisie about actresses, there was often thought to be little separation between the two. Though the attitude toward actresses was not fixed within French society, during the period of Duval was performing on stage, the profession was denigrated. Even the most celebrated of actresses would have had to negotiate the box of sexual deviance to which they were relegated. So this might partially explain why Duval would have been looked down upon by Baudelaire's friends and, particularly, his mother, herself a respectable bourgeois woman. Duval's race, however, surely did not make things better. That becomes more clear when we see that this is where people in his life (and later biographers of Baudelaire) chose to locate their disdain for her. The attacks upon her were aimed at a place where they would most wound. She was not respectable via her class, her profession, nor her race. But we can make some observations about the world in which Duval lived, and thus see some of the contradictions in how her behavior has been interpreted.

Lenard Berlanstein, a theater scholar, writes eloquently about the financial, cultural and emotional pressures on actresses. He shows how the negotiation of lovers, career, marriage, and needs to properly present oneself – while simultaneously being seen as prostitute, whore, courtesan and professional – intersected with changing attitudes toward them (and other women) over several regimes. According to Berlanstein, it was considered acceptable for bourgeois young men to fall in

⁸⁰⁵ Edmond Lepelletier, August 17, 1892, quoted in *La querelle de la statue de Baudelaire: août-décembre 1892* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007), 67-68.

⁸⁰⁶ Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 100.

⁸⁰⁷ Stoler, 105.

love with actresses, so Baudelaire's meeting of Duval and relationship with her would not have been considered out of the ordinary.⁸⁰⁸ Baudelaire's overwrought emotional displays (to Duval and to his friends) would have been keeping with "the gendered display appropriate to his status—the passion was expected of young men."⁸⁰⁹ There was a price to be paid, however, if the infatuation was misinterpreted as feelings of love which became excessive or disruptive.⁸¹⁰

Likewise, there were rules of engagement for relationships between actresses and their lover(s). For an actress who was kept by a gentleman, there was a primary, publicly recognized lover, known as "Monsieur."⁸¹¹ As responsible for financially providing for her, he had – to put it bluntly – right of first refusal. However, there was an assumption that she would have other, secondary lovers. There could also be a "friend of the heart," who received the least amount of her attention.⁸¹² So Baudelaire's drama about sharing her with others says more about him than about her. Since he could not support her, or keep her, it was expected that she would find financial sustenance elsewhere. Yet, scholars of Baudelaire (and Baudelaire himself) seem unaware or unwilling to grant Duval what would have been commonplace during her lifetime. She, at least, appears to have followed the rules that were standard amongst women in the theater. Yet she was – and is – denigrated.

Finally, Berlanstein writes that "actresses' oddness, particularly their imputed sexual energy, also required the use of racial construction," including the "weaker proclivity for modest behavior and domesticity," which led to "degenerate, primitive" behavior.⁸¹³ This might also provide a space to understand the venom directed at Duval, since her known racial identity would have hyper-categorized her, leaving her even less opportunity to be seen as a proper, domesticated, or bourgeois wife and potential mother of Baudelaire's children (even if it had been something she had wanted to be – and we cannot know, for her words were destroyed). While Duval (and all the baggage that accompanied her) might have been more acceptable than not for Baudelaire, she was not in the eyes of those – like his contemporaries and present-day scholars – attempting to rehabilitate *his* image. Their attempts echo the same tensions between metropole (Baudelaire) and colony (Duval) that was apparent early in this dissertation.

If we return, in speaking about the end of slavery, to my theme of Duval's symbolic value, Stoler can again provide some assistance. She writes that "if we accept that 'whiteness' was part of the moral rearmament of bourgeois society [regardless whether the actors operating within that system acknowledged it], then we need to investigate the nature of that contingent relationship between European racial and class anxieties in the colonies and bourgeois cultivation of self in England, Holland, and France."⁸¹⁴ There is a quandary, however, exemplified partially in the exhausting complexity of Baudelaire's letters in which his relationship with Duval is painstakingly illuminated. Whatever his intent, his lack of "middle-class morality, bourgeois sensibilities and normalized sexuality"⁸¹⁵ removed him, as well, from the definitions of authentic whiteness. By exposing Baudelaire's often-disgraceful interactions with her, it becomes clear that whiteness was no guarantee of "enlightened" behavior – though it may have been excusable if blame could be placed on her shoulders (or other parts of her anatomy).

⁸⁰⁸ Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve*, 101.

⁸⁰⁹ Berlanstein, 103.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹¹ This duplicates in interesting power dynamic from Saint Domingue where a slave would address a white master as "Monsieur," but blacks – slave or free – could not be so addressed.

⁸¹² Berlanstein, 119.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸¹⁵ Stoler, 105.

* * *

Jeanne Duval – an Afro-French woman in nineteenth-century France – should, in many ways, represent the final conflation of French/African/Haitian. Yet, as the writing about her now and in the past has made clear, her representations remained inauthentically French. Though abolishing slavery during her lifetime, France still could not figure out a way to incorporate women like her into the “family” of Frenchness. Therefore the creation of a mythology was needed to explain her. The legacy of both black womanhood and femininity under colonial French slavery was perpetuated in the iconic representations of Jeanne Duval – dismissed, maligned, and ultimately turned into a Medusean myth by Baudelaire’s biographers. The very intensity of anger shown her by the biographers indicates how essential she was to Baudelaire and his work.

Baudelaire attempted to erase Duval to get what he wanted from his mother: he could not live without her – nor he could get the money he needed if she remained present. Neither was his circle completely able to erase her, since some of his most famous poetry was based upon her – one could not exist without the other. So they discussed her in ways that reinforced what they believed was her hypersexuality. Her race was also an integral part of how Duval was represented, putting the erasure under the rubric of character assassination. In erasing blackness they elevated whiteness, reinforcing their Frenchness. Within that frame, not much had changed in the century this study spans.

Still, she is a symbol of the shifting relationship of white French men and women to the black French men and women among them. Whereas in the time of Ourika, white actresses who wanted to play her role had to decide whether or not to wear blackface, in Duval’s time it was actually possible for a black woman to be on stage. Slavery had ended in her lifetime, and the project to rid France of blacks had been attempted and abandoned.

In answer to the question of whether Duval was Baudelaire’s angel or demon, Christophe poignantly concludes: “She was, quite simply, the person who lived closest to Baudelaire and shared the poet’s temperamental and bohemian life-style. Jeanne Duval should neither be condemned or condoned, for she was, above all, a woman of flesh with the qualities and frailties intrinsic to all humankind.”⁸¹⁶ Perhaps the fact that any trace of her has survived – even in this mutilated and mutated form – is a triumph.

Jeanne Duval was not a pious nun like Pauline Villeneuve, nor did she conveniently disappear like Henriette Lucille or the Ourika of fiction. Jeanne Duval, a woman most likely born in Haiti, may not have been particularly likeable, nor – more importantly – can we even know if she tried to be. She was not a slave like Sarah Bartmann, and hardly a house-pet as the original Ourika was. Yet, like the other black women whose lives and images have been examined in my dissertation, “proper” or “authentic” others have either written their own anxieties onto these bodies, or distorted her in order to avoid dealing with her humanness. Each of the cases examined is unique, yet in many ways received the same response: misrepresentation in, or erasure from, French discourse. Yet they remained essential in forwarding the discourse about race, gender, sexuality, and class in France. They were identical in the unacceptability of their blackness – and thus their Frenchness – yet the impact and challenge of their presence led to a gradual shift in standards. Within the lifetime of Jeanne Duval, less than half a century after the revolution in Saint Domingue/Haiti, which thrust the issue of blackness into the forefront of legislative and social conversation in France, slavery was abolished.

I am not saying that blacks were immediately accepted – as we find from the rhetoric about Jeanne Duval – nor that women were given equal status with men – as we see in Courbet’s *l’Atelier* – nor that French masculine prowess was no longer threatened – as Baudelaire and his chroniclers

⁸¹⁶ Christophe, 439.

made so apparent. Yet a softening of boundaries has gradually given value to – even honored – the humiliation and suffering of these women.

CONCLUSION:
FROM THE HOTTENTOT VENUS TO THE VENUS NOIRE



Fig. 6.1. *L'Esclave*, Vegetal-wax bust candle, 310h x 200w x 160d mm, Paris, *Cire Trudon*⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁷ Photo: Chan Kin Wai, Anthony Chan. Cire Trudon.

If I willingly tread on the unstable ground that lies between “history” and “representation,”
it is because I wish to blur the distinction between them.⁸¹⁸
Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*

On the Left Bank in Paris, a candle shop – founded in 1643 – continues to produce works of art in wax. *Cire Trudon*, the world’s oldest candle maker still in operation, has made candles for French monarchs, fashion houses, and discerning Parisians for nearly four centuries that span extraordinary shifts in government and culture. Amongst their collections, *Cire Trudon* includes one called « *Les bustes de cire* » which are a collection of oversize busts that they say “tries to revive the faces of those who marked its history and the history of France.”⁸¹⁹ There are currently three candles in this *collection*: Marie-Antoinette (1789), Napoleon (1803), and the third, entitled “*L’Esclave*” (1867).⁸²⁰ It is identical to the terra cotta bust, « *La Nègresse* » created in 1872 by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux. When you click on the details for the candle, you are led to the following image:



Fig. 6.2. Auguste François Biard (1798-1882), *L'Abolition de l'esclavage dans les colonies françaises en 1848, 1849*, huile sur toile, MV 7382, Versailles, Musée national du château et de Trianon

⁸¹⁸ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 14.

⁸¹⁹ <http://www.ciretrudon.com/en/index.html> (accessed October 22, 2010).

⁸²⁰ While it appears that the copy precedes the original, as with many pieces of sculpture, the “final” piece went through many iterations over several years. Originally created by Carpeaux in 1867 for a fountain, many variations were done in marble, bronze and plaster, as well as the terra cotta on the cover.

<http://www.artquid.com/artwork/5836/2826/captive-negress-carpeaux.html> (accessed October 27, 2010).

Not only, then, does the candle depict the importance of slavery, but also its eventual end. Although my work has argued that slavery very much “marked the history of France” (and continues to do so), the inclusion of *L’Esclave* is a stunning recognition. While I argue that it is not one that the larger nation has yet embraced, I am also struck, in this image, by blacks passively accepting their freedom, not acting as if they had been participants in obtaining it.

* * *

This dissertation has examined the impact of black women in France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing that representations of them were a result of racial anxiety first felt in France’s black colonies – in particular Saint Domingue – and exacerbated by France’s loss in the Haitian Revolution. Charles Mills says the Haitian Revolution was an example of an “ontological shudder” to the white polity, because it was a threat to the moral and political universe that constructed whites as human and non-whites as subhuman.⁸²¹ This defeat, I have argued, on the heels of the French Revolution of 1789, haunted France throughout the nineteenth century. White émigrés, displaced by the Republic and then the Empire, came back to a France that did not resemble the one they had fled. Colonial refugees returned with stories of black barbarism, feeling financially bereft, and angry at the French government for seemingly refusing to assist them regain all they had lost. They too found a “homeland” that resembled neither where they had come from, nor what they remembered. Thus, they were doubly displaced. Finding newly defined French identities would not be painless for any of them.

Racial roles had been destabilized with the loss of Saint Domingue, often articulated as being at the hands of blacks. Gender roles had become unbalanced, as formerly strong and virile French men limped home after that devastating defeat. Napoleon’s debacle in 1814 did little to assuage those feelings. France was then occupied by foreign powers, a constant reminder to citizens of exactly what they had lost. France’s resistance to accepting defeat was visible both in its repeated attempts to reclaim that lost island and in its refusal to call its former colony “Haiti.”

As my project has shown, this period was also an historical moment during which racial markers become fixed in particular ways. One of the main rhetorical uses for black women in early nineteenth-century France was to mitigate the devastating economic and psychological aftermath following the loss of Saint Domingue. The black female body provided a field that allowed the rhetoric to evade the troubling loss, while shoring up assertions of French prowess and rearticulating notions of a true French national identity, one steeped in white French masculinity. Black women, displaced by *both* attributes, became reflections of changing attitudes on both race and gender boundaries – all the way to the end of slavery in 1848 (and beyond).

Representations of black women functioned to highlight the myriad ways of “proving” black of Frenchness at times when Frenchness was so critical to self and public presentation, and yet so precariously established. It is not surprising that, at the end of Restoration, when France had passed the crest of its colonial/military supremacy, when slavery looked like it would no longer be law of the land, that representations of black women returned to those of the *ancien régime*. What, then, did it truly mean to be French? If one had lived in the colonies, any racialized identities that had been fostered there had to be sloughed off. Instead, they had to embrace a definition steeped in whiteness – without that being stipulated. As we have seen, social constructions of whiteness required constant

⁸²¹ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 86.

reminders (as well as revisions). It was not merely in the imaginations of the French (although this was one important site) where these oppositional debates took place, it also happened in both the social and legislative spheres.

Regardless of who they were or where they came from, the overarching narrative for black women was the reinforcement of the inauthenticity of their Frenchness. Within the realm of vastly different political and cultural structures, their inappropriateness was foregrounded. Yet in almost every case, these *ombres noires* – apparitions not only from Saint Domingue, but all those carrying the racial legacy of slavery – reveal through their narratives a chipping away, however slight, of racial and gender boundaries designed to constrain them. In that way, their lives impacted both identities.

The women in Saint Domingue illuminated how cultural representations were fostered and how they were used to establish and maintain both racial and gendered hierarchies. They also showed how precarious those hierarchies could be, as sexual relationships occurred regardless of laws that were designed to prevent them, and women ignored legislation designed to help them maintain their own precarious racial identities. As both blacks and whites arrived in France, racial legislation needed to adapt to fit changing circumstances. But white French men and women often flaunted those regulations opting for their individual comfort over national racial homogeneity.

This dissertation also pointed out the ways that white French men and women negotiated issues of race, often via the black female body. By speaking through these women, white French men and women both transgressed their own boundaries (of royal authority, for example) and illuminated paths for others that might follow. Women like Henriette Lucille also found niches for asserting their own sovereignty, even as representations of cases like hers were used to reinforce fears of unclean blood and the unsuitability of blacks to remain on French soil. Women like the Black Nun, though sequestered, were still able to speak their own versions of their place in French society. Even as she was locked away from her own supposed royal heritage, the *Mauresse* still managed to remind French subjects that she was a product of France via her parentage. That it was refused to her did not make her case any less poignant – or powerful.

The life of Sarah Bartmann, whose body was so maligned in order to both scientifically prove the superiority of white Frenchness and explain the black female body, demonstrated to white French women that they could also be controlled. Yet it permitted them to be complicit in the definition of Frenchness. Representations of Bartmann became a critical guide for subsequent conversations about black female sexuality, while restoring prestige to expert white male knowledge. As a result, the subjugation of blacks in the metropole could again be asserted – this time under the authority of science.

Ourika, the “perfect” aristocratic young lady, highlighted the strength of race in rendering a person inauthentic within the definitions of Frenchness. At the same time, writing in her voice and dressing like her gave white French men and women a unique venue for challenging their own sexual and cultural confinements – while warning them that the dangers of non-assimilation could lead to their own exile, or death.

Finally, Jeanne Duval, integrated into Frenchness via the most important benchmarks of language, parentage, and cultural assimilation, had her life turned into a series of representations designed to remove her from bourgeois respectability, to be sure, but even from the bohemian milieu within which she moved so freely. Her uneasy life experience mirrored a France coming to terms with the end of slavery and needing to remake itself in a way that erased blackness along with the institution. Yet, like the ghostly

image in Courbet's painting, Duval and the other women in my study managed to leave traces of themselves behind.

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