Mimola or the Story of a Casket

Antoine Innocent
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MIMOLA
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ANTOINE INNOCENT
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DOWNSTATE LEGACIES

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They say that one never learns something more intimately than when one has to teach it. Perhaps, then, translation is the only rival to the insight expressed in this adage.

If our research has been thorough, this English language translation of Antoine Innocent’s *Mimola or the Story of a Casket* is the first in existence. Given that it is also the first formal literary translation that I have ever attempted, I have no doubt that it will be improved upon in years to come. Nevertheless, despite this novice attempt, the nearly twenty years that have elapsed since my first discovery of this and other superb texts of fin de siècle Haitian literature without seeing the advent of their translation indicates the necessity of beginning somewhere.

It is time that students in the United States and the rest of the English-speaking world start learning and that professors and other teachers start teaching more widely our intellectual and literary heritage from the French-speaking Caribbean.
The period from 1890 through 1915—punctuated in Haiti by its nineteen-year occupation by the United States—witnessed the flourishing of a literary culture. It was not the beginnings of Haitian literature, but merely a particularly prolific era of its production, as was that era in the United States and elsewhere around the world. Poetry, novels, and periodical literature, including newspaper participation, all enjoyed a certain popularity among the French-reading classes. It was a popularity sustained and propelled by a circle of mostly Paris-educated friends and acquaintances, who supported one another’s endeavors both positively and negatively as editors, critics, readers, and rivals ideological, artistic, and political. Of the novelists, the four who stand out as having known some success beyond their own shores were Frédéric Marcelin, Justin Lhérisson, Fernand Hibbert, and Antoine Innocent. Another writer, the poet Masillon Coicou, also published a slightly less widely circulated novel during the first decade of the twentieth century when most of the other men’s significant works appeared.

Upon returning to Antoine Innocent’s work in 2013, my understanding of its significance had been enriched by fifteen years of teaching American Indian, as well as African American, US at large, and some greater North American texts. The African-rooted religious practices and spiritual beliefs of numerous Haitians and Innocent’s depiction of that inheritance resonates deeply with indigenous thought across Native North America and attempts over centuries by both practitioners and outsiders to conserve, revive, explicate, educate, and enrich populations with an understanding of indigenous cosmologies and their cultural expressions. Just to name one example,
the centrality of prayer directed toward the four cardinal points of the material world strikes this uninitiated reader as a significant theological, intellectual tie among African and North American traditionalists. Noteworthy is the throwing of corn and other food to the four corners and reminiscent uses of cornmeal as well. Honoring of ancestors and blood ties, as well as an ecological sensitivity, significant and central ritual roles for women, and a wide-reaching sense of our dimensions of interconnectedness and obligation also stand out as features in common, even while Innocent talentedly demonstrates the predominantly Eastern hemispheric origins of Vodun, its intimacies with ante-Christian European beliefs.

Augmenting those parts of the novel that focus upon religion, often through an anthropological view open to the same strong critiques as early twentieth-century ethnography in the United States, there is visible a prevalent theme of savagery versus civilization. That theme ties the narrative closely to American—especially US and European colonial—treatments of Native subjects. Innocent’s efforts to translate what his character Léon and many “foreigners” steeped in Western civilization see as savage remnants of a dark Africa never explicitly question the validity of the terms or their opposition per se; they do, however, deny most efforts to bring Haiti into civilization in any way but through the ancient practices. The practices acquire recognizability, familiarity, respectability through association with those of Celts, Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Saxons, Germans, Slavs, and, implicitly, with those of ancient Israel and its polytheistic neighbors.

Moreover, contrasts of character intermittently reverse the actors in the savagery-civilization dance. This motif Innocent
surely found amid myriad writers at his fingertips. He presents, for example, at the opening of Part I, Dan-Maoua’s mother instructing her daughter about God, which is then used to demonstrate greater Dahomey and greater Africa as a scene of naïve, pure, pious theological instruction, only to set that scene against the opening of Part II, where we are introduced to Manzila’s brutish, hypocritical, and oh-so-civilizationist rapist. If both Native Americans and descendants of Africa and the African diaspora have historically been measured against a civilizationist standard, their spokespersons and writers—as exemplified again through Innocent—as well as a multitude of European and Euramerican allies, have consistently measured those ideologues against their own standard and found them wanting. Innocent takes the indictment a courageous—even blasphemous—step farther, pulling the reader into the inner voices of Albert and Léon as they accuse the Virgin Mary and Jesus themselves of cruel neglect and indifference toward those Christianity would picture itself civilizing and saving.

Osage intellectual John Joseph Mathews remarked that the Osage elders “threw away” the old beliefs, the objects associated with them, the old knowledge, in part to protect their children as the times and white society forced a change upon them. Mimola’s grandmother has slightly different motives, but they operate within a similar context with a comparable loss of cultural beliefs and heritage and a reminiscent seeking after them by the grandchildren so separated from them. The older generation’s hiding, rather than transmission, of the knowledge may be why she and her friend Tante Marguerite say that there are mysteries the Creole cannot understand—or it may be for reasons beyond this one; this book leaves open the question
of whether they are right or whether future generations might understand these mysteries as Africans did, whereas Mathews’s books seem to close that question. “Poor child! Poor mother!” writes Innocent’s narrator. “How would they ever penetrate the secrets of a heredity, unconscious and blind, the affinities of blood which exist between us and beings that we have never known and yet that we carry within us!...How finally to know that we are tied to our origins by bonds so much stronger [than time, distance, the crossing of the Atlantic] that neither time nor distance, nor the crossing could absolutely free us from them.”

Other Native North American thinkers and writers hold out similar beliefs that there are certain knowledges or traits found “in the blood.”

These are only a few of the numerous intersections with American Indian, US, and greater Western literary and cultural studies. The more one examines Mimola, the more complexity one discovers in Innocent’s project, his approaches, and his language. Therefore, it may help readers, both of the English-language version alone and of this translation against the French, to arrive at a few more of these intersections and to elucidate those just evoked if I discuss my approach to translating the work and some of the problems that it raises. The afterword will continue this exploration of Innocent’s project, informed by the readers’ own encounters with the text.

**Translating Mimola into American English**

In philosophy, I agree with those theorists of translation who see translation as an artistic and creative activity. Particularly for a work of literature, one is almost forced by imperatives outside of oneself to put artistry into the translation. Yet
that opportunity for immersion in creativity also draws one to the work in the fashion of an intrinsic reward. It is a rare opportunity to work with language in a way that stretches, teaches one about one’s own as well as another’s language (or two others’, if the translator’s first language is neither source nor target) while also demanding great attentiveness to audience reception, and, in the case of a historical work, attention to the linguistic forms of another period as well as one’s own. I was fortunate to begin this translation while entering a semester of teaching fin de siècle/début de siècle works from the US. I drew upon expressions and formalities in those works, as when deciding how to convert an idiomatic French expression into idiomatic English of the period, or whether and how often to resort to contraction of the simple word “not,” especially in inverted question phrases, versus retaining its formality and the greater formality of the period’s English.

For this particular text, the most difficult choices to be made were certainly in the realm of verb tense. These had to do not only with Innocent’s use of the imperfect where English writers would generally employ the simple past (and/or the equivalent of the French passé composé), but with his frequent switching between a past tense and a present. Such switches often happen from paragraph to paragraph of the same, seemingly unified scene, or even within a single paragraph: a technique which is now so widely frowned upon in English that it can seem not only unnatural, but simply improper. I had to ask myself whether Innocent’s artistic purpose would be lost should the translation eschew these delicacies, or betrayed if it did not. In only one or two cases, but nevertheless in those, I wondered if the switch were indeed artistic purpose or poor
editing, given other imperfections in the original 1906 edition that are clearly typesetting mistakes. The jury is sure to hang on this one.

A few examples: The first four sentences of Part One, Chapter II have present tense, then past (passé composé), then present, then present, before the paragraph switches wholly into the imperfect. This majority of this paragraph I have rendered into the simple past, placing the second sentence in the pluperfect and the last verb in the conditional. On the other hand, for Part One, Chapter I, it seemed to me that Innocent’s shifting back and forth from present to past serves to make living the “primitive” Africans he describes there, as well as Tante Rosalie the moment we first catch sight of her. Thus, only the second-to-last paragraph here have I shifted from present to past, though often using the simple past where Innocent generally employs the imperfect. On the other hand, for the scene wherein Mme George is begging for provisions at the market stalls, I have followed Innocent’s several changes in tense, despite avoiding them earlier in that chapter, in the hope of capturing the tension of the moment.

Earlier, when Lala is first stricken with convulsions, I have chosen in one instance to convert Innocent’s imperfect tense to the conditional, as sounding more natural in English: “One moment, the patient would calm herself a bit, repeat this foreign name between her teeth,…then…she would cry that name so loudly that the echo would reverberate…. passersby would halt…neighbors would run up in throngs” versus “One moment, the patient was calming herself a bit, repeating this foreign name between her teeth, as if she was chewing it, then,…she was crying that name so loudly
that the echo was reverberating...passersby were halting... neighbors were running up in throngs.” Verb tenses continued to present challenges deep into the second section. Most sudden switches out of past tense into present and then back have been smoothed into past as sounding more natural to the English-language reader. In every case, whatever I have done with respect to verb tense has been examined first, and done consciously and deliberately rather than unconsciously, though on occasion with ambivalence or provisionality.

Perhaps a less surprising kind of imperative for change from absolute fidelity to the French comes in the form of slight alterations to sentence construction. In Part One, Chapter I, “qu’on s’ingeniait” becomes “how they strove so ingeniously” while two chapters later, “la chère adoré” becomes “the one so dearly adored” so as to sound natural in English. In the subsequent Chapter V, we are told that “the book, the needle, the crochet hook were prohibited” to Lala, whereas I have converted these nouns to gerunds—reading, sewing, crocheting—because I judged those to sound better in English given how it would need three words (the crochet hook) to two in French (le crochet), interrupting a neat parallelism. Such decisions obviously extended to simple expressions as for time or weather, which are infrequently translated literally into English. “The eleventh of July had arrived” sounds more natural than “We were at 11 July.”

Occasionally the visceral nature of a scene necessitated such changes in construction. When Manzila’s rapist is perversely seduced by her figure while he brutally tortures her, a literal translation—“The roundness and amplitude of her hips, the proportion of her lines...”—would distance us from
the immediacy of his lechery in English; so the line instead reads: “Her round and ample hips, her fine proportions, that expression in her glance, those plump lips imploring grace…” Perhaps the distancing is intentional on Innocent’s part, discovering the interior of a man who is looking at Manzila like she is in a painting in an art gallery; yet it is therefore not a difficult choice to trade the slaveholder’s point of view for the reader’s. Likewise, “it was like a tension of all his being toward that irresistible call…” becomes “it was as though his whole being tensed toward that irresistible call of that savage form.” Nouns become verbs or adjectives to bring the scene closer. On the other hand, during Lala’s first and only visit to Port-au-Prince’s infamous prisons, we might describe her sensitivity as “She was inhaling there like the odor of blood, of crime” or “She was inhaling there something like the odor of blood, of crime” but I have rendered it as “It was as though she were inhaling the odor of blood, of crime there,” losing some of the directness of the visceral simile but reemphasizing the narrator’s perspective and incredulity (“À l’en croire”) as to how, by what means, she could possibly be coming into direct contact with injustices unseen.

With respect to vocabulary, I began from the stance of preferring true cognates when they appeared, though the process of this translation softened an initially harder line on them. Often their use can seem appropriate while focusing on a sentence but present an unnatural sore thumb in English when read in the context of a paragraph or passage. At other times, while the cognate is appropriate or accurate, a synonym carries a preferred sound or meaning—as when one has to decide whether to retain the somewhat dated connotations of
an “air” which at times capture period but occasionally cause a reader to stumble, or to describe it instead as a melody or tune. (Similar deliberation regarding how English readers must sift through multiple meanings led to ditching a more period-appropriate “shade” for the clearer “ghost” in an instance involving no appropriate cognate.) A synonym can also simply lend a variety lost when two or more French words for something else must share one English translation. One similarly wavers here between adherence to the concept of a “cult” for the French “culte,” which can reinforce negative views of Vodun yet also faithfully describe aspects of it, and recognition that an equally legitimate translation, “worship,” is really meant. Or, despite its personification, does one writing partly for twenty-first-century youth wish for Mme George’s “little metallic animal” to be vomiting white stitching onto multicolored prints in the same sentence wherein it demonstrates “that it had been initiated into the two great motives of the human soul” and could “sympathize with its sufferings”? On the other hand, while clear and limpid mean essentially the same thing in English, I retained both cognates for emphasis, rhythm, faithfulness to the text, and echoes from passage to passage. When describing Lala’s figurative rather than literal loss of virginity, I retained that cognate rather than using the “innocence,” which describes the figurative more neatly, because “virginity” does more work as the metaphor it seems intended to be and carries more weight. It also forms a prelude to the myriad invocations of the Virgin Mary and ties Lala to her.

Occasionally, the wish to retain a true cognate meant redoubling a phrase that in the original text appears just
once. Innocent’s own style of redoubled phrasing elsewhere aided these decisions as they could be camouflaged within his habitual voice. For example, he uses the word *orgie* more than once to describe a nonsexual event, so I softened those sexual overtones in one location by using four words for one: “culinary orgy, feeding frenzy.” When it appears alone as merely “orgy” the second time in a similar context, it is to be hoped that the attentive reader retained that attempt to speak back to narrowed connotation. Similarly, “la grande magnétiseuse” became “her the great thaumaturge, the stone healer, the magnetic therapist” given no equivalent word of clear valence in English.

Perhaps the most difficult translation conceptually and imagistically as well as culturally was the line: “L’art avait accusé l’hystérie et s’était déclaré finalement impuissant.” The first word seems to have the connotation of both art and skill and seems to refer to Mme Georges’s healing skills, while the verb puts these semiabstracts/semiconcretes of skill and hysteria into a legal or courtroom setting, as “accuser” in French means “to accuse (of), to blame, to indicate, to charge with, to indict, to impeach, to take to task, to arraign, to denounce.” It seems as though Innocent meant to liken the mother to an attorney who loses a trial after impeaching, indicting, or arraigning a suspect, yet the fact that skill declares itself powerless does not quite seem to fit that imagery.

Matters of internal and external allusion arose frequently in Innocent’s word choice and in relation to it. When Dan-Maoua calls out to the African *lares* in the eighth paragraph, they remain “sourds à ses accents.” By then, Innocent has described her as still having an African accent while walking through the Haitian market and praying to the good God in her patois when a little girl. While one might be tempted to translate the
phrase generically as “deaf to her cries,” Innocent seems to be asking whether her local dialect in Africa or her French—given in an African accent—had been intelligible to them, not simply whether they heard her or not. Is she so linguistically isolated as to have been left without spiritual allies? In this same paragraph, the author sends those unfamiliar with their Old Testament searching out the first—Gehenna—of his many learned references, and perhaps suggesting that this illiterate woman knew it better by both girlhood word of mouth, and later, lived experience, than most readers of her story. To draw out the parallels to our own southern United States, I have taken some liberties with “bourreaux” here. In dictionary definition, executioners, or persons charged with inflicting corporal punishment pronounced by a criminal court, or cruel persons who mistreat others, they become lynch-men. This allusion accentuates the incongruence of their having a God and has cultural immediacy and clarity for US readers, while tying the violent histories of the circum-Caribbean together.

The text contains allusions to or intertextualities with the literature of France as well. Frequently, the narrator interrupts the text in the first person to indicate hyperbole combined with ignorance. “I know not what…,” “what more do I know,” and “more I know not” seem to be common poses for French narrators. Victor Hugo uses such constructions, for example. Despite the oddity of it in English-language literature, I have retained that first person rather than smoothing it into the impersonal expressions one would likely find in English-language literature to retain Mimola’s ties to wider Francophone contexts and their English-language translations. Innocent is also inventive with these links to France, transforming the common
expression *ville-lumière* (City of Lights) into *ville-féerie* (literally City of the Fantastical World of the Fairies, here City of Enchantment). At times, though, broader cultural moments remain opaque. When Madame Dajobert finds a new broom and then a *coui* shrouded in calico outside her door, even the footnoted French-language edition from Haiti is silent on what the specific significance of these two signs might be. This is rare, though, in a text that seeks to show the analogies and affinities between Vodun and the religions of antiquity, though with no pretension to being a sociological work, as Innocent wrote in his 1906 note to readers.

Innocent’s language is beautifully textured. He is wonderfully attentive to items like recipes for Haitian foods and the care with which they are prepared. By his use of both “alcool” and “liqueur” side by side, he reminds us that there is a distinction between spirits and liqueurs, which are spirits that have been flavored and sweetened. Occasionally his texture is lost, though, as when I choose to translate “biscuits” as “crackers” rather than investigating and explaining to the US audience in depth the probable look and taste of this handy excursion food. This translation tries occasionally to enhance the beautifully textured language, since elsewhere it must lose it. He seems to be playing with us, making fun of his countrywomen a bit when he uses the term “dada” to describe the horses women are riding to Saut d’Eau: a dada is a hobbyhorse, either a wooden toy horse head on a short pole powered only by human legs and the imagination, or figuratively something that someone harps upon continually. Though neither is literally true, he seems to want to emphasize the inadequacy or diminutiveness of the transports provided. I
carried an echo over into a sentence where Lala is “empétrée” (entangled) on her mule by choosing the term “hobbled,” which also emphasizes their possible attempts to secure her in her saddle.

Innocent’s own imagery is at a height when he describes the poignant scene at the church in Mme Georges’s neighborhood, which is the site of first public fulfillment of her promises. As they are kneeling, a thick cloud of the poor starts to form around them, and, as we and the women both see them up close for the first time—in rags, sickly, ulcerous, and yet quarreling with one another to be first to receive the food—they become bees in a hive into which Lala and her mother have fallen. (This image and another describing an imaginary martyrdom of the Virgin Mary resonate in surprising sympathy with images from Gerald Vizenor’s work of a much later era and much different genre, Bearheart.) Innocent calls the people bees of another species who “had for wings only tatters.” Here, next, English fails the French aiguillon. This word simultaneously calls up a needle (aiguille), an equine or bovine goad, something piquing one’s interest, the thorn of a rose, and the sting and stinger of a bee or wasp. And while the last is clearly the most direct meaning, one cannot say “and were armed only with the stinger of misery and suffering” in English without evoking puzzled brows or laughter. This is particularly so given that the weapon turns in upon itself: the sting does not inflict misery and suffering upon the one stung but upon the one stinging. By translating their stingers into thorns here, I hoped to link them to Christ and to the later imagery and inner speech which does so, while retaining the metaphor of the swarm and alluding to the self-inflicting nature of their armature. Ultimately, these
poor are not sharp but humbly rounded, presenting “here a coui, here a cup, there the hollow of their hands.”

It was not a difficult decision to leave the Haitian Creole (Kreyòl), or rather Innocent’s orthography of it, wholly untranslated within the text itself while following the 1981 edition’s form of placing translations into the target European language into endnotes. (All instances are in fact my translations from French of that edition’s aids, and are noted as such.) To this day, the grand majority of Haitians speak Kreyòl and learn French as their second language or not at all. That fact makes this novel and the others of its era from Haiti more accessible to French and other Western audiences than to many or most of the people on whom its “local color” is based. At the same time, Haitians highly educated in the Western system may not have learned Kreyòl well, so Innocent’s initial edition, which presents no footnoted translations, may have left some of them somewhat in the dark at key moments. Aside, then, from mimicking Innocent’s own presentation and his subsequent editors’ felt need for giving readers assistance with the Kreyòl, I also hope that in leaving his orthography in the main text and showing its translation, readers may learn something about the grammatical integrity of the language, its uniqueness, and the impossibility of full comprehension merely through a knowledge of French vocabulary and syntax.

I have also italicized other words foreign to French, including the English word “cash,” whose italicization allows it to acquire some emphasis. The terms lare and loua, while not italicized or not always italicized by Innocent are consistently italicized here for both readability and emphasis as key words. The 1981 edition alters Innocent’s original text slightly, as
when it describes peasant women seated under their market canopies at the Chapel of Orangers rather than seated in front of their fire, or describes the Mount of Orangers rather than the Chain of the Orangers. The latter may be a correction of fact while the former an attempt to alter primitivist perceptions the editors felt Innocent to be perpetuating or even inventing. The text does not indicate whether the corrections are in fact from the editors or from Innocent himself. I hope to have used that edition judiciously where it improves or clarifies the 1906 edition without treating its changes or variations as definitive or authoritative.
MIMOLA
OR THE STORY OF A CASKET
Tante Rosalie² had first seen the light of day on the shores of Dahomey. Upon coming of age, she had suffered the same fate as so many others, unwitting victims, carried to Saint-Domingue by an odious trade. Father, mother, brother, sisters had all suddenly disappeared, dispersed, alas! to different parts of the island.

What dark days she had known! What atrocities, what tortures! Scars ranging all over her body attested to the inhumanity of the colonists.

But finally, the hour of deliverance rang; and there she is now, dragging her old carcass through the streets.

Each morning, leaning on a long cane, her oblong shopping basket under her arm, she went shopping at the neighborhood market. Sundays, clothed in her caraco de Brabant³, shod in large slippers, head covered in a striped blue handkerchief, two ends knotted over a face furrowed with wrinkles, while the other two hung down the nape of her neck, she set out toward
the closest chapel. Slowly she advanced, seeming to count her steps, and stopped frequently to take a little rest. Each time a passerby saluted her “Good day, Tante Rosalie!” with that veneration so due to old age, she never failed to respond with these words: “Bonjour piti moé” in that African accent that she had never completely lost. Age, having distorted her eyesight, she would approach quite close to the unknown speaker, shading her eyes with a trembling hand the better to distinguish his or her features; then asked about the person’s family. Whether she remembered the speaker or not, she would take the hand of the individual between her bony fingers and spit in it three times...

Another trait of the African, no less striking, was that she loved the “good God” whose existence her mother had revealed to her while she was still in Africa. Very small, sitting close on her heels, she had learned to invoke him in her patois in terms simple and naïve.

This spontaneous belief in the existence of an invisible and hidden force manifests itself with the primitive Africans every time that they fix the zenith, with their eyes like ones possessed, or raise complaints, lamentations, prayers, in their invocative jargon. The great woods, the rivers, the stretches of desert, burned by the sun, the infinite sky, the immensity of the ocean, all speak to them of this superior Being.

For they know instinctively that if the forests, the waterways, the sea and the sky itself are inhabited, according to their beliefs, by divinities, they are not, for all that, the creators of those things.

However, this notion of a superior Being, confused, incoherent, developed within Tante Rosalie in contact with
the Catholic religion, the same religion which taught that the negro was inferior to the white, and as such, called to serve. Nevertheless, Tante Rosalie sincerely loved the God of these lynch-men, this unjust, inhumane God, in whose name so many crimes and atrocities were committed. Often in the midst of the tortures that her masters inflicted upon her, when the African *lares* remained deaf to her accents, it was him “the Great Master” whom she called upon with all the power of her primitive soul. She understood him altogether differently from how they strove so ingeniously to represent him, that is to say, extending his goodness, his infinite gentleness upon all mankind, and not solely upon a portion of this humanity. Thus, she had recognized him in the Gehenna of the negroes, this God of whom she had never been able to form an exact idea, and whose worship apparently resembled that which she practiced for her divinities. These altars decorated with holy images, did they not remind her of the little masonry platform consecrated to the worship of her *lares*? These religious hymns, did they not present some analogy in rhythm and cadence with those primitive airs of savage Africa? She was convinced of it. And this is why, each Sunday, she went regularly to church to familiarize herself better with this God who was represented so sumptuously on the altars. Also, she always said to herself that never would her only daughter Julie know about the rituals that she continued secretly to devote to her gods. As a consequence, she hid from her daughter, with ever-increasing care, all that might make her suspect the existence of these “mysteries” up through the day when Georges married her.

What was singular about the old woman was that the worship of one God did not preclude the worship of other
divinities. If she had always wanted Julie to live in the most complete ignorance of the African rites, it was because she was jealous of them, even selfish, knowing moreover that they would never acclimate on a soil where at the very least they would be exposed to the most criminal profanation. Moreover, she nourished the hope that one day, even after this life, she would again see the Gold Coast, and that her gods would go there to live with her again...

Julie having married, Tante Rosalie lived alone in an isolated little room at the end of a courtyard. All her furniture consisted of two old straw chairs, a frame over which a mattress was spread, a disjointed trunk, an earthenware pot turned upside down under a decrepit table, a mortar donning the form of a large wooden chalice, its pestle leaning against a corner of the little room; finally, a large old multi-colored casket with a mysterious air.

All these exuded the scent of years, emanation of outdated things, mute and weary testimony of too long a life.

At given times of the year, Tante Rosalie ground herself some “tom-tom,” a mélange of ripe and green plantains, sweet potatoes, yams, etc, all reduced to a paste out of which she made large balls which she arranged with care in the earthenware pot.\(^8\) She also prepared “cham-cham,” a combination of corn, hoholi, roasted pistachio, and pimento, all this pulverized and mixed together, and moussa which is nothing more than corn flour cooked with pulpy chicken broth.\(^9\) This accomplished, she invoked her gods in a language comprehensible only to herself; then threw the tom-tom, cham-cham, accassan,\(^10\) moussa, corn kernels and pistachios, to the four corners of the sky. This ceremony was accompanied by libations, consisting of liqueur, spirits and water. This task accomplished, she called together
the gang of kids from the quarter to stuff themselves with these diverse dishes prepared in bizarre fashion...
The old woman no longer went out now. A century had left her bedridden upon her cot. She could no longer drag herself either to the market or to church. Madame Georges took care of everything. To render her nostalgic wanderings less cruel, Tante Marguerite, her old friend, her companion in misfortune, surviving vestige like her of the implacable regime, came often to chat with her. It was curious to see the two confer together. They called one another “nanchon” for having been originally from the same tribe. Their jargon roamed over thousands and thousands of themes: homesickness for their native land, recollection of many stages of an existence filled with evils. In the course of the dialogue, a note having sounded too movingly, these two old faces darkened, and silent tears would glisten down the length of their wrinkled cheeks...

Neighbors also came to see Tante Rosalie. They loved to listen to the old woman speak of things she had lived through, of the country of Guinea, of the dreadful scenes of slavery, wars, relentless slaughter. Despite the century that she bore, she had conserved her lucidity of mind, the full possession of her memory. Their interest was so much the sharper to hear her because she had suffered all that she recounted. The motif that moved her most was her country, her native land, the Gold Coast. When she suddenly touched this vibrant cord, a flood of sentiments, disparate, inexpressible, invaded: her eyes dilated, drowned in infinity.

At the height of this nostalgic crisis, she clenched the cloth of the mattress, made fruitless efforts as though to raise herself, take flight, be gone... Then, calming herself little by little, she
murmured in a low voice something unintelligible that ended in some foreign tune…

One day, sensing that she was passing, Tante Rosalie in great haste had her daughter called to her and told her in her quavering voice: “Djoulie, piti moé, m’a pé mouri. Si lan Guinin paté loin, moé ta va lé chimin moé. Min, ça criol pas connin gran passé criol! Pren courage, tendé, piti moé!”\(^{12}\)

While saying these words, tears filled her voice. She took in her icy hand the hand of Madame Georges, brought it to her mouth, and licked her palm twice, designating a cross there. She had not failed to urge her, as soon as she had parted for the other world, to get rid of her casket, throwing it still sealed as it was into the sea.

By the next day, Tante Rosalie had ceased to exist; and the neighbors said amongst themselves: “It is good to die after all, when one has swallowed so many barrels of salt…”

*   *

Eight days had passed since the death of the African. Just a few relatives and some people of the quarter, reunited on the ninth day, which was a Sunday, were humming the prayer of the dead in the cell of the deceased. It was the last day of the novena, otherwise called “the last prayer.”

The African’s table had been transformed into an oratory. It had been enveloped in a white tablecloth decorated with holy images. Two whale-oil votives burned on the little altar. In a saucer, a little holy water in which a tiny palm being used as an aspergillum was immersed. From underneath the table, whose legs were fully covered in the vertical folds of the tablecloth, rose the reddish smoke of the incense.
Father Jean, an old man with a gray beard, almost blind, who was looked upon during that epoch as the fellow most learned in orisons and canticles, presided at the ceremony. His calico frock, which he had had ironed for the occasion, rivaled the tablecloth for whiteness. Hardly had he finished intoning *l’Auguste di...* the antique and solemn *libera*, the canticle of the dead, in his broken and lifeless voice, than they had the traditional punch and the customary liqueurs served to those present. The drink assisting, liveliness ensued: people spoke a bit of the African, her virtues, her habits and the vicissitudes of her long life.

After which, each of them retired.

When she had assured herself that the last of the attendees had gone, Madame Georges had nothing more pressing than to have a man known in the quarter under the name of *Pratique*, a merchant of water by profession, call upon her. She spoke to him of a *djeb* and fixed the price.

After having gratified the man with a large bottle of grog, Mme Georges helped him load something which had been hidden with care in a corner of the courtyard.

It was a beautiful moonlit night. *Pratique* walked some steps ahead of Madame Georges. The latter, not wanting to be recognized by passersby, had disguised herself under a black shawl which covered half her body from the head down. They had directed their steps towards the saltworks.

Arrived in the designated spot, they halted: *Pratique* laid down his burden.

They were in the neighborhood of *Fort Dimanche* on the ocean’s shore, at a spot where the terrain rises perpendicularly to a height of three metres, as if to dominate the waves.
whose lapping, at this hour, was sadly gentle and lugubrious. The waves gleaming under the reflected moonlight seemed to commune with the meditative sky. At a signal from Madame Georges, the burden was engulfed in the waters. In the descent, there was a noise as though of dishes, of earthenware. The song of the waves was interrupted for an instant by this strange noise, such a funereal note in the silence of the night.

It was the old casket with the mysterious air that Madame Georges had just thrown into the sea. She had scarcely finished carrying out her mission when she felt a clenching in her heart. A puff of air brought to her just then the bronze complaints of a nearby bell announcing the curfew. It was like a knell tolling in her ear—muffled by the distance and rendered more sombre by the calm of the evening. She had an intuition, secret and profound, that she had just consummated an act of sacrilege.

Nevertheless, Madame Georges returned home, satisfied with having carried out the last will of her mother.
Mme Georges had had the misfortune to lose her husband. Of the seven children that she had, only a little girl was left to her. The six others had followed one another to the grave in the most mysterious fashion: There were wasting diseases, sudden indispositions. People in the quarter even said that they had been victims of spells. Madame Georges gave no credence to these remarks; and besides she could not comprehend them.

Children, husband, mother gone, she resigned herself to her sad fate, and concentrated all her affections upon her daughter. A few squares of ground in the country, a house which kept her free from rent, her profession as seamstress sufficed for her subsistence and the education of her child.

“Georges being no more,” she often said to herself, “none other will come to efface his memory in my heart. Fifteen years of marriage, it is good enough! And besides, didn’t he leave me a companion? Mimola will be my cherished idol!”

Mimola, this was the name of the surviving daughter. This mysterious name probably came from the country of Africa; it appeared to have I know not what significance in the patois of Guinea.

The grandmother, sensing herself near death, had solicited from her daughter the final satisfaction of adorning the little one with this sweet name Mimola.

Mimola soon became Lala, her nickname.

Years rolling by, Lala grew noticeably. Her features began to show themselves more clearly. Madame Georges was pleased to find some resemblance to the African in her daughter: same profile, same eyes, identical nose and mouth. On the other hand, her gait was that of Georges, her speech, that of
Georges, and how many other of those little marks of character that the mother had learned to admire in her spouse. The widow often went to church to pray to God, to the Virgin Mary, to preserve *Lala* for her; she made vows, offerings for her health. There was, in a word, no trouble which her tender mother would not undergo for the one so dearly adored.

Madame Georges understood that it was absolutely necessary to place her daughter into a boarding school, so that she had the least possible contact with the outside. Three times a week, she went to visit her, made inquiries with the principal whether she was lacking anything. At each visit, she provided bonbons, barley sugar, *mangots, caïmittes, sapotilles*, jams of all kinds.17 *Lala* ate little; and the presence of her mother at the school was an occasion for her to feast with her schoolmates by distributing these treats to them.

All of a sudden, a change took place in her character. The gay, alert little schoolgirl that was *Lala*, became pensive and brooding. She neglected her lessons, did her homework poorly. Incomprehensible! Each time she opened her book, she instinctively diverted her eyes from the page to direct them vaguely elsewhere. Was she thinking of her father, deceased these many years? Hardly! all she knew about him was his name! Of her mother? Not that either, since she made it her duty to go see her three times a week.

Examined about the state of her soul, *Lala* had never been able to say what caused her continual distractions. Yet, she appeared in the grip of some inner thought, of occult forces imposing their will upon her little being. To see her change mood suddenly, to hear her grumble sometimes, there was no doubt that a struggle was taking place in her, a struggle of
temperaments unknown, diverse, wavering, as one might say a “moving series” of mysterious types disputing over the frail creature. She was obsessed with strange visions. Internal voices seemed to speak to her. Her mates fled from her because of these all-too-frequent mood swings.

At recess, when all the kids were playing joyfully, she isolated herself under a tree in the grip of her thoughts, of her voices. The mistress of the school, unable to comprehend these bizarre eccentricities, informed Madame Georges of them, who took sorrow from it.

—What! Is this possible? Am I thus condemned to lose all the fruit of my loins? My God! Lord, my God! What crime have I committed to merit such a terrible chastisement? So it is not enough that you have ravished from me six precious jewels, mother, husband, so many links which held me to life! Must it be, after these cruel separations, after all the tears which I have shed, that I am losing the only gem that remains to me? Well, no, why lose all hope! Perhaps Lala is precocious, is at her stage of development! Doubtless this is why these mood swings?

Consequently, she redoubled her cares, had a doctor called, who advised a week in the country, far from the noises of the city. The child stayed there three months. The country having brought about no change in Lala’s condition, her mother returned her to the city.

* * *

The month of May had just begun to bloom. First Communion was approaching. With the show of nature in riot, trees in flower, powerful sap circulating through all the branches, joy radiating on people’s faces, frolicking gaiety causing hearts
to blossom, Madame Georges—she too—felt penetrated by a feeling of well-being, of I know not what vivacious hope that her daughter would again acquire her former cheerfulness…

—Why wouldn’t Lala flower again like these trees? she silently said to herself. Why wouldn’t I profit from this occasion by initiating her into the sacrament of the Eucharist? Isn’t she the right age? Isn’t she sure to undergo her catechism successfully? Who knows! Perhaps this religious act will bring about an improvement in her abnormal state? God is so good!

To tell the truth, Lala had something like a premonition that she would never make it to the Holy Table. Why? She didn’t know. And yet, it was not desire that she lacked. How many times had she caught herself contemplating the prospect of this beautiful day in which she would be beautiful as an angel under her diaphanous veil? Her little heart, wasn’t it pure, immaculate?

But no, a stronger voice rose within her which opposed her in it. So, how to reconcile those feelings within her—naïve, religious, spontaneous—with what constituted, so to speak, the foundation of her little being! How especially to obey the impulses of a superior force without evincing a manifest disobedience toward a mother whom she venerated.

—Well no! I will not disobey my mother; I will take communion since she wishes it, and whatever it may cost me!

The big day come, she donned the lovely white dress which her mother had artfully fitted. Under the tulle veil that fell to her heels, she was as she had always imagined herself, an angelic beauty. But how peculiar! At the moment she approached the Holy Table, she nearly became ill. She scarcely had time to restrain herself so as not to cry out. When the
host was presented to her, she felt such a strong upheaval that the priest hesitated a moment. Her friends both right and left perceived it. The priest attributed this nervous faltering to the emotion of the moment.

Scarcely initiated into the sacrament just administered to her, Lala began to cry hot tears. Certainly, she did not cry from emotion, from that inexpressible feeling born of the intoxication of happiness, but rather from spasms, sudden starts, inner contortions, as if she were accusing herself of a profanation, a sacrilege.

Arrived back at her maternal home, Lala remained indifferent to the kisses that relatives and friends planted on her face. Pious hymns which saluted her return, for her, transformed themselves into savage chants, rhythmmed in a rude, barbaric language. Her interior voices seemed to speak to her more forcefully. Those unknown beings whose prey she was, appeared to dispute over her with increased rage, for she felt something like tearing around her heart, a desire to reject what was hidden in the sanctuary of her pure, virgin soul. At the meal, she didn’t want to eat anything. She spent the whole day sobbing.

No one understood any of it, and the guests murmured low: “It’s strange! It’s strange!”
Mimola

IV

Madame Georges was disappointed in her hopes. The divine balm had not produced on her daughter the salutary effect that she expected it to have. On the contrary, more alarming symptoms came and added to the widow’s worries. Months, years elapsed without her being able to record any improvement in her daughter’s condition. The symptoms were soon followed by nervous fits that recurred every other day. In the most extreme of her convulsions, she would utter incoherent words, hurl shrill cries. What seemed enigmatic for the mother was one vocable which returned incessantly to her lips: Dan-Maoua. One moment, the patient would calm herself a bit, repeat this foreign name between her teeth, as if she were chewing it, then, her face contorted, assembling the note little by little, furiously shaking her disheveled head, dandling her feet and arms, she would cry that name so loudly that the echo would reverberate far into the neighboring quarter. At the cries hurled by the young woman, passersby would halt, asking what it was, neighbors would run up in throngs. Among the latter one noticed Tante Marguerite, Rosalie’s old friend. Seated on a chair at the foot of the bed, she leaned her chin, crooked by the years, upon her cane.

The moving lips seemed to ruminate upon an inner thought. From time to time, at this name Dan-Maoua, she shook her head with a mysterious air. Finally she called Julie aside and told her in her quavering voice.


Madame Georges was too absorbed in Lala’s illness to seek to penetrate the meaning of these words. Her daughter’s
repeated cries were troubling her to the point where she was losing her head.

When *Lala* came back to her senses, she opened upon her mother large eyes from which fell heavy tears. She seemed to be questioning her, to be asking her why this martyrdom, all the pains which she was enduring.

Poor child! Poor mother! How would they ever penetrate the secrets of a heredity, unconscious and blind, the affinities of blood which exist between us and beings that we have never known and yet that we carry within us! How would they ever know that being is multiple, changeable, that within one being stir and persist an infinity of individuals with diverse temperaments, as numerous, perhaps, as there are germs in a drop of water! How finally to know that we are tied to our origins by bonds so much stronger that neither time, nor distance, nor the crossing could absolutely free us from them.

After these fits, *Lala* would fall into a kind of depression. Her worn features had lost their radiance, their freshness. She would take only *accassan* diluted in syrup for her whole sustenance.

Madame Georges did not know which way to turn. Skill had denounced hysteria and finally declared itself powerless. The *bocors* that she had resigned herself to consult differed in opinion about the cause of these crises. And the gossips prattled amongst themselves:

—There’ll soon be seven; or, it’s a diabolical pact; or, there is a mystery that no one can decipher.

*Lala* wasted away from day to day. Mme Georges was in despair over it. One night, she had a dream: she had lost a tooth. She informed an old woman about it, one who in the quarter was looked upon as a Sybil with regard to dreams.
—Bad dream, that one! said the old woman with a sombre air. The loss of a tooth, she added, is the loss of a cherished individual!

From then on, Madame Georges doubted no longer: Lala must be dying. At that idea, she could not contain herself. She could barely repress her sobs, and two hot tears shone in her eyes that she quickly wiped away with a fold of her dress, for fear of being surprised by Lala whom this sight could upset. Everything presaged the likely end of the poor girl.

Lala fell into a state of prostration such that she could hardly sit up. And the fits became accentuated, repeated themselves four, five, up to six times a day. Would the old woman’s prophecy be realized?

Madame Georges was tired of praying, of dragging herself to kneel at the feet of the altars, of making offerings. What prayers at the Stations of the Cross, at the cemetery! What masses hadn’t she had said! In vain, alas! Well, no! She would no longer go to the church, she would make no more vows; from now on, she would shut herself up alone with her daughter!

One evening, Lala was sleeping peacefully. This was the first time in weeks that she had slept so well. Madame Georges, seated at her bedside, was following her breathing anxiously, feeling for her pulse, assuring herself that her heart was beating. Then all of a sudden, imagining that her daughter was about to die, that this sleep was deceptive, she bounded to her feet, took her head in her hands and cried her mother’s name three times:

—Rosalie! Rosalie! Rosalie! Manmann’ l’an l’aut’ moun, sauvé Julie! sauvé Lala!
Lala was startled awake by these cries…

—Julie! said she in a feeble voice, addressing her mother.

—What! dear? responded Madame Georges while passing her hand over her daughter’s lustreless face. I frightened you? I interrupted your sleep? You no longer suffer, say?

—Well, that’s it! I dreamed tonight, or rather no, it was like a vision that I had. I was wandering alone on a savanna; I was going…I was going without being able to find a soul alive. I was on the verge of crossing beyond it, when suddenly, I do not very well know how, I found myself in the presence of a stream in the middle of a great wood. There was a large rock on the bank. Tired of walking, I sat down on it to take a little rest. Suddenly, I thought I heard melodies that were coming from far off. It was like a humming, something like the noise that a large pot makes when it boils. I looked around me and saw no one. I listened again more attentively. More doubtfully this time: these songs were coming from the water. I lowered myself, stuck my ear against the current. The sounds were becoming more distinct, clearer: it was drums being beaten and voices of women singing. How strange! I said to myself, this drumming in the current! Is there a world under the water? Is it possible that they are dancing there?

There I was in my reflections, when an old woman whom I did not recognize, emerged from the water up to the waist. I wanted to flee: impossible. My feet, heavy as lead, remained stuck to the ground. Little by little my fright dissipated. Then I could see across that clear and limpid water that this old woman was wearing a striped skirt of gaudy colors. Her frizzy hair from which small droplets of water streamed was surmounted by a handkerchief rolled into a horn. A superb coral necklace fell at her side, slung over her left shoulder. To her right in
the water floated something shaped like a closed box. Her two arms crossed over her chest, in the manner of one shivering with cold, she spoke to me, tears in her eyes:

—Cé moé Dan-Maoua, tandé, piti Lala! Di Djoulie, songé ça moé té di: “Ça criol pas connin, grand passé criol!” Min, bin moé té vlé fait là, li tounin mal, Djouli rinmin ou, piti moé? li pas ta vlé rouè lan mor ou? Eh bin, piti moé, la vie ou lan ça!\(^{23}\)

While speaking these last words, she raised the lid of the box, and I could see some earthenware vessels, jugs, plates, pots and still other things that I was unable to make out. It was at that moment, Julie, that your cries woke me!

—It’s my mother! it’s my mother! exclaimed Julie, pressing in her two hands one of Lala’s that hung down:

—Yes, my girl, Tante Marguerite told me the other day, Dan-Maoua, that is the name that your grandmother had over there in the country of Africa.

At once, she remembers the striped skirt of gaudy colors and the coral necklace that she had burned several days after the death of Tante Rosalie. She sees again the old multi-colored casket, she hears that noise of breaking dishes, of earthenware which had remained in her head like a lugubrious note. Then questioning her daughter:

—La vie ou lan ça, she said lastly, didn’t she?\(^{24}\)

—Yes, Julie.

After some minutes of reflection, as if a thunderbolt had torn a mysterious veil from her:

—I understand… I divine…murmured the mother....
The next day, early in the morning, Tante Marguerite came to gather news of the patient. She found Madame Georges preparing coffee. This poor mother had been unable to shut her eyes all night. Upon seeing her, a person had no trouble recognizing that she was obsessing over one thought. This dream, or rather this vision of her daughter’s was an enigma the significance of which she wanted to know one way or another. That night, it’s true, by a sort of inspiration, she had said mechanically “I understand, I divine” but now she perceived that she had understood nothing, divined nothing. The more she reflected upon it the more chaos reigned in her head. The casket, its contents, the stream, her mother who had appeared to Lala in the dream in attire most strange, that name Dan-Maoua that she had revealed, those mysterious vocables: “La vie ou lan ça” all this was floating, dancing in her imagination. And aside from that, this obsession betrayed itself through her clumsiness, her unceasing distraction.

While the blackish liquid fell from the cloth filter into the pot, she was letting herself range over a thousand conjectures. Impaired as she was in her reflections, Madame Georges only perceived the presence of the old woman when she heard her stammer in her quavering voice:

—Bon…jou, piti moé! Et Lala?

—Tormented all night, replied the mother.

She invited the old woman to sit down, then served her a cup of coffee. Tante Marguerite took the cup, and before bringing it to her mouth, thrice poured a little of its contents onto the ground while ruminating about something. Madame Georges didn’t wait long before informing her of Lala’s dream and asking her for an interpretation.
—Cé vré ça ou dit, piti moé? inquired the African with surprise.  
—Yes truly, Tante Marguerite, confirmed the mother.  
—Eh bin, piti moé, tandé ça moé dit ou.

She gave the cup back to Madame Georges after having gulped down her coffee, and she began to speak slowly, very slowly...

She apprised Madame Georges of many things that she had never known about her mother’s life.

She explained the dream down to the smallest detail, stressing the casket at length. At this point, emotion mixed with a sort of religious respect was imprinted upon her gaunt features. That voice almost extinguished by old age became more hollow, more sombre, for she was touching upon the sacred things of her existence, upon this vibrant cord that had so often wrung tears from her. What the casket contained—jugs, pots, terra cotta dishes, plates—represented the papa lares or papa-louas. She spoke at length of Rosalie, of her brothers and sisters whom she had known well before they were uprooted from Africa.

—Nanchon m’té marassa; pareill’li té rélé Manzila.

She dwelt upon the customs, the beliefs of the country where she was born, the origin of the domestic gods that are none other than the spirits of ancestors whose memory we venerate. She spoke of how good they are, guardians, prodigious of benefactions when one fulfills the sacred duties with respect to them, and how, on the contrary, they are malignant and cruel when the grandchildren neglect or slight them. In the latter case, they are persecuted, exposed to all kinds of evils, privations; a thousand vexations assail them. Often a tragic death
awaits them after they have dragged out a life of misery, suffering, and disgrace.

To confirm the occult power of the lares gods, and in order that there would be no doubt in the widow’s mind, she added in the last place that it is because they practiced the cult of the ancestors that our fathers vanquished…

—So, Tante Marguerite, Lala persecuted? pressed Madame Georges.28

The old woman nodded her head.

—Lala is going to die? added the mother, opening her eyes wider and taking her head in her hands.

Tante Marguerite reassured her by telling her that Lala’s life depended solely upon her. Those vocables: “La vie ou lan ça” didn’t they say enough about what the mother must hold herself to?

If she consented to make a promise, an improvement in her daughter’s condition would not be long in coming about.

Tante Marguerite told her of what the promise consisted and what she had to do. She obeyed immediately, went down to Bord de mer,29 bought, following the African’s instructions, three white plates, three little pots, three platters and three jugs of terra cotta: the contents of the casket. In a remote corner of the house, safe from indiscreet eyes, she arranged these objects on a napkin, made Father Jean come in secret to say a pater and an ave while sprinkling them with holy water. This was the baptism of the gods. Nor had she failed to enjoin him to reveal nothing. Hardly had the old man with the gray beard retired than she took a candle, went on her knees before her improvised gods, and mumbled a fervent invocation…

The next day Lala enjoyed much calm.
Madame Georges was only at the first stage of her program. There remained still a whole series of promises for her to accomplish: coffee for the poor scattered about the church, the manger to appease the souls of the incensed ancestors, vulgarly called the manger-les-âmes, the pilgrimage to Saut-d’Eau or Ville-Bonheur, the funeral repast or manger-les-morts, and finally the manger marassa. The first promise accomplished, Madame Georges hastened to do what was required. She put all the more zeal into it given that she apprehended the frequent return of the fits. Time must not be wasted; the earlier the better. She went to the market, bought coffee for twenty centimes, two bricks of rapadoux, and some bois-pin for a cob. That evening she roasted and ground the coffee, washed the receptacles: stockpots, pots, coffeepot, turned all those upside down, arranged in a large laye so that she no longer had to occupy herself with the accessories once she woke up.

One…two…three…four o’clock! Madame Georges jumped to the foot of her bed, put on her work jacket, after having illuminated the lamp, shook Lala, who woke up, yawned, stretched, rubbed her eyes as if to chase away the sleep that was much more agreeable at this hour of the morning.

You did not dream last night? said Madame Georges.

Yes, Julie, the old woman appeared to me again, but this time, she smiled at me.

—It is a good sign, said the mother to herself silently.

She urged Lala to dress cautiously, not to muss herself, and made her put a bath towel around her neck for fear of a draft.

The humming of the bronze bell and the last notes of the reveille were dying on the sleeping city when the glou-ou of the cup in the water barrel made itself heard.
—Take care, my girl—observed Madame Georges to Lala who was drawing water to wash her face—one must never wash one’s eyes when the firmament is still starry, for greatly would you risk losing them.

Throwing their heads back, they gargled together. After this little duet which lasted only a few seconds, Madame Georges turned the key twice, went out into the courtyard, and turning herself toward the east, made the sign of the cross.

In fact, she had not been mistaken, the sky was strewn with stars. A soft, languid glow expanded over the city. One heard in the street the heavy and irregular footsteps of the passersby, and, in the neighborhood, at the home no doubt of some old woman, the regular sound of the blows of a pestle grinding coffee.

Madame Georges had lit the fire, and placed over it the large pot containing water for the coffee. She plunged in the *rapadoux* after having stripped it of its sheath, put the ground coffee in great quantity into the cloth filter vulgarly called *grèque* that she had made for the occasion. Lala, seated on a very low straw chair, held the *bois-pin* whose reddish flame filled the courtyard with a sharp clarity: which contrasted strangely with this semi-obscurity of the night. From time to time, Madame Georges took this improvised torch whose resin fell in tiny black drops on the ground, leaned forward to assure herself that the cauldron was boiling.

All of a sudden she hears knocking at the gate.

—Ça qui là?  
—Çé moin Pratique.

Alerted the day before by Madame Georges, Pratique was coming early to go buy bread from the baker Ti Frè. Julie
placed her hand into her pocket, taking out fifty centimes that she gave to the man in a napkin. Ti Frè lived just along the street where Pratique came and went. Upon his return all was ready. Madame Georges cut each loaf into slices of three or four, depending on the size. Then she poured the coffee into a pot, pouring some thrice onto the ground while mentally saying:

—The saints, the dead, marassas.

After which, she chopped a slice which she threw to the four cardinal directions, without forgetting to repeat the same words. For Tante Marguerite had not omitted telling her always to associate the invisible ones with the least act of her life right down to eating and drinking.

Lala said not a word, watching without understanding.

Pratique, squatting near the fire whose fiery coals were extinguishing themselves beneath the ashes, had just received his portion, consisting of a fragment of bread and a cup filled with blackish liquid.

—Mèci damm’moin!37

Then scratching his head with a mischievous and half-witted air, he added:

Damm moin gain lè sèvi.38

He gulped down his coffee and stuffed the slice of bread into the gaping pit of his jersey. There it was, his reserve: this morsel of bread and some knots of cane, nothing else for the whole blessed day.

Madame Georges pretended not to hear this sally of Pratique, rose brusquely, entered her bedroom, put on an ironed dress and took her shawl. The day was beginning to dawn. Julie gave Lala the napkin containing the slices of bread, seized
the handle of the vessel brimming with coffee, took the route toward the church, followed by her daughter. Arriving forthwith, they went down on their knees before the large door and said a short prayer. Madame Georges and Lala had not stood up before they saw themselves surrounded by a thick cloud of the poor—men, women, children in rags, sickly, ulcerous, quarrelling for first place. They had fallen into a veritable hive. But fortunately for them, these bees of another species had for wings only tatters, and were armed only with the thorns of misery and suffering. Lala made the bread rain, while her mother poured coffee right, left, in front, behind. And these people jostling one another, presented here a coui, here a cup, there the hollow of their hands.39

Madame Georges had taken care to place in reserve three slices of bread and a full pot of coffee. This thoughtfulness on the widow’s part was for a good old fellow who was looked upon as being the patriarch of the poor. Seated under an hourglass situated on the esplanade, a candle in his hand, he told his rosary, all the while chanting holy orisons, with which alternated the canticles of yesteryear, which the good old women squatting in a circle around him repeated in chorus. The coffee and bread being exhausted, Madame Georges returned to her house, light of heart, for she had just performed a beautiful act.

From that moment on, Lala’s health went on improving from day to day.

The fits having ceased little by little, Lala exhibited a general malaise, which manifested itself through headaches and nervous agitations. Julie, to combat her migraines, applied compresses soaked in tafia to her forehead, making her take milk
to restore her strength. She was forbidden from doing anything that could aggravate her state of convalescence: reading, sewing, crocheting were prohibited.

Madame Georges provided for the cares of the household, swept, made the bed, did the cooking.

To Pratique were entrusted the little domestic errands.

This way of life lasted thus for three months.

Julie, finding herself straitened in her business affairs, could not execute the third point of her program. Her daughter’s illness had eaten her little savings and caused her to lose her clientele. Worst of all, her sewing machine no longer functioned, this poor little machine, her companion, her friend, her providence—since it gave her her bread each day—was itself declared ill, it too.

Since the death of M. Georges, this little metallic animal had never ceased to make its deafening ronron heard. Sometimes, throwing its white stitching upon the multicolored Indian prints of the peasants for barbacos or candjanhoun, at other times its black stitching upon the linen for a funeral, it demonstrated well enough that it had been initiated into the two great motives of the human soul such that it could sympathize with its sufferings. This little being had understood the anxiety of its mistress: that is why it was silent.

Long before Lala’s illness, this machine which had easily racked up twenty five years at labor, no longer had that clear, thin voice of its first days. It had become hoarse as though it had actually caught a cold. Therefore it had to be nursed: Madame Georges immediately thought about sending it to Jeanton who worked at the Foundry.

She hadn’t a cent. How to do it? Where find a gourde and
a half for repairs? Didn’t she still have her jewelry? She would sell a pair of earrings.\textsuperscript{31}

There she was in her calculations when piercing cries, repeated, prolonged, were heard in the next bedroom. It was \textit{Lala} who had just surrendered to a bout of fits. She had collapsed like a mass on the floor, her hands and feet convulsing.

The neighbors came running as always; some put grains of salt between her toes while forcefully pressing them together; others, furnished with cigars, puffed large clouds of smoke into her nasal passages, this one over here made her inhale the smoke of a piece of lighted cotton, that one over there bathed her face in alcohol. This torment of salt, these puffs entering her nose, this sui generis odor of cotton rising through her skull as though it would asphyxiate her, the alcohol burning her eyes, the hands of iron ready to break her frail fingers, it was really too much for her to regain her senses.

When \textit{Lala} came back to herself, her face was agitated, her hair disheveled, her blouse in disorder. She felt ashamed. How indeed to endure the looks surrounding her without experiencing a feeling of contempt for her own person? Each time she found herself in this state, she felt a little of that virginity belonging to her whole being, her whole body, drain away.

Oh! That profanation of the flesh, that positive blight of hands, those tortures, by what means could she escape them? Those fits which caused them, what remedy could she find for them?

Madame Georges comprehended that the return of the fits had been provoked by how sluggishly she had gone about completely executing her program.
Thus she resigned herself to making any sacrifice. She effectively sold all her finery: chains, bracelets, rings, earrings, etc., with the exception of the broach which framed the miniature bust of Georges.

That relic, which she covered with kisses in her moments of sad remembrance, for nothing in the world would she wish to deprive herself of it.

For the sale of the jewelry, she had been able to procure, it’s true, a few gourdes, allowing her to cope with certain expenditures.

Unfortunately that wasn’t all. After having sacrificed what was most precious for her pride as a married woman, she had to sacrifice her social persona.

But how to vanquish that prejudice, that repulsion which she felt for those women who go, unceremoniously, a basket in hand, to beg provisions at the market, under the pretext of relieving the wretches who were dying of hunger in prison?

How to conform to this custom which was so repugnant to her!

She hadn’t had to blush when it was a question of distributing bread and coffee to the poor, for all had been accomplished under cover of night.

This time it was no longer the same thing. She had to make herself visible, to show herself in broad daylight, to all the stares, at the risk of being pointed out and hearing whispered under the breath:

—It’s Madame Georges?

And yet, without question she had to resign herself. Without this, the manger-les-âmes would lose its effectiveness.

What to do?
She did not hesitate long, since Lala’s complete healing depended upon fulfillment of all those promises.

The next day which was a Saturday, Madame Georges takes her large basket and proceeds to the market.

At first, she presents herself timidly before the vegetable merchants, people who barely knew her, and begins the traditional refrain:

*Manger-les-âmes! Manger-les-âmes!*

Into the basket the peasants threw, one, some Congo pea pods, red beans, black beans, white beans, another, yams, spuds, plantains, *malanga, tayo*, ground corn, rice, cassava, carrots, squash, etc. etc.

Having covered the first rung, she decides to approach the notables of the market: the butchers and curing merchants.

Once on such a good path, she could not stop herself. All of a sudden an idea crossed her mind.

—But, reflected Mme George, all these people know me. Among the salt merchants, I have Sor Jeanne, who is my former customer and my companion; among the butchers I have Ti Mouche, my good friend, the former friend of Georges, my husband, the most respected, the most frequented of the butchers and the largest furnisher of beef and steak that people have ever seen.

Continuing her reflections: —What if they were to think that this is a ruse, that penury reduces me to this shameful expedient!

Then, under the energetic surge of a hasty resolution:

—What does it matter what they say, so long as my daughter is restored!

She directs herself toward the tents with a firm and resolute step:
—Manger-les-âmes, Mesdames! Manger-les-âmes!

Still pursuing her stations, she stops in front of the butchers’ stall:

—Manger-les-âmes, Messieurs, manger-les-âmes!

Morsels of salt pork, corned beef, cod, pig’s head, herring, mackerel, fresh cuts of meat rained into the basket.

Her task completed, Mme Georges had the basket taken by a porter.

Arrived home, she gave the man three cobs, the price agreed upon for transport. Lala helped her to empty the basket which contained quite a large provision.

In front of this mound of food, meats and vegetables, Madame Georges felt joyous, thinking that she now only had to make some little complementary purchases.

As for the utensils needed for cooking the food, such as boilers, pots, etc., she would ask the neighboring women to lend them. She would invite them also to come give her a hand, promising to return the favor, as they did in the country.
VI

Monday at dawn, on the day consecrated to the saints and the dead, Madame Georges’s courtyard was brimming over with women from the quarter who had responded to her call. Some shelled beans, peeled plantains, spuds, yams; others fried grease, stoked the fire under the pots and boilers whose poutoupoutou and fouï made a singular music through which cut the chattering of the gossips, excited, they too, by the fire of Bacchus.42

By noon, everything was ready.

The vessels containing the different foods were covered with white napkins.

The neighbor women had had time to return to their houses to freshen up and come back. Father Jean had completed the litany of the Holy Virgin.

Each having taken up her burden, the convoy started on its way, led by Madame Georges and her daughter.

Lala, due to her overwhelming weakness, could carry only the box containing the cigars.

People stopped at the crossroads or came onto their thresholds to watch this little procession of white napkins pass.

—Vini ouè manger-les-âmes, cried children on the stoops.43

*  

It was the first time Lala had visited the prison.44

After having passed through the large red gate and crossed the front courtyard, one had to traverse a long corridor leading to the interior courtyard. It was there that the culinary orgy, the feeding frenzy must take place.

They deposited onto the ground platters, casseroles, terrines, pots, baskets.
All at once, from the dark cells where they were penned by the twenties, thirties, forties, monsters in human form came forth, half-naked, with torsos shining and filthy, with pants frayed, in sordid rags.

All these cattle, covered with *carangues* and other parasitic vermin, rushed upon these fearful women, who would have ended up abandoning the place without the guard’s intervention. Blows from the baton fell on the backs, the heads of these starvelings who retreated and came back again under this hailstorm to claim their pittance. It was less a hive this time than a den of brigands, thieves, bandits of all kinds, of all shades, of all degrees.

*Lala* had never seen such a spectacle. She was so frightened by it that they believed for a moment that she was going to be sick. Her mother had her escorted to the warden’s office where she could regain her senses. If we believe her, it was not just this sight that impressed her so vividly, but the place itself which inspired in her a sort of instinctive horror. It was as though she were inhaling the odor of blood, of crime there.

The walls, didn’t the walls unfold their secrets to her?

Whitewash poorly concealed from her eyes the few reddish stains that drew the attention of passersby.

In the gloom of the dungeons, didn’t she read the number—what a large number!—of victims which hunger, indignation, infamy, despair, irons, remorse, sores, had devoured!

What ghosts wandering at night through these corridors!

—Julie, said *Lala* upon leaving, promise never to bring me back to these grounds.

—I promise you, my girl.

While *Lala* spun away on a bus toward her maternal home,
Madame Georges, followed by three friends, made her way under the dust and sun, with what was left of the food, toward the women’s prison⁴⁶ where the same scene presently replayed itself among the madwomen and prostitutes!...
PART TWO

In a town in the North, a white man, satisfying a desire, had dishonored a poor slave, a black woman, spitting his blood upon her. Sleep, night, solitude were the only accomplices to his crime.47

And yet, curious affair! Never had this haughty colonist been able to conquer the invincible repulsion that he experienced every time he found himself face to face with a negress. Didn’t he inflict his contempt upon all of his friends who had allowed themselves to be seduced by the irresistible charms of a beautiful, black curve? Didn’t he consider this coupling as a degradation for the white man?

One day, the master was flogging the slave for a peccadillo. The blows, falling hard, tore her throbbing flesh. All of a sudden, writhing under the implacable whip, in a confused movement affecting her whole being, she offered to the ferocious eyes of her torturer the hidden treasures of her ravaged body. Her round and ample hips, her fine proportions, that expression in
her glance, those plump lips imploring grace and I know not what emanations being released from her caro nigra... all that rose to his head, intoxicated him, sent vertigo through his unbridled senses. He could not hold back, faced with so much magic. Vanquished, he walked away grumbling, not without having ordered her to be shut up all alone in an isolated hut.

That night, at the hour when all nature was sleeping, enveloped in shadows and mystery, the colonist took the footpath that led to the slave's cell and entered softly. He found the negress sprawled on her back, sunk in the most profound sleep: fatigue and tortures had broken her. That brutal hand, through which a shiver of fever now seemed to run, sought gropingly in the darkness.

Upon contact with this body of a woman in shambles, his flesh quivered, his eyes shone with lust; it was as though his whole being tensed toward that irresistible call of that savage form. The negress started awake: but two iron fists immobilized her in her place. The only caress she knew were these horrors, pronounced in a voice strangled by carnal emotion: “Bitch! if you budge, if you cry out, death!” Nature, which seems to take us to task in order to prove our errors anytime we pride ourselves on a nobility or an unjustified superiority, had caught him in its snare.

The unfortunate woman dared not budge nor cry under the infernal embrace of her tormenter who had just inflicted upon her another torture. She would have liked very much to scream, but who would hear her?

The beast, satisfied, left furtively like a prowler in the night. The slave became a mother. She gave birth amidst sufferings most cruel. This fruit of her loins was a girl. The child
grew, free, having space to herself; for henceforth would she
know the more shackles, the more masters.

She was beautiful, the little mulatress. Her long hair rip-
pled over her nape. Her sharply defined profile, her regular
features, her nose, her blue eyes, recalled those of the master.

What a contrast between the mother and the child!

That frizzy hair, those thick lips, that ebony complexion,
could they produce such marvels? Yes, yesterday’s slave doubt-
ed it not: from human muck had come this pearl of beauty;
this jewel, she carried nine months inside her; she nourished
her with her blood, with her milk. The father can doubt, but
not the mother. However, if she was convinced on this point,
she was nonetheless troubled by another problem: the future
worried her.

What if the murderer in “spitting his blood” upon her had
passed his wicked sentiments on through the seed!

Who can boast they know the mysteries of heredity?
What if while growing up, the little girl came to have
doubts about her origin!

What if she disavowed her because of her black skin!

And finally what if she felt contempt for her brothers, the
sons of the African!49

No, Francine loved her mother passionately. Often, as
though to give the lie to the African woman’s secret thoughts,
she hung about her neck, frenetically kissed her thick, black
lips in joyous transports, lavished upon her a thousand caresses
which dissipated at once all doubt and all false conjecture.

Sometimes, when a white man came along, little Francine
went to her mother and said to her in her childish voice while
pointing out the passerby:
Manman, cé papa?

The latter responded while pressing that blonde head to her breast:

—Your father is dead, do you hear, my little one!

Francine had grown up under her mother’s selfish glances. She had sprouted rapidly in the new atmosphere, impregnated with a vigorous and benevolent breath. Overflowing with vigor and youth, she had become in the blink of an eye her big girl, of slender size, with lightly rounded hips, well-proportioned to the rest of her body. She was so well-made, there was so much harmony in her lines and contours, that people truly said that she had been thrown from the mold. And to think that so much beauty was enveloped only in simple clothes. No earrings, no necklaces, none of those adornments capable of putting beauty into greater relief, rendered more eloquent by its simplicity.

The mother grieved inwardly at not having been able to procure for her all the luxury of her age. Fully she had to resign herself, since all she possessed was her own person, sad wreck of vanquished slavery. She felt not even the courage to work. The vampire had sucked her blood, drained her strength and her energy. If it were not for the thought of her daughter for whom she had to find bread each day, she would have let herself die, impassive assistant to the complete ruin of that dilapidated body. With no kin, she had been abandoned to herself on this soil that she had fertilized with her sweat, with her blood, far from her Africa, far from her wild solitudes, far from her streams with the mysterious songs, far from her tribes so dear whose names Lagos, Badagri resounded so often in her head!

Oh! what she wouldn’t give to see her native land again?
But when she returned there, would she be sure to meet again all those dear beings whom she had left there? Only once, in this Gehenna where the white man had cast her, had she caught a glimpse of a young brother. They had come across one another in Saint-Domingue; but alas, the brother had recognized his sister without being able to embrace her, to speak to her.

All affection must be banished from the heart of the slave, all ties to family ruptured.

They had glanced at one another furtively, and they had quickly wiped away a tear; for if the master caught a glimpse of those looks, those tears, it was torture or death…

Since then, they had seen one another no more.

That brother, her two sons, had they died in the late war, in that struggle among giants? She knew not. Nevertheless, that emptiness in her heart was filled by Francine. She loved her so much the more because henceforth she was the sole being who populated her existence. How happy she would be to see her married before her death! But, who would want to espouse her poverty?

One thought consoled her, however: that of the master who was no more…

Francine would not become, herself, the prey of a sensual tormenter: she would belong to the one who would make her heart beat; she was free to love whoever pleased her, without constraint, whether or not he were poor, provided that he was honest!

Monsieur Dajobert offered himself, and he was accepted. He had descended from a well-off and respectable family. Upon dying, his father had left him a rather handsome inheritance: estates in the country, some houses and a store in town.
The first time he saw Francine, he was unnerved, and transfixed by her.

The customary formalities being fulfilled, the marriage was resolved and concluded.

The mother died some time after. She was awaiting, it appears, only the fulfillment of her vows so that that wasted carcass could finally find repose in the shade of a cypress at the cemetery. Her son-in-law gave her an extravagant funeral, doubtless to compensate her for having given him such a sweet creature.

Indeed, Francine was good, pleasant, naïve, submissive. They loved one another tenderly through the long years.

Nevertheless, Monsieur Dajobert despaired at not being able to acquire from his wife a little blond-headed one who would fling the gay note throughout the house and thus break that monotony of two which seemed to endure forever …

His wife, would she be afflicted with sterility?252

Finally, he came into the world, this little blond-headed being so impatiently awaited.

What an effusion of joy did the midwife arouse when the sex was announced: a little male!

At these words, Dajobert, at the height of joy, leapt, ran around the bedroom, clapped his hands, clicked his heels, laughed to split the ceiling, popped across the room with a bang the cork of a bottle, swallowed in one stroke a large gulp of champagne, while the mother halfway reclining smiled to hear the wailing of the child.

The newborn was fêted and cherished by the two spouses. Henceforth, they had no horizon but this little cherub for
whom they would willingly have given all the gold they possessed.

Léon (thus was the newborn named) grew quickly, surrounded by attentions that his father and mother lavished upon him. At the age of twelve, he was sent to France to study. Three years after his departure, his father, Monsieur Dajobert, died of a stroke. Madame Dajobert became almost insane with grief. She had to hide this sad news from her son.

From that time on, emptiness expanded around her.

Monsieur Dajobert dead, this woman saw herself alone in the world. Everything in the house reminded her of her dear spouse. This table where they had been wont to eat side-by-side, that sofa where they came and poured their hearts out to one another at night, after the fatigues of the day, this bed confidant to their amours, she fled from them. Still, if Léon were near!

Perhaps his presence would help her to endure such a cruel trial! But no, that dear son was far away…very far away on foreign soil. She did not want to make him return to the country before he had finished his studies. This solitude weighed upon her enormously. In any event, she had to abandon this house, flee this town, all these places so dear to her heart…

Oh! how fast the scene had changed!

How that future that yesterday appeared so rosy had suddenly been wrapped in mourning in her eyes!

God, whose designs one cannot know, often grants our wishes, but at the cost of what sacrifice! He had replaced the father with the son.

How long would Madame Dajobert remain a widow? All her life; she swore it. Thus, she would no longer stay in her
hometown, witness to her first loves and to a cruel separation that inflicted widowhood upon her so soon. She would go elsewhere, to another city, far from all that could rouse in her spirit the memory of that adored spouse. She sold her houses, her rural holdings, her store, her furniture, erected a modest monument over Dajobert’s tomb, and came to settle henceforth in Port-au-Prince.

She installed herself in one of the most commercial streets of the Capital, kept a shop, and took some people into her service. In the first days, she found herself a little bit ill at ease, not knowing the customs of the place. She got used to it in the long run. Her reputation as a rich woman soon attracted to her acquaintances and friends of both sexes. Merchants and some of the city authorities frequented her house. She rebuffed more than one proposal of marriage: she would not be perjured, for she had sworn fidelity to the soul of Dajobert.
The young Léon came back to the country at the same time as his compatriot and former fellow classmate Albert Deltan. They had studied together in the same college. They had come back, heads filled with dreams, with progressive ideas. Their ideal was the same: to advance the country forward, while freeing it from old mistakes, outdated traditions, rude superstitions, all things tending to keep it in routine and barbarism. But they differed in opinion over the means of action. The one, the young Dajobert, radical, wanted to break entirely with the past, rebuild on the ruins, after having destroyed everything, overturned everything. The other, more modest, wiser, more reflective, thought that one could arrive at no less satisfactory a result without needing to take drastic and radical measures.

Toward that end, we had to take as our basis the progressive march of other peoples, who had preceded us in civilization, to seek by thorough study what was good and what defective in our institutions, whether the chain of our traditions perhaps broken brusquely and with impunity, which is the source, the origin of our superstitions, whether Vodou, that social wound as people are happy to call it, is not a religion in the sense, well understood, in which that word was taken by the Hindus, the Greeks, and the Romans of antiquity. It was important also, in order to convince ourselves and others of it, to establish as much as possible the striking analogies that exist between the worship of our ancestors and that of the ancients.

Pushing his investigations further, he asked himself whether, by virtue of the emigration taking place from the center to the North, from the North to the center, and consequently through the contact long existing between Roman Africa and
equatorial Africa, our fathers had not borrowed from the Roman colonists, if not their religion in all its entirety, certain practices, certain rites. Moreover, whether these savages had not suffered from another side, toward the orient, the nefarious influence of Muslim fanaticism, and whether, ultimately, the Vodou that seems to be an exceptional defect, is not a collection of all the debris of the old beliefs. After all that, how astonishing that civilized Europe has abjured its outmoded ideas after centuries of trial and error, and that savage Africa still conserves its gods!

In their enthusiasm for renovation, these intellectual workers imagined that their task was easy. They had believed that scarcely disembarked upon Haitian soil, they would find a position capable of permitting them to realize their dreams most quickly. But alas! they had been deceived in their hopes.

The young Dajobert, thanks to that grand reputation that his mother enjoyed among influential personages of the era as a rich and honest woman, was admitted as teacher of the first rank at the Lycée National, with a salary of seventy-five gourdes; the other, Albert Deltan, whose father, grandfather or some other Deltan had had something to clear up with an authority of the government of that time, was simply passed over. His father had some money, he could more or less live without ever abandoning his books whence he drew the lessons of the past. He proceeded inquisitively through all the passages where he was sure to find important notes for the work that he had undertaken.

For his part, Léon, not to displease his mother, had accepted this charge as teacher while waiting until he could find something better. The teaching profession hardly responded to
his aspirations. And besides, he was going to wilt, to make himself stupid through teaching, to suffocate between those four walls! This role as an educator of youth became him badly; he could never escape the depressing atmosphere of the classes that numbed one’s brain while removing all one’s energy, all one’s initiative, all one’s productive urge. What he needed was a field of observation, where he could see men and things evolve. Was it hence to no purpose that he had devoted two years to the study of the moral and political sciences?

He only awaited some opportunity to take leave of his students, his colleagues, and the rest. The principal furnished it to him one day by making, I know not in what regard, a light observation to him. There had really been nothing to lose one’s temper over, and besides, the principal had used all the tact he could have in evaluating a Gentleman whom he knew had lived in France, under the discipline of polite and courteous masters. He got angry, took his briefcase, his top hat, not without having given his senior in rank a nice little shower. At the threshold, he flung back these words full of contempt for the chair that he occupied.

—I do’n’ need ’at to live.

To understand better this outburst of Dajobert’s, it is important that we state that since his return from France, he was in a surly, disagreeable humor, ready to fly into a rage over nothing. He was also somewhat antisocial, going out only to go to class. And now that he had tendered his resignation, he shut himself up alone with his books, receiving no one except his friend Deltan who came often to debate with him.

Léon, cooped up in his study, had ended up becoming averse to the country, men, and things. All his illusions having
worn away, he felt a complete disgust for this capital where he had hoped to find a Paris in miniature.

Years had elapsed since Dajobert’s resignation. His mother procured for him everything that he needed. One day, only just back from a visit that he had been repaying to a friend of the family, he fainted suddenly, to the great terror of the widow. The latter in all haste summoned an expert who found the cause of the indisposition in intellectual overexertion. The doctor prescribed potions, forbade reading, and advised a new sojourn in Paris if the mother’s funds permitted it. There was, in fact, deep within this stricken heart something like a touch of nostalgia. In his slightest remarks, he cited Paris to you with all that that city held of beauty, magnificence, splendor. For him, Paris was not only the City of Light as people sometimes liked to call it, but also the City of Enchantment par excellence.

But how to effect it so that he could go reside there once again? Mme Dajobert had exhausted already almost three-quarters of her fortune. Let us add to that that her trade was beginning to decline somewhat dangerously, so much so that people had insinuated that her house was hexed, that all the disappointments that she was experiencing in her affairs derived from spells against which she was not taking enough precaution. They went so far as to persuade her that there was more or less something in this sudden indisposition having arrived immediately after a visit. This obsession which haunted her son right away donned another character in her eyes; she believed it some of the symptoms of madness. What managed to confirm it in her mind were the macaques that someone came to work many times before her doorstep, during the
night. One morning, she had found under her awning a new broom; another time a coui\(^{55}\) shrouded in calico.

On the advice reiterated by several friends, she had to consult charlatans and fortune-tellers in secret which put new dents in her cash register. Among the former, some such declared that Léon’s malady was none other than the effect of a slow poison which had been administered to him during a toast, others affirmed that the young man would go mad if the mother did not fulfill certain obligatory duties toward her ancestors; among the latter, some believed they saw death or the cross (in cartomancy, these two terms are synonymous) in the appearance of the ace of clubs; others attributed this mania of Léon’s to spells by the queen of diamonds and the queen of hearts who were none other than the two neighbors and best friends of Madame Dajobert.

With these revelations, most often false, was strung out a whole vocabulary of suitable words, such as conspiracy, bagatelle, jealousy, etc.

Madame Dajobert did not know what to believe.

Finally she had acquired the conviction that she had spent her money to no purpose and that she had let herself be duped by people more ignorant than she. She therefore made the resolution never to set foot in their homes again.
The month of June had just come and gone.

Noon! A leaden sun weighed upon torpid nature. A crushing heat oppressed breasts avid for pure, fresh air. The city over which hung a low sky, cloudy and heavy, had the air of an immense forge. Each house, each individual was a hearth from which heat radiated. Not a breeze in the air. Trees, immobile, folded in their languid branches. The sea, dark and calm on the seashore, was boiling in the distance, like molten steel, under the burning rays of the sun.

The mountain, like a harassed colossus, was dozing in the rigid immobility of its somnolent vegetation. Here, under an overhang, in the middle of half-naked children, a mother, in only a blouse and pants, stretches herself out, her figure streaming with sweat. There, on a balcony, a Monsieur taking a siesta lets fall from his hands a newspaper, or the volume that he has just taken up. In the street passes a dog who pants, tongue hanging out. Over there, tied under a tree, the ass asleep in front of the grass, dreams standing up, eyes closed.

And yet, through these days of great heat, in this gigantic kiln from which breaths of fire rise, from every corner, from every crack, people were toiling as though in winter, the European, so as not to let himself be hypnotized by her the great thaumaturge, the stone healer, the magnetic therapist.

The sixteenth of July was approaching.

In the streets, in the houses, in the offices, at the market, on the public plazas, after shaking hands, they asked one another:
—Well, aren’t they queuing up this year for Saut-d’Eau?
—And why not? Just this instant, I got my permit signed by the division chief.
—As for me, I want to be there eight days ahead of time. I played a prank on my patron.
—What trick did you find?
—It’s quite simple: a relative who is dying at Mirebalais!
They parted company the next moment:
—Till Saut-d’Eau?
—Till Saut-d’Eau.

Penitents, rigged out in their costumes made of Brabant or other coarse fabrics, were roaming the streets of the city in all directions. They crossed in a perpetual to-and-fro outside the churches and chapels. The women wore on their neck a blue neckerchief, on their heads another of the same color surmounted by a broad-rimmed straw hat; at their waist a cord of cotton yarn. Men ensheathed made a piteous impression in their coverings of coarsely stitched fabric.

This sixteenth of July holiday became the preoccupation of many families.

This whole population, aimless, avid for pleasures, distractions, debauchery, wild revelry, were up and moving, impatiently awaiting the hour of departure.

And among this flood of pilgrims repairing each year to Ville-Bonheur one often encountered people of a certain renown (numerous also these latter), who went there to look for the healing of an incurable illness or a balm for some moral suffering.

Thus, Madame Dajobert, to whom they had often spoken of the Virgin of Miracles, of Ville-Bonheur where that virgin had made her appearance, if one may rely upon the legendary stories which circulated, did not want to lose the most fortuitous of all opportunities, to go make vows for Léon whose the state of health each day gave her more intense concern.
IV

In a house of modest appearance situated in a very peaceful quarter of the city, far from the rumors of the markets, the swarming streets where peasants, city dwellers and animals mix together pell-mell, a woman of gay and smiling mien is seated in front of a little table.

In a corner of the drawing room embroidering was a charming brunette, with thick and bushy eyebrows shading a pair of jet-black eyes, with white teeth enshrined in purplish gums, with plump and voluptuous lips.

Near the threshold of the door, a wretch in a jacket, seated on his quart, held in his hand an end of cane which he was tearing with his beautiful teeth.

It was Madame Georges who, bent over her machine, was doing the work of four to be able to acquire enough money to buy a good provision for the forty days that she had to spend at Ville-Bonheur.

It was Lala who, feeling herself regaining her strength, had taken up her crochet hook again.

Finally, it was Pratique who, at this noon hour, had come to take a little rest under the awning of his pratique. That careless one, while peeling his cane, was spouting to these women, who were bursting with laughter, some improbable adventures or some anecdotes, which he said he had heard from his grandfather or his great-grandfather. Madame Georges sewed until ten, eleven o’clock, even midnight without tiring. Alone in her bedroom, all the doors closed, she turned her machine rapidly while singing in a clear and limpid voice, this popular air with a rhythm slow and lulling:
A-là dix zè sonnin
Manman métém’ dehô
Machine moin en bas brasm’
Pìtîl’ moin sou côtém’

REFRAIN

Pas pleuré, mon enfant,  
Pas pleuré!

Pas pleuré, mon enfant
Pran courage! (bis)\(^{61}\)

These languorous notes that accompanied the *ronron* of the machine were soft, insinuating, on the evening breeze.

The stroller lingering, allowed himself to daydream upon hearing this simple air and its naïve words. He pictured to himself a victim of love, chased from the maternal home, who was weeping her misfortune, and leaving to look elsewhere for some shelter, her machine under her arm and her child on her breast. And this refrain: “*Pas pleuré, mon enfant*” resonated in his head, like the consoling voice of another mother less severe, more indulgent…

*  
* *
Madame Georges had been able to save up some money. She made her preparations, fashioned together two penitential dresses, one for herself and the other for Lala.

The eleventh of July had arrived.

The next day, Madame Georges, after drinking her coffee, had nothing more pressing to do than to repair to Pont-Rouge to wait for the women hiring out animals who were coming in from Orangers, from Coupe-Mardigras, from Saut-d’Eau and its environs.

Men, women, children, were coming and going, running in front of the peasant women, asking the price of the animals, and, without taking the time to examine them, were disputing over them, quarreling with one other.

Here, a woman pays her four gourdes, price of the rental (round trip), in cash. She mounts proudly on the back of her hobbyhorse and goes joyously on her way, like a conqueress, whip high, body dancing.

There, a young man is delighted with the bargain that he has just concluded: two gourdes! He only paid two gourdes, what luck! But the unfortunate beast, a scrawny old mule, worn out by the long journey that she has just made, apparently wants to be recalcitrant. She stretches her neck out long when he pulls the rope. His comrades mock him, children laugh to the point where they can’t catch their breath; but he, he does not worry himself a bit, trusting especially to the large stars on his spurs, or in case of manifest rebellion, to his revolver which would respond to the animal’s duplicity.

Across this mob in quest of animals, one saw Madame Georges returning, followed by a peasant woman mounted on
a superb horse and trailing behind her a little mule with solid hocks…

Madame Georges, arrived home, hastened to arrange the bundles of old clothes in the *sacs-paille*.\(^{62}\) She had had time to buy a large quantity of savory shortbread crackers, cheese, ham, sausage, sardines and to prepare fried fish, rice and peas, etc., etc.

She had not forgotten her demijohn of water, for, the Plain of Cul-de-Sac once crossed, she would still have kilometres to travel without hope of encountering the slightest trickle of water on her passage.\(^{63}\)

Four o’clock in the afternoon sounded at the Cathedral. She was overdue to get herself underway.

The animals loaded, attached to the posts of the house, awaited the two penitents.

Finally, they were ready.

Madame Georges made one last inspection. After having assured herself that the doors were well fastened, she handed the key over to *Pratique* who had been entrusted to keep watch over the house.

*Lala* seemed very embarrassed to hoist herself onto the back of the animal. *Maripiè*, the peasant, helped her to mount by supporting her foot. Julie, less of a novice flew nimbly from the bench onto her seat. *Lala* fearful, did not know how to hold herself on her little mule. She believed at every moment that the beast was going to let the kicks fly.

*Maripiè* reassured her by telling her that she was docile and submissive.

It was understood that they must sleep at *Bon-Repos*, on the plain, on one of the properties of the late Georges. For it
was not prudent, for women, to venture alone in certain places along the route at night and even the day, even though everyone passed through them at all hours.

Madame Georges had in mind the tragic facts of travelers whom murderers had thrown headlong down into the ravines after having slit their throats and stripped them of their belongings.

*Morne-Blanc*, the lair of these brigands, was the terror of the pilgrims.

They had arrived at the front gate. There, horsemen in light costume, hats adorned with ribbons, wearing boots, leggings, seated on colorful woolen blankets in the way of cushions, passed at top speed, leaving behind them a thick cloud of dust.

Women, perched high on their hobbyhorses, swung themselves nonchalantly from right to left or from top to bottom according to the gait of the animal. This bodily movement did not occur without causing a noise of scrap metal to issue from the pot, cups, etc., attached to the handles of the *sacs-paille*.

Seated under the awnings, ladies and gentlemen were buying themselves the pleasure of watching this whole crazy world repairing to Saut-d’Eau pass by. And behind everyone, back there, letting themselves advance at the will of the animals, one saw coming slowly, very slowly, Madame Georges and *Lala*.

*Maripiè*, once in possession of her money, had let them go on ahead in order to go buy her little provision at the market, not without promising, however, to join them again before they even had the time to arrive at Croix-des-Missions. She trusted to her legs which she knew to be strong and solid. The peasant had spoken truly. Scarcely had the two women left Sarthe than
they saw Maripiè coming, trotting along the wide road, bodice stuffed with one knows not what.

They halted at Bon-Repos at seven o’clock.

Compè Ti Louis, the manager of the property, alerted the night before, had hastened to unload the mule and the horse and had tied them under a tree where he had had grass put in the afternoon.

Sò Macouloute, his wife, had had time to prepare a light meal for these Ladies; she had had taken out of her trunk, where they had been folded with care since Georges’s last visit, a sheet and two well-ironed pillowcases.

Julie expressed the desire to sleep under the stars. It had been so long since she had breathed this pure air of the countryside. She wanted to drink it through all her pores.

Compè Ti Louis moved a mattress out under the arbor; Sò Macouloute made the bed, a bed white and tidy indeed.

Maripiè, herself, gave no trouble to anyone. She stretched herself out without ceremony across some sacs-paille.

Everyone had gone to bed. In the vicinity, one could hear the tremolo of the cicadas and the strident cries of the crickets.

The breeze humming through the coconut, palm, and mango trees, poured sleep over these women. Only the voices of some horsemen hurling their gay notes into the night, and the hooves of animals galloping on the wide path came to trouble their repose from time to time…

Compè Ti Louis announced the day-star. They awoke. The animals half reclined on the remains of the feed grass seemed also to have understood the signal: they stood up on their legs and shook themselves vigorously as though to chase away the remnants of their fatigue.
The coffee was ready. What flavor! What an aroma! Madame Georges judged it like a connoisseur. And besides, was there anything more agreeable than coffee sipped at four o’clock in the morning?

The beasts vigorously cinched down were soon loaded again.

Sô Macouloute brought a straw chair; Lala mounted first, Madame Georges next. The latter having inserted her hand into her sac-paille, took out three cookies that she handed to the manager’s wife for little Louisa, her goddaughter. Sô Macouloute, hands outstretched, curtsied, saying:

—Mèci Comè…

Compè Ti Louis had just taken her by the cuff of her sleeve:

—Ma fait gnou bout’t’chimin avec ou oui, comè.

Madame Georges joyously accepted this pastoral courtesy:

—Oua faim’ plési mon compè.

The sun was announcing itself with an immense blaze on the horizon as they put themselves back en route. The trees were blurred in the semi-obscurity. Already some birds were flinging their garrulous notes from branch to branch.

Pilgrims, male and female, underway at an early hour, jauntily seated on their mules or their horses were riding along the wide route in groups of three, four, five.

On foot, solid lads flew by, pant legs rolled up, jacket on their arm, and women, skirts short, solidly held at the waist by a handkerchief.

Throughout the journey they also encountered the infirm, the lame, the half-blind leading the blind, who went each year to look for the divine panacea. All this flood of humanity went journeying under the sun, dust, and rain almost a hundred kilometres.
They had just cleared Carrefour-Bourg. Arrived at l’Allé-Monté, Compè Ti Louis took leave of these ladies. They walked for a long time on a chalky soil, between scorched stumps, defoliated, denuded trees, which at night created the impression of phantoms upright or crouching. What privation! What misery weighed upon all these trees desperately tendering their naked arms toward the sky and asking of it in a mute supplication to appease their always unquenched thirst! What a prodigious din were one able to hear their jeremiads!

Madame Georges had turned her head: she saw this immense plain receding further and further.

At a turning point in the road, they started to walk between two chains of mountains that seemed ready to crush them under their mass or bury them alive within their enormous flanks.

It was not to be believed. Those crenellated hills, lying indolently down there, under the sky with which they seem to blend, enveloped in a bluish tinge, as though of velvet, often girded in the front by a band of white vapors. Madame Georges saw them brush up closely against them; she imagined to herself that she had only to reach out her hand to touch them.

The route was now becoming rocky, and thus, more onerous for the pilgrims. They took slow steps. The little troupe had twice had the time to rest. It soon arrived at the foot of Morne Blanc and halted a moment. The pita fiber straps were loosened; they had to consolidate the harnesses before beginning the ascent. Maripiè gave each animal’s strap a vigorous tug.

They had to climb an entire avalanche of powdery, grayish rocks, detached from the mountain and lying pell-mell across the trail.

For fear of scaring her, Madame Georges had firmly
guarded herself against telling Lala about the brigands who infested those places.

On both sides of the trail climbing up a steep slope, trees intertwining their top branches form a kind of dome which blocks the solar rays. What a gloomy place! What mystery does that dusk conceal which reigns there even in broad daylight! What sepulchral silence! What do they conspire in their tête-à-tête, these trees that have often been witnesses to or rather mute accomplices of the murderers?

What if one of them were about to surge into view?

There she had arrived in her frightful thoughts when horses’ hooves made themselves heard behind her. It was numerous horsemen, some of whom were armed with revolvers. Among them, Mme Georges recognized some friends of her late husband. Soon repeated detonations arrived to waken the sleeping echo of this savage solitude. They reached the summit; Mme Georges let out an ah! of relief. She thought that everything was done after the ascent, but she did not take long to recur to her error. A steeper slope on the other side was there beneath her feet, for Morne Blanc exhibits almost the shape of a pyramid.

Maripiè had taken the mule’s rope. Lala, trembling, held onto the saddle tightly both front and rear. The descent took place without incident, despite this sloping ground that seemed at each instant to disappear under the animals’ hooves.

Morne Blanc behind them, the little troupe continued. The route became more and more difficult, due to the enormous boulders that reared up there, seeming to bar the way.

Mme Georges, addressing herself to Maripiè, told her that this was the first time that she had undertaken such a long journey and had to climb slopes so steep and so rugged.
The peasant woman, after having made a significant little houn, added with a smile:

—Cé troquett’ là ça, chaill’ la douvant…

Then, after a silence of a few seconds:

—Madann’ gain lè li pas janm tandé palé Pensez-y-bié?

It was true! Why hadn’t she thought of it? those words “Pensez-y-bien” had occasionally struck her ears. She quizzed Maripiè:

—Et bien, ma fie, est-ce qué nous pré rivé?

—Li là, lan détou douvan, said the peasant woman, pointing with her finger.

In fact, she had spoken the truth. At a bend in the road they found themselves in the presence of the colossus.

Many people were resting under the trees or breaking bread before committing to the tortuous flanks of the boa, immense, upright, elevating his granite head toward the heavens.

Mme Georges also wanted to take a little rest and make a small snack, for, since that morning, they had taken only crackers and cheese. The inconvenience was that there was nowhere in the place a rock elevated enough or even a stump to facilitate Lala, hobbled upon her mule, being able to dismount. A Gentleman, who was resting in the shade in company with two other people, came to help her get down.

Pressing his gallantry further, he invited these ladies, who appeared to him of good enough mien, to come share the dense shade of his tree. Mme Georges welcomed the invitation. The young man hastened to state his name.

—M. Deltan, at your service…

—Mme Georges, widow, née Julie Diampois!

—Mlle Mimola Georges.
He then introduced these ladies to Mme Dajobert and Léon.

After the introductions, Deltan, assisted by his friend, removed the *sacs-paille* and laid them down on the ground. The task seemed repugnant to Léon. Albert, who knew his temperament well, threw these words to him under his breath:

— My dear, here, no code of manners; one must be courteous with everyone.

Then slapping him on the back after having shot a glance at *Lala* who had her back turned:

— And besides, that phiz is nothing to disdain, far from it. She well deserves a little effort who is none herself, after all.

Mme Georges and *Lala* ate heartily. *Maripiè* was not forgotten…

A moment later, Albert pulled out his timepiece: it was two o’clock.

They would not arrive at Ville-Bonheur that evening; they would be forced to spend part of the night at the chapel of Orangers.72

Time sat very heavy upon them; large, black clouds amassed themselves in a corner of the sky. They must not let themselves be surprised by rain on the “Pensez-y-bien.”

They hurried.

The little troupe, augmented by Mme Dajobert, Albert and Léon, were underway.
VI

The ascent began. The walls of the colossus were flanked by enormous boulders. The pilgrims, engaged in this narrow and rocky passage, were walking one behind the other, as neither two animals nor even two pedestrians could go abreast. It did not take long for them to emerge onto a little platform situated there as though to permit the animals to catch their breath.

Mme Georges did not conceal her joy; she was expecting something more painful, more back-breaking than Morne-Blanc.

Maripiè understanding her misapprehension:

_Ti mòne ça là, cè pilit’ pensez-y-bien; cè alè qui lè na pral’ mouté manman li._73

In fact, that little hill that they had just climbed seemed to be the baby of the mountain, a fruit of its gestation. People and beasts only had time to catch their breath.

Behind a thicket of trees stood the new _Tower of Babel_ in all its imposing grandeur. Slowly, painfully, scaled the caravan. The animals were stumbling among the rocks. The peasant women—gay, strong, stocky, well-mounted upon their legs—were clambering, jumping from one boulder to the other. They were hailing one another from elevation to base.

—_Maripiè hooool!!!_
—_Hou!!!_

They were rousing the animals to walk by calling them by their names.

—_Gadé Ti Mâle, quimbé cor ou!_74

The beasts were panting, groaning, sweating, appearing spent.
Maripié, furnished with a switch, was inciting one moment the mule, another the mare: Vîp, vlap!
—Hiye, Cétoutt, hiye!75
—Gadé Fanmpabouqué, quimbé cor ou.76

These animals’ names, the blows of the rod falling thickly upon their rumps, the timorous women, plunging abruptly toward the bottom of their mounts, for fear of vertigo, the peasant women trotting among the rocks, all this produced quite a bizarre effect.

Having reached a bend in the mountain, Deltan turned around to size up the elevation that he had just climbed.
—Come over here then, Léon, there at the bottom, in that abyss: all those little heads that are swarming about, wasn’t someone saying that they are close to the earth? Don’t they seem really like little dwarfs entering into the chest of a giant?

Léon, in his turn, had just cast his gaze across the ravines toward the east.

Look over here, Albert. What a panorama! I have never seen anything so imposing! It’s immense, this Plain of Cul-de-Sac, which extends before us as far as the eye can see! But over there, at the far end, past the last flat, what can that be, that whiteness that resembles a sheet of water? It is not the ocean certainly, since we have that behind us…

Albert, standing straight up again on his stirrups, after having a good look:
—Why, it’s our Étang-Saumâtre. I visited it once with my father.77

Indeed, the spectacle was splendid.

Seen from that height, this whole plain seemed an ocean of green. What harmony! What art!
Were it not for that wall of mountain on their right that blocked the view, Port-au-Prince would appear as a point on the horizon.

During this time, Mme Dajobert, Mme Georges, and Lala were continuing their ascent between two rows of boulders spiraling up to the summit. The beasts, out of breath, were hesitating, fumbling, skidding between large rocks arrayed like the irregular steps of a gigantic spiral staircase. It was as though they were suspended over the ravines gaping there below them. One false step would plunge you forever into the abyss. These women were experiencing vertigo. Lala had just closed her eyes so as to see no more. One last rugged boulder, and they were at the summit. Finally!!! These folks had just climbed 1,000 metres in altitude.78

Now they breathed at ease: their dilated lungs inhaled the pure air of the heights.

Léon and Albert, to give themselves a little vigor after this bruising ascent, had just swallowed some cognac.

From that moment on, the route became less rugged. They walked for a long time without encountering any serious obstacle.

Morne-latanier, which owes its name to the fan palm trees which populate it, let itself be ascended without difficulty.

The two widows, since they had left “Pensez-y-bien” had been chatting familiarly about one thing and another as if they had known one another quite a long while. They questioned each other about their hour of departure from the city, conferred about the difficulties of the route. Oh! this “Pensez-y-bien,” they would think about it their whole lives. They knew that they were both going to Saut d’Eau for the first time.
They were inexhaustible on the chapter of the Virgin-of-Miracles and her numerous miracles. However, each for her part was experiencing some scruples in revealing the secret of her pilgrimage.

That however did not prevent them from continuing to chat without that constraint that two people ordinarily experience who have just become acquainted. Already something like a kind of sympathy had been established between them. They felt as though they were made to visit with one another, to know one another.

What harmony of circumstances!

Widows both, the one had only a son and the other just a daughter.

What if it had been the same motive that had put them on the road to Saut d’Eau! They rejoiced in this fortuitous encounter which had so recently attracted them one to the other. This law of human attraction is so powerful that it takes just simple chance, an unforeseen circumstance, a nothing to put in one another’s presence two people made to love one another, to understand one another, even were they placed at opposite ends of the earth.

It was understood: the two widows should no longer be apart. At Ville-Bonheur, they would reserve a small room together.

While they were conferring, Albert who was walking side-by-side with Lala, was pressing her with questions, wanting to get the better of her timidity. He heaped attentions upon her the whole length of the route. Were her sac-paille leaning too much to one side, quickly he leapt to the ground and set it back in balance.
Léon, himself, taciturn, was following behind, dreaming of I know not what. Occasionally he addressed a word to Maripiè who, not always understanding what he said to her, contented herself with responding in monosyllables.

—Yes, M’sié.—No, M’sié.

The sun, tilting toward the horizon, had just gone into eclipse behind the mountain. The trees, deprived of light, were already drowsing, filling the dusk with their doleful silence…

The little troupe had just descended into a mysterious low-land, filled with shadow. All that could be heard was a little murmur of water falling gently into a hollow cavity, under a gigantic tree.

They were at Source-Moncet.79

They should not stay there long, for people believe that the place is haunted, and the darkness was becoming thicker and thicker.

They tackled therefore a wooded path, quite rugged, that wound the whole length of one precipice like a serpent…
VII

The mount of Orangers rose in the darkness, presenting to the travelers a larger passage, more ample in its numerous contours, but wholly as rocky as “Pensez-y-bien.” They did not suffer much in the ascent. Less painful than Pensez-y-bien, the mountain of Orangers is more uneven, more elevated than Morne-Blanc. It has the shape of a truncated pyramid. The second slope leads, through a long narrow pass, bordered on the left by latticework, into a vale sown with bushy trees. The travelers could no longer see one another in this spot; they let themselves be guided by the animals who walked one after the other in the darkness. A stream flowing among piles of rocks announced itself by its babbling.

The beasts crossed it, bathing their feet in it. The little troupe had just climbed a small knoll. Down there, some distance away, twinkled some candles which seemed to be moving, walking….

—What is it? asked Mme Georges.

—Nou rivé lan Chapel, said Maripiè.  

They had attained the Chapel of Orangers. There was a fantastic swarming, something like our markets, Saturday evenings. Men, women, peasants, and citizens pell-mell were there. Some peasant women, seated under their market canopies, holding a lighted piece of bois-pin or a lamp, were selling grillos of pork; others, standing in front of a display of bottles, were hawking tafia, cookies, stale candy, and chocolate bars. Weary pilgrims, enveloped in their woolens, were sleeping under the open sky on the mown grass; others were singing, eating, drinking. Here, horsemen, who had just arrived, were cracking long pita fiber whips; there, horses, mules, and,
indeed, asses, were grazing on strands of grass a few feet from their masters.

In all this tohu-bohu, Mme Georges and her companions did not know where to settle themselves. The place looked strange to them, and besides, this indiscriminate mingling!...

To whom to speak?

On the advice of Maripiè, they entered an enclosure where the chapel was situated and found a suitable spot to lie down.

Léon and Albert rid the exhausted and famished animals of their harnesses, bought some bundles of grass which they threw before them.

The three women had just entered the rustic chapel where some candles burned on the ground in front of a miserable little altar. They knelt, addressing a short prayer to Saint Genève of Brabant, the patron saint of the place.82 After which, they broke bread and lay down as well as they could, heads resting against the sacs-paille or the saddles...

At three o’clock in the morning everyone was up.

The pilgrims, a trace of sleep still under their lids, took leave of the chapel.

The route began to change in appearance. It was cut by shallow ravines, by nippled hills of gentle or rugged slope. A pale moon allowed one to guess at the beauty of the surrounding landscapes.

What enchantment it all must produce under the kisses of the nascent sun!

At times, the caravan marched along the hillsides, while at others, it descended into the lowlands populated with thick mango trees.

It was daylight when it broke onto a savanna covered with
grasses across which played the feeble rays of a nonchalant sun. Here and there were some pole fences, inside of which one saw cornstalks or millet waving under a fresh morning breeze, roofs “of thatch,” like hats, from which rose thin threads of white smoke.

They traversed some boulders baked by the fire from the sky, thrown there on the savanna, always the same ones that people met again each year, streams meandering their harmonious waters under the tutelary shade of trees skirting their sinuous courses along both banks.

The little troupe had stopped a moment, so strong for the three women was the temptation to drink that clear and limpid water.

Albert and Léon also profited by this occasion to bathe their throats in another swig of cognac.

They drank and continued on.

This road to Saut-d’Eau, it was interminable! They would never arrive…

_Eh bin, Maripiè, said Mme Georges who was beginning to get impatient, est-ce que nou pré rive?_83

_Nou poco, non! Nou passé savann’ Madan-Michaud, na pralé pran savann’ Madan-Michel. Après ça nou rive._84

In effect, a thin curtain of trees presented themselves to the pilgrims as the boundary between the two savannas.

They glided under the branches and found themselves as though by enchantment in the presence of the savanna called _Madan-Michel_. The sight is quite grandiose. Other scenery, other landscapes more and yet more charming offer themselves to view. An immense valley, decorated here and there with clumps of trees, dotted in certain spots by hills, carpeted
under thick lawns of golden flowers, unfurls itself as far as the eye can see…

Albert sized it up with his eyes:
—Why this valley, it is capable of holding four cities the size of Port-au-Prince!

Léon upping the ante:
—There would our Paris be well founded! And to think that in the United States, it would only take a few years to transform it into a magnificent city with boulevards, public plazas, buildings and monuments.

The women had gone a few feet ahead of Albert and Léon, who were following behind, building at great, imaginary cost their mansions in the sky.

They walked a long time…a very long time without being able to reach the other end of the valley. The pilgrims walking one after the other, seen from afar, seemed like an interminable chain of large ants going in search of prey.

The two young men had abandoned their castles in the air to enjoy fully this truly enchanting spectacle.

Here, carpeted in verdure, presenting on its opposing flanks shrubs in the guise of tapers arrayed in gentle gradation, a little eminence awakened the idea of an altar despoiled of its God; here and there, scrawny cows with flaccid udders, half reclining or standing, were chewing their cud; goats, asses, wandering horses bounded over the vast expanse or grazed, necks stretched toward the earth, the grass short and thick. Under the branches, or squatting beneath the shade of a tree, peasants hawked milk both raw and boiled, coffee, sold mangos by the heap.

Framing this whole magnificent picture, the surrounding mountains, upright in their majestic pose, also themselves
seemed to enjoy this panorama which offered to them that immense tapestry of verdure rolling away at their feet.

All of a sudden a deafening roar made itself heard. Surely, it was not a storm rumbling in on this beautiful, sunny morning.

_Na pral’ passé la “Tème,”_ said Maripiè who had understood the travelers’ anxiety.

In fact, they were some distance from the “Tomb,” a tributary of the Artibonite. The more they advanced, the more formidable became the noise of the water. The three women were already trembling in their skins. How would they do it, cross the river that they imagined to be vast and deep!

They laboriously descended the twisting switchbacks of a slope that led to the terrible “Tomb.”

All that noise heard at a distance originated from the splashing of the waters against large brown rocks, sloping or sheer, which obstructed the riverbed.

The pilgrims crowded on the bank were proceeding one after another into the water across slippery rocks that slid suddenly out from under the feet of the animals.

Often women and sacs-paille capsized in the current.

Then there was an infernal uproar, the cries of the terrified female pilgrims, those noisy exclamations that they yelled to arouse the attention of their mounts when they stumbled upon the rocks.

Albert and Léon had given some cobs to the solid peasant men who congregated on the shore to facilitate the travelers’ crossing. A ferryman, legs tucked up into his lower abdomen, had taken Madame Dajobert’s reins, and two others were pulling _Cétoutt_ and _Fanmpabouqué_ by the rope.
That particular day, the “Tomb” was swollen, for it had rained the night before. The water rose up to the sacs-paille; the three women got underway with a few splashes. *Maripiè*, herself, *caraco* lifted above her knees, had gained the opposite shore.

Now there remained nothing more than “Sapotille,” tributary of the “Tomb.” The little troupe crossed it without difficulty, then it climbed for the last time a steep and slippery ascent toward the base, and finally found the quarter of Ville-Bonheur seated on a little plateau.
VIII

This little plateau is bordered all around by luxuriant vegetation. Wherever one turns one’s eyes, one finds oneself in the presence of fresh landscapes, evergreen trees nourished by abundant sap and never having known the rigors of drought. From the vegetal tangle to the various nuances of color, the slenderness of disheveled coconut and palm trees stands out, whether one is inclining one’s gaze toward lowlands filled with shade or reposing it upon heights inundated with light. What richness, what infinite variety in tone! Saut-d’Eau is almost an island: the Canotte and Sapotille rivers and the “Tomb” converge there like a belt of water!...It is not very large: ten minutes suffices to walk round it.

The thatched huts and the rare little huts of sheet metal which are found there appear at first glance insufficient for such a large number of pilgrims! and one incessantly growing. Also each cottage seems like an anthill. People of all conditions, from diverse localities, are piled up in an incredible promiscuity, by ten, twenty, thirty under the narrow awnings, in the yards, even under the dome of the trees. Everywhere, hammocks attached to poles intertwine every which way. All the lanes are in a perpetual swarm.

What spirit, what life!

One cannot really analyze that joy that people experience to feel themselves there in that human fair and to say to themselves: I too, I know Ville-Bonheur, this rendezvous of penitents, those who suffer and who want to be healed, those who make vows so that their wishes will be granted, the curious in search of distractions, sensations, and novel impressions, filles de joie who come to profane the sacred ground. This whole
world jostles and elbows one another; it seems as though all of Port-au-Prince is present there. People from the plain, from the hills, from Jacmel, Léogane, St. Marc, l’Arcahaïe, Gonaïves, Lascahobas, what more do I know? come there to acquit themselves of a promise, make an offering, or beseech of the Virgin her untiring grace.

One is quite surprised sometimes to encounter former classmates come from afar off, whom one has not seen for a long time and consequently whose names one has forgotten. They warmly clasp hands; they are quite joyous to see fellows once more, with long hair on their chins; they chat, they toast noisily in front of the tap-room outdoors.

It was July 13 at eight o’clock in the morning when the little troupe made its entrance into Saut-d’Eau. They were, as it were, disoriented in the midst of the thatched huts and narrow streets where people easily get lost when they are not used to it. They went on like this for half an hour without being able to find a suitable spot to take shelter. Albert and Léon, come to the end of their patience, tired of this forced promenade which was offering them up as a spectacle to the whole world, put an end to it by squarely accosting a local woman. They asked her if, by chance, she might not have a little room to let. Upon receiving an affirmative response from the Sautdlaise, they agreed upon the price; the ladies and horsemen dismounted, the animals were unloaded, and the sacs-paille piled in a corner of the cell which was very tiny. Maripiè who was in a hurry to be going, since she had to return to Port-au-Prince one last time, took leave of those ladies, pulling Céoutt and Fanmpabouqué by the rope with a formal promise to bring them back in about forty days. The other three mounts were entrusted to a local man.
Albert and Léon had not omitted telling this guardian that he would have to meet them early on the morning of July 16, in order that they might go before their departure to visit the superb waterfall that had earned the quarter the gentle name of Saut-d’Eau.90

The women had gone to make the sign of the cross in the chapel of the Virgin-of-Miracles.

Rid of their mounts, Albert and Léon were rejoicing in the idea that they were about to surrender themselves entirely to their own gambols. Standing on a little knoll, they indulged themselves in looking at that savanna over which they had just traveled, and where they yet saw that interminable line of pilgrims. Moved by I know not what sentiment of curiosity, Léon had lifted his eyes to the sky as though to observe the progress of the daystar.

—Albert, look at this sun a little with me. Don’t you find in it a strange, timid air? It really does not resemble that of the Capital. And aren’t you more aware of yourself in the vicinity of the latter?

In fact, at Saut-d’Eau, the sun seems lazy, nonchalant, for after having risen to a certain height above the horizon, it appears to remain stationary, immobile, as though frozen in one corner of the sky. At the moment of setting, it leaves you with this illusion, that it has not crossed the sky, that it is going to die a short distance from the spot where it rose, and that not having the sea in which slowly to extinguish its enflamed disk, it will eviscerate itself upon the jagged peaks of the hills. So much more strange is that each time that one moves, it also appears to change position as do children who play lago-lago outside.91
Often discussions arose about the geographic situation of Ville-Bonheur; the four cardinal points became a sticky subject.

Albert and Léon had no trouble orienting themselves. They attributed this apparent anomaly in the course of the celestial body to the position that Saut-d’Eau occupies relative to Port-au-Prince.

On their return from the chapel, the three women had prepared their meal together. Each rivaled the next in her hunger. After which they spread mats on the ground and lay down the whole rest of the day. The young men, themselves, having removed spurs, leggings, jackets, settled into their hammocks. They felt sick with fatigue. Léon, who happened to mount his horse very rarely, felt aches throughout his whole body. Only a good bath could really have soothed their numb limbs. They must not think of that for the moment, for they had not had enough sleep that night at Orangers.

The bath was thus postponed until early the next morning.

The ladies, for their part, had promised themselves that they would go visit the sacred palms…

Night came and went in the greatest calm. Never had they slept a sleep so profound.

July 14, which was a Friday, Albert and Léon woke up at dawn. It was nice out, the air was delicious. That date and the freshness of the climate made them recall their sojourn in Paris. In their minds, they saw themselves again in the middle of that Parisian world celebrating that great anniversary. Their bath towels around their necks, the ex-Parisians promenaded through the little alleys of Saut-d’Eau reliving in their imagination the
unforgettable scenes of their life on the boulevards. In their imaginary peregrination across Paris, they passed in front of the guard house, entered for a moment the chapel where all they did was make the sign of the cross, inspected the candle vendors seated before their baskets, crossed the market, directed their steps towards the monument representing Calvary, came walking back in order finally to go to bathe in...Sapotille.

The whole way, they saw little groups of men and women, male and female penitents who were repairing to church, gentlemen who were going to have their coffee at the home of people they knew or take their absinthe under the shady market canopies, the awnings where the tap-rooms stood.

Arrived at the bank of the river, Albert and Léon were greatly surprised to see themselves preceded at this early morning hour by a crowd of people who had also come there to bathe.

* * *

* * *
IX

Sapotille runs through a ravine across boulders spaced some distance from one another. At the base of each boulder is found a sort of cavity that fills with river water. Around these, one sees numerous pools staggered about, so to speak.93

Here men almost naked were chatting, gossiping, exchanging full-bellied laughter; others, having water up to their navels and their flasks resting in the hollows of boulders, were gulping down a swig between two dives; higher up some women, veritable naiads, their hair in disarray, abandoned the floating folds of their blouses to the meandering waves, or made the water coming from a little cascade fall in beads of pearl over their heads.

Often couples, shunning indiscreet glances, go in the evening under cover of night to hum their duet of love in the current, which goes on to whisper their secret to the trees on the bank....

The same scene which passes in Sapotille repeats itself also in the Tomb and the river Canotte, for each pilgrim has his favorite stream.

Albert and Léon, after having thoroughly soothed their limbs in the current, had regained their cottage.

They only had time to break bread: crackers, jam, cheese, and then they went to rejoin the three penitents who had parted toward the palms....

The holy palm trees are, like the Grotto of Lourdes, the object of a deep worship on the part of the pilgrims.

They are arrayed in groups in the lowland dominated by the little rustic church, visible to those who look at it from below its whitewashed left side.
One reaches the palm trees from the chapel by a little slope, quite steep but of short duration. One must dive there.

These majestic trees lift their needly shafts toward the sky; at their base, around protruding roots, are amassed brown stones coated with burnt wax on which people come ceaselessly to light candles. There the Virgin of Miracles made her first appearance; there through these palms the pilgrims persist yet in seeing her; there she continues always to work her divine miracles; there at last that thousands of voices grateful or solicitous sing her praises and glorify her name a thousand times blessed.

Seated, kneeling or standing in the shade of the palms, an innumerable crowd is there in an indescribable pell-mell. It is the rendezvous of penitents, male and female. It is the soil of happiness, of healing, the hive where a whole swarm of miseries, sufferings and ills of all sorts buzzes. The deaf, the mute, the blind, paralytics, epileptics, the ulcerated, the cancerous, the scrofulous, the leprous, the legless, the crippled, the one-armed, the arthritic, those with dropsy or goiter—what more I know not!—are thrown there like the sordid flotsam of a shipwreck. One finds there the whole gamut of human miseries. Here a black scarf hides a large purulent sore instead of a face, there skulls shorn by eczema, live rotting flesh. Lamentations, complaints, prayers mount in a formidable, confused and prolonged hoin-hoin toward those branches, which seem rather to listen to the lover’s song of the breeze caressing their long tresses. The hymns multiply, intertwine; each group sings a different air; all the notes blend confoundedly together, and the scenes of manger-les-âmes endlessly repeat themselves. Circles form; in the middle is a woman or a man who reels, exhausts themselves
in contortions of face and body, jabbers a mysterious jargon, makes nefarious predictions, announces starvation, pestilence, the end of the world.

And bizarre thing!

Those who hallucinate claim to be Saint John, Saint Philomène, the Virgin of Miracles, etc.

In the presence of these dramas of another kind, one cannot really defend oneself from a feeling of profound pity for these miserable ones who implore their pittance from the Virgin. If she could descend from on high into the middle of this crowd starved for healing, for ease, for fortune, for happiness, for earthly felicity, what martyrdom had she not undergone? Each would like to seize a shred of her bloody robe; pushing further his unconscious cannibalism, each would like to find in a morsel of that pure and chaste flesh, sanctified by divine maternity, his holy nourishment.

Poor sick souls, poor human debris! If it were in vain that you groaned! If the Miraculous One, nesting on high in the palms, remained indifferent or, at the very least, impotent to your complaints, to your tones, your accents! Wouldn’t your faith be unshaken? Wouldn’t you return next year with the same fervor, the same zeal, saying to yourselves: —(Oh! how easily suffering cradles hope!)—that perhaps it was not your turn, and that the Virgin would know not to lavish her beneficence upon all her children at the same time.

Comforted by this thought, every pilgrim whose wishes will not have been granted, will say the same thing each year, and each year, he will renew his pilgrimage until his body horribly mortified by the austerities of the penitence, consumed by the suffering, feet bruised by the rocks along the path, having
only a glimmer of hope as his whole strength, soul weary, he comes to alight finally under the holy trees, eyes turned toward the palms and in one last agony begging them again the divine balm that will never arrive…

Surely, there would not be lacking a voice to murmur like a consolation to this departed soul: “The Virgin loved him, the Virgin looked after him,” thinking that this victim is one of the elect, and that on high supreme joy awaits him.

Oh! how many pilgrims have departed for the land of happiness, Saint-Virgin, who have remained there through your will, one says, and have never returned!

But, confess it, Saint-Miraculous, for the few that you have healed, how incalculable are those who perish without ever having received a single one of your balms! For the small number of the favored that you have filled with your largesse, how many will die in the blackest misery without ever benefiting from a single one of your favors! And despite this implacable law of social inequality that weighs forever upon them, they will continue always to tender to you their unappeased lips.

Know thou well, Saint-Virgin, what is uppermost in all these jeremiads, in all these calls to happiness, to health? It is the return of the Messiah that epitomizes all these hideous scenes; it is another redemption, the suppression of all these sufferings, of all these ills, of all these miseries. For the impotent who came to die at your feet, because he retained a shred of hope, would surely be much more grateful to you for a second ephemera of earthly joy than for the eternity of celestial felicity that you tacitly promise him…

And besides they all know that, if your son suffered, his passion was not in vain, for he saw realized the most beautiful
of his divine dreams after that of having redeemed human-
kind: his resurrection, which detached him from the humanity
who would have so much need of him thereafter. After having
stripped of its mortal envelope what was divine in him, would
he had remained among us the better to teach suffering to the
generations which knew it not? Would he had taken the scep-
ter and the purple? The kingdom would be one and would not
be torn asunder. And then, long ago, the great truths would
have been proclaimed! We would have learned better to know
God the Father through the direct lessons of God the Son. He
did not want that. He preferred to leave to others, for fear per-
haps of defiling himself through contact with us, the trouble
of achieving the work begun by him. But those, will they ever
have the strength to guide it to good end? Are they not already
succumbing under the weight of the immense divided empire?

To me you will object perhaps, Saint-Virgin, that your son,
in redeeming us, only gave himself as an example to humanity,
and that humanity, in order to be resurrected into perfection,
equality, supreme felicity, must also climb its Calvary.

But you will surely agree that to your son only thirty-three
years of martyrdom were needed to accomplish his work thus
far imperfect.

On the other hand, how many centuries of suffering and
tears, what bloody stations will humanity not have to pass
through before exhausting its long martyrlogy? How much
time yet to accomplish its ascension toward the serene heights,
impregnated with immutable truths, bathed in the bright lights
of divine science? When will it thus divorce itself from the
doubt that mutilates and gnaws at it? No voice responds; in its
desert of anguish no “divine mirage.” And even when it would
see all its ideals blossom, will it be sure that it would have nothing more to desire in its nirvana?

Besides, your son, Saint-Virgin, never doubted except toward the end of his suffering, that he should share the celestial realm with his Father. Before rising on high, did he not see himself accomplish his humano-divine destiny? Moreover, is this why, in the midst of his tortures, he had not a single moment of weakness? —But him, the miserable one who has his face turned toward you, does he know what there is at the end of his throes, will he ever find this promised felicity?

Oh! if only, he could feel on the moist pallor of his brow, the vivifying warmth of a tear from thy motherly eyes! But no, those eyes are now dry; all your tears flowed onto the feet of the “great Crucified.”

For want of that tear, if this thirsting soul in flight toward it for eternity, who knows? could drink only a drop of dew on your blessed palms, only that, and nothing but that! It is again in vain, for the dove, in taking flight toward the skies, already drank this drop of Hope, leaving us blind Faith and timid Charity grappling with Doubt and Selfishness.

Troubled, gripped by vertigo in the presence of this state of things, we truly fear that poor sick humanity, tired of walking, spirit tortured, vanquished finally by Doubt, will sink down forever on the path, eyes piercing the immense heavens, not to implore, but to blaspheme them...

Such were the reflections to which Albert and Léon surrendered themselves while the three women, kneeling at the feet of the palms, lit votives and told their rosary beads...
The entire day passed in prayer. The three penitents went one hour to the church, another to calvary to come back again beneath the palms.

It had rained in the afternoon. Nothing more disagreeable than rain at Saut d’Eau. A sticky, blackish mud makes you falter with every step. Forced we were to remain in our retreat one on top of another, like penned sheep. The next morning, a thick fog stretched over the hill, the distant valley, and Ville-Bonheur. An immense shroud enveloped us on all sides; two steps away, we were unable to recognize one other. It was the first time that these ladies had witnessed this scene of nature; she had ordered a set change.

The rays of the sun did not wait long to lift one by one the folds of nature’s floating dress, leaving her in all her nudity. It is a good thing that he loves her.

It was July 15, eve of the sixteenth. The quarter swarmed with people; the cottages, crowded with pilgrims, could hold no more. Albert and Léon, while going to bathe in the river Canotte, had passed alongside the market. There young men, young women, without standing on ceremony, were shopping, drinking lait caillé, eating grillos, fried bananas in new couis.

By the afternoon, the quarter had taken on another complexion. Much more movement, more comings and goings. People were preparing for the feast day. Here and there, people were dragging about coconut and palm leaves; they were raising arcades in the little streets where tomorrow’s procession must pass. Ladies from the Capital, gentlemen, who had obtained great favors from the Virgin were adorning little temporary altars under the awnings. The chief of
the quarter in military habit was making much fuss, going left and right.

All of a sudden, the noise of a bugle makes itself heard; it is the Commander of the Arrondissement of Mirebalais who is making his entrance into Saut-d’Eau. He is followed by a large cavalry. Precautions are taken to maintain order. In the evening, light everywhere: all the lampposts are illuminated. Coudiailles fill the little streets with the mad voices of drums and the hoarse sounds of bugles. From under each roof mount hymns in which the name of the Immaculate Virgin is sounded over and over. Groups locking arms with one another, promenade gaily, singing until quite out of breath. Religious airs mix with popular ones. Toward eleven o’clock, everything returns to silence. Each person has gone to curl up in his own retreat in order to wake up early the next morning…
July 16! The little clock chimes cheerfully, saluting the return of the holy day. The quarter has taken on its festival air. The soldiers of the tenth regiment are on foot in their brand new uniforms. The drums beat to the fields: it is the procession of the Commandant of the Arrondissement who is going to Church.$^{101}$

The pathway leading to the chapel is obstructed; people are no longer walking, they are massing. The little temple itself is on the point of bursting. People press themselves against the doors, or jostle against one another. Each woman holds a bundle of fronds upon her arm. It is an amalgamation of dresses made of Brabant, blue neckerchiefs, straw hats with large rims…

Finally the procession gets underway. The beadle, rigged out in a miserable soutane which goes only to his knees, opens the procession, holding the cross high. The priest, the children of the choir, and the eulogists intone the Ora pro nobis.

The niche of the Virgin richly decorated, borne by hand on a litter, is in the middle. This compact crowd looks like a flock of sheep. Thousands of voices sing different airs: Grace, Marie, grace! Sacred palms, Virgin of Saut-d’Eau, Virgin of Miracles, Immaculate Virgin, are so many of the hymns in honor of the Miraculous. The bugles and drums, marching on the two flanks, mix their discordant notes in this charivari. From place to place above their heads rose all the bundles of palm fronds that people were waving convulsively and all the voices cried together: Miracle! Miracle!

Madame Georges, Madame Dajobert, and Lala were lost in this forest of heads. Albert and Léon—the better to follow
the evolution of the procession—had climbed up on a knoll
facing the palms. There, indeed, the spectacle was grandiose.
They commanded all this human flood, which descended on
one side and ascended upon the other, going to assault the little
church perched on an eminence.

It was not rare to witness, on the route of the procession,
a spectacle that would be of a nature to divert us were it not
for the many cases of accidents that one had to record. Two
men quarreling with one another, or even less, two asses tossing
kicks at one another, sufficed to throw people into a panic. The
barking of a dog produces as much effect on a band of sheep.
So, it was a general run-for-your-life stampede, tramplings, se-
verely bruised faces, cracked heads, lost hats, etc., etc., and the
affrighted crowd, believing in a chastisement from the Virgin,
cried: Mercy!…mercy!…Miracle!…miracle!…

All this mob, gradually as it rose from the palms, flowed
across the little streets in all directions. When the last pilgrims
had climbed the little slope, Albert and Léon went to rejoin the
three penitents who had come back, likewise furnished with
their bundles of fronds.

After the celebration of the mass, the festivities began. The
bastringues, allowing their lubricious notes to be heard, were
raging. All the Mirebalaisian youth who had come, that same
morning, to take part in this solemnity, firmly seated on frisky
horses, returned home, horses prancing, stamping, galloping,
their riders’ hats askew, their blouses hanging out. In a nearby
courtyard, one saw the villagers, who were dancing the contra
dance under a canopy, arranged in couples facing one anoth-
er. A voice called out the different movements to perform: “En
avant dé lé danm’”—“Traversé”—“A vos places”—“Balancé,” “Tou dé
bras,” etc. At each command of the conductor alternated the accentuated notes of the fiddle and the tambourine beating the rhythm….\footnote{103}

What charms, especially on this particular day, is the spirit, this intimate satisfaction that one experiences in believing oneself transported into a paradise on earth of delights, of happiness. One truly feels that one could spend one’s entire life there drinking in this pure and vivifying air, and contemplating the picturesque sites which hold one’s gaze. And then, how can one not lavish one’s sympathy on the little population of Saut-d’Eau so interesting, so prepossessing, so hospitable!

In the afternoon, the Saudelaise\footnote{104} youth had organized social celebrations: kermess, raffle, literary soirée, not to mention a choir which was a huge success.\footnote{105} They are no strangers to the usages and customs of the Capital, far from it! For most of these young people had been students in our colleges and the Lycée, the Academy for young ladies, etc. If they love their patroness so much, it is because she never haggled over the welfare of the happy couples who go so often to her feet to ask her to seal their mutual vow of love. Also, is it for the purpose of always being agreeable to her and of drawing to their brow her inexhaustible fountain of favors, that they took to heart each year to heighten the splendor of this solemnity with the stuff of art. That which also denotes among them sentiment and the cult of beauty.

They need space to evolve; what they ask for is a good moral and intellectual organization. Isolation weighs upon them. The elements are there and wait only for the capable hand to impress motion.

Do we know the dream which actually hatches in each
Saudelais heart, the vow which he addresses incessantly to the Virgin, it is that the Eden-of-Miracles, the quarter of Saut-d’Eau erect itself into a charming and stylish borough having its little administrative autonomy. All of them, they all have faith in the Miraculous One; they never doubt that she deigns to perform for them this distinguished favor….

That evening, people attended a spectacle of another type. Besides fireworks and Roman candles, there was also the fire of St-John, imported into the country by a priest recently arrived in Saut-d’Eau.106

In front of a pyre which had been lit on fire, a whole crowd was there waiting, faces lit by the crackling blaze. At a given signal, each one approached from his own side, carrying off a firebrand, which, according to belief, has the power to protect the dwellings against curses.

The seventeenth of July many pilgrims readied themselves to depart. The lessors of animals arrived in throngs. Horses and mules, well-strapped, waited in front of the doors. Madame Georges and Lala accompanied Madame Dajobert who went one last time to visit the palms, the chapel, and the calvary.107 Under the palm trees, she had taken some moist earth which she rolled into a ball that she wrapped in her pocket handkerchief: this sacred earth is the ointment of the pilgrims. At the church she had been given a little oil having already served at the consumption; at the calvary she had addressed a prayer to the son of the Virgin. The shriveled little Jesus, the size of a puny child of two years with the face of a man older than thirty-three, appeared to suffer anew from his physical deformity. The three women, returning from the Calvary had directed their steps toward a little courtyard situated in
the neighborhood of the market. It is there that people see trickling between the brown stones the miraculous water of St.-John. The tradition demands that visitors there observe the most profound silence. If one raised one’s voice too high, if one spoke an indecent word, instantly the water would cease to run…. After having made ablutions by bathing her face, her legs, her feet and hands, Madame Dajobert filled a bottle with this water. This done, they regained their cottage. Madame Dajobert carefully arranged in her sac-paille the bundle of fronds, the oil of the Virgin, the earth of the Virgin, the water of St-John, as so many precious nostrums.

She waited on nothing more before departing than Albert and Léon who had gone to visit the Waterfall.

The two horsemen had left before dawn. They had ridden over a tortuous path, climbed quite a high little hill toward the summit. Arrived on the heights, they were overwhelmed by the strong scents of an abundant vegetation. Gardens planted with thick banana trees, coconut trees, corn, sugarcane, under the first rays of the sun present a brilliant verdure. Streams, intertwining in all directions, without noise, without a murmur, carry away a limpid and rippling water through which one can see smooth little polished pebbles sleeping blissfully at the bottom.

Enormous tree trunks embraced by the cursed talons of cannibalistic fig trees there remind you of the last tragic minutes of the priest of Neptune, him and his sons, clasped in the “immense orbs” of the two dragons of Tenedos. Branches, toppled in the current, still retain their green vitality, the brilliance of their leaves, and continue to blossom despite their fall.

The trail disappears; one walks under the thick shade of trees eternally young, and the horses’ hooves splash in the
water of streams where one sees the disheveled roots of bushes floating.

Hardly have they proceeded past this web than they become entangled in a large enclosure. There they notice, crouched behind a tree, a little peasant. They accost him and ask him to point out to them the route which leads to the Waterfall. Pièrismé, thus did the child name himself, certain that they were going to give him a tip, instantly put himself to running gaily in advance of the horsemen. They arrive soon at the spot where one must dismount.

—Nou rivé, says Pièrismé.¹⁰⁹
—Eh bien, nou pas rouè Cascade là, responds Albert.¹¹⁰
—Li lan descente là. Min cé pou nou fait pied à tèr, oui, ca ti mône là à pic.¹¹¹

They tie up the horses, and not without some hesitation, let themselves slide down the length of a narrow pathway, indeed on foot, a pathway leading into a sort of cave.

Finally they are in the presence of the Waterfall, so vaunted, of Saut-d’Eau. It is a marvel. All this water falling perpendicularly from a prodigious height comes from the streams that they had crossed, a moment ago. And this immense gap which serves as bed of the Waterfall had been hollowed out, affirm the inhabitants of the place, by a landslide that occurred during the earthquake of the year…

The view from here is splendid. Under the solar reflections, each drop is a ruby. Whipped by the wind, each ribbon of water dissolves into a fine mist which comes to bathe your face. The gigantic walls between which the water falls are flanked by large rocks covered with moss. The atmosphere of the place is always damp. Albert and Léon did not want to go
without leaving something which would testify to their presence in these parts. They decide to engrave their name on a tree.

—*Moune pas rété ici longtemps non*, observes Pièrismé.¹¹²

—*Et pourquoi?* retorts Léon.¹¹³

*Ici yo connin tendé voix moune capé palé, tambou capé batt’, l’oraille capé grondé.* And he adds: *ça nou rouè ici-là pas angnin; gangnin gnou l’aut saut pi là bas ça fè deux fois cilà-là; moune qui v’lé rouè li cé toutouni pouli métèr...et pi, fô li gnou nègre ting oui pou li allé là...*¹¹⁴

The two friends laugh until they are out of breath upon hearing the naïve declaration of the little boy who took the noise of the water for the voice of imaginary gnomes.

At once they descend into somber reflections on the state of absolute ignorance in which our peasants live, and the little trouble that one has to instill in them the first notions of science. After having etched their names into the soft, sappy bark with the help of a pocket knife, Albert and Léon climb up the steep slope, hoisting themselves up, so to speak, with the help of the roots of plants and trees.¹¹⁵ They get back into their saddles, give some cobs to Pièrismé, and head towards Saut d’Eau.

Upon returning, they had not failed to fulfill a promise. They went to see Ti Jean, the man to whom they had entrusted their mounts and who had a superb garden in the area. His property, seated on a hill, commanded a view of Ville-Bonheur. Down there at the bottom, behind the trees, Mirebalais conceals itself; and ever in the same direction one spies a bend of the Artibonite, appearing like a white stain on the green background of the trees.

After having feasted their eyes on this panorama, Albert and Léon had pulled out their watches: Eight o’clock! It was past time
to depart for the Capital. Madame Dajobert must be impatient. Some kicks with their spurs and they were at Ville-Bonheur.

Madame Dajobert, who was indeed waiting for them impatiently, had time only to embrace her two friends. Albert and Léon shook hands warmly with each of them. They promised one another that they would see each other again in the city. Madame Dajobert, Albert, and Léon got back on the route to Port-au-Prince, leaving in Ville-Bonheur their companions, who would not themselves return for forty days or so.

This parting created a void around Madame Georges and Lala; they felt themselves alone. Their conversation, yesterday so stirring, so full of rejoinders, became cold and monotonous. Day after day, they repeated the same things to one another. They could not say enough about Madame Dajobert’s goodness of soul.

Albert and Léon, were well-educated young men, polite, very well-mannered. Nevertheless, Lala had not failed to attract the attention of her mother to the contrast that existed between these two temperaments; and the mania by which Léon appeared to be affected had not at all escaped them. In short! they rejoiced in the happy moments that they had passed in company with this widow who was so pleasant and with gentlemen so charming.

Their first visit when they returned to the city would certainly be to the family Dajobert.

Saut-d’Eau emptied itself in the blink of an eye; soon, of all that mob which had found itself there, none remained but the residents of the place.

For Lala, Ville-Bonheur no longer had the same charm, the same attraction. It seemed to her that her heart was aching.
From what? She could not say! Sometimes alone, under the pretext of going to the calvary, she wandered across the large brown rocks that one saw on the sides of the path leading to Mirebalais. Unbeknownst to her, an unknown feeling had been born in her heart. Seated on a boulder, she thought she might find in these trees which surrounded her friends to whom she might speak; she imagined to herself that they could hear her, understand her, if she took them into her confidence. But no, to what good! since she herself could not well analyze this feeling, determine its origin. And then, this scene of nature, yesterday so lively, appeared dead to her eyes. She had come there to ask herself why did she not find that joyous ambience, that charm of days gone by? She did not know to what to attribute her indifference to this scenery! Was it that her artistic taste was blunted? Or else did this void that she felt in herself and in nature come from her friends’ departure? And by what means? No, she vigorously repulsed this idea; she refused to believe it.

And yet, her spirit, as though by a force of attraction, tended toward Port-au-Prince. She would have liked to be there that very instant. Each night, she imagined herself back in the city. Oh! these forty days, when ever would they expire? The hours, why did they move so slowly?

Madame Georges was no less impatient. She thought all the time about her house. For nearly thirty days, she had had no news of it, and the recent fire worried her.

The mother and daughter in their impatience to return to the Capital did not really know how to spend their time. They were tired of shuttling between the church and the calvary. When they knelt under the palms, they did not know what to say to the Virgin.
They had exhausted all their vows.

The hour for departure finally rang upon the clock tower of the Virgin. How great was their joy when they saw Maripiè arrive, faithful to her word, leading the animals. Swiftly, they arranged the *sacs-paille*. Since the day before, Madame Georges had been gathering “her ball of earth, her vial of oil and her bottle of water.” They went to say goodbye to their acquaintances in the quarter and got themselves underway.

The journey from Saut-d’Eau to the city was accomplished without any accident to record either on the part of Madame Georges, or on the part of Lala.

Arriving at Carrefour-Bourg, they had spotted, seated in the inclined flanks of the mountain facing them, the Cut with its metal roofs gleaming in the sun.

At “Bon-Repos,” they stopped a moment: enough time to quench their thirst.

When they reentered the city, it was five o’clock in the afternoon.

Lala found that the entire city had taken on another complexion; the street where she lived seemed strange to her, as though there was something missing. As soon as they had arrived, the whole neighborhood was on their feet; all the voices cried:

*Min voisine, min Lala!*\(^{117}\)

Pratique ran up, carrying the key to the house:

*Bonsoè, Pratique, comant ou yé Pratique, et voyaill’là Pratique.*\(^{118}\)

*Toutou* who had not seen his mistresses for weeks, flitted from Julie to Lala, wagging his tail and pawing lovingly at them.

Pratique helped *Maripiè* unload the animals. Madame Georges was too tired to cook; she had fried fish at Sò Fi’s place.
Madame Georges, after having recovered from the fatigues of the road, had taken up her work again with ardor. It delayed her in executing the last two points of her program.

One Sunday evening, she went to see Madame Dajobert who was charmed by her visit. They spoke a little about everything. The two widows appeared to have no more secrets from one another, inasmuch as their conversation had a familiar, frank and cordial demeanor. Nevertheless, they were each for their own part experiencing some scruples in baring the rawest piece of their hearts. And yet, they felt the desire mutually to confide their griefs in one another, in the vague hope of finding a word of consolation, of reassurance.

It is with joy as with sorrow; when they are overflowing, one always experiences the imperious need to share them with another as though that confidence was an alleviation or an increase in pleasure.

By that sort of transition in language which is so common to us and which one only rarely perceives, they had left the banalities of life to wrap themselves up wholly in the dramatic episodes of their existence. Madame Dajobert recounted to her friend the whole span of her life, from her origins, her first and also her last love, the death of her husband, her large fortune, her arrival in the Capital, the persecutions to which she had been exposed because of her commerce, the bad luck that beset her house, up through Léon’s illness. She hid nothing from her, not even the motive that incited her to travel to Saut-d’Eau. She even confessed to her that since her return from Ville-Bonheur, Léon’s state only made her more apprehensive. And she added with a feeling of bitter despair, that
without means, a second sojourn in Paris was impossible; she did not know what to do, where to turn. After this confidence, Madame Georges found it easy to recite her misfortunes. She spoke of her mother, of her spouse, of the cruel loss of her children, of Lala’s illness, of her vision, of Tante Marguerite, then she proceeded to address her friend in this way:

—Imagine my astonishment, my dear, when the old woman told me that Dan-Maoua, this name that Lala was repeating during her fits, was my mother’s when she was in Africa!

Madame Dajobert started each time that she heard this name Dan-Maoua which was no stranger to her. And without letting any emotion appear on her face, she interrogated Madame Georges:

—And Lala had never known her grandmother?
—Never. When my mother died, Lala was very young, she was not yet weaned.

—But this name Dan-Maoua was not foreign to you?
—Absolutely foreign. Until the day when Tante Marguerite revealed it to me, I did not know that my mother had any name other than Rosalie.

—There’s the mystery! And this casket, Lala’s vision, was she able to make sense of all that? Did she give you the clue to the riddle?
—She puzzled it out so well that here I am today in continual affrights…

—What? said Madame Dajobert thunderstuck.
—Why, I have been obliged in order to ransom my daughter, in order to save her, to accept a pact.
—With whom? pressed her interlocutor more and more anxiously.
—With the casket and what it contained.
—I truly do not understand! said Madame Dajobert opening her eyes wide upon her friend.
—You will understand it. I have already told you that in dying my mother, so near the end as she was, had instructed me to throw her casket into the ocean ... Why, later, when the misfortunes fell upon me, Tante Marguerite made known to me what it contained: dishes, pots, jugs, etc., were my mother’s *papa-lares*. If she had charged me to part with them immediately after her death, it was because she wanted to leave no responsibility on my back, since truly I had always been held in complete ignorance of these mysteries. According to the explanation that the old woman gave me, these African gods are good or spiteful, according as the descendants adopt or scorn them. Consequently, in executing my mother’s last will, I had committed, unbeknownst to me, a sacrilege. And, although the act consummated by me had been unconscious, although ignorant, and therefore inculpable, I carry the burden of my ancestors; I am prey to their wrath; I have been smitten in my children who were wrenched from me in a strange manner, and in Lala’s illness, so cruel. You see now what choice I had? Either lose my daughter, the only one remaining to me, or *gather in the saints* of my mother.
—You have *gathered* them in then?
—What would you want me to do? Had I not done so, I would have lost Lala long ago!
—And since then a change has taken place in your daughter’s condition?
—That is to say, I have done more than just *gather them back together*: I have also made, to these gods, promises which
I must carry out entirely in order that Lala be completely restored.

—And of what do these promises consist? inquired Mme Dajobert whose curiosity was more and more aroused.

—Of “coffee” that I gave to the poor, of “manger-les-âmes,” of “manger-les-morts” and of “manger marassa.”

—Those are tribulations for a mother, for a woman with no help! And what is the use, the purpose of all this?

—It is in order to appease the spirits of the enraged ancestors; it is in order that henceforth they lavish upon me their benefactions, and constitute themselves protectors, guardian angels of Lala and my house. And the manger marassa that must take place shortly, will be in memory of my mother who was a marassa.120

—Your mother was a marassa? Mine too. One more coincidence in our lives. Weren’t we truly meant to know one another, to love one another, and to find a mutual consolation in intimately sharing our griefs!

—I still remember the name of her pareille.121 This name, I do not know why, resounds continually in my head.

—She was called?

—Manzila.

—Manzila! my mother! is it possible! exclaimed Mme Dajobert. Are we truly cousins? Would it definitely be that my mother was your mother’s twin; that this Dan-Maoua of whom my mother spoke to me so often in her hours of anguish was she who gave birth to you!

It was as though Mme Georges was turned to stone by these exclamations out of her friend’s heart. There was a moment of silence. The two widows looked at one another without being
able to speak, suffocated by emotion; then tears shone in their eyes. It could not be that there were two other twins having the same names! unless God had wanted to deceive these creatures by deluding them both. No, they were not mistaken; the truth was discovered. Had they not compared dates? Manzila, trembling with fear, crouching behind a clump of trees, hadn’t she witnessed her sister’s removal? A month later, hadn’t she met the same fate? Transported on a slave ship, she, too, wasn’t she cast into a city in the North? Wasn’t she born of the same father and the same mother? And this brother that Manzila had once caught a glimpse of, among so many other slaves, wasn’t he also Dan-Maoua’s brother? In the presence of so much evidence, it had been impossible for these women not to believe themselves related, descended from the same stock.

They were convinced of their kinship. In the effusion of their joy, the two widows threw their arms around one another and embraced. Indeed to look at them, one would have said that they were thrown from the same mold, there was such a resemblance in their features and their whole person. But the contrast that existed between their skin tones was very marked: Madame Georges was a pure-blooded black woman.

From then on, they called one another cousins, just Julie or Francine.

Madame Georges, upon returning home, imparted this happy event to her daughter, who welcomed this news with transports of joy.

Madame Dajobert dared not reveal anything to Léon, whom the lightest conversation exasperated. Even the presence of this mother, who was his idol, grated on his nerves. His mental state became more complicated day after day. Once,
he would have thrown himself from the height of his window, had Albert not arrived in time to prevent him. In his lucid moments, he wanted with all his might for someone to bring him his revolver. In fear that he would harm himself, they had removed all possible weapons from his bedroom, down to the pocket knife which he used to clean his nails.

Confronted with the frightening progress of the illness that devoured her son’s mind, Madame Dajobert could not remain inactive. She had a doctor called who again counseled a voyage to Paris, only with the briefest delay, for all tarrying would be fatal. How to do it? She had not a sou. People had recommended other bocors, other fortune-tellers of greater renown, more solid science; all spouted the same stories to her. Only one among them had spoken, in speech devoid of artifice, of the cause of this malady, of her mother who was African, and of the obligations that she had to fulfill toward her ancestors.

Lala’s mysterious story had helped her to comprehend the revelation of the houngan. Why had she not thought of it earlier? Wasn’t she Julie’s cousin? Weren’t they descended from two mothers marassas? The blood of the colonist which ran in her veins, would it be powerful enough to free her from all responsibility of this nature? At least, she believed that for a long time. And that was why she had always professed a secret contempt for the papa-lares, and the coarse beliefs which proceeded from them. If it had not been for Léon’s illness, never would she have consented to what she had always considered a moral decadence. What had come to shake her conviction was Lala’s mysterious story.

After serious reflection, she had ultimately convinced herself that she also had her burden: that Léon was persecuted.
Under the sway of this idea, she went to find her cousin, discuss with her the latest consultations that she had made, this revelation that to her appeared exact and full of good sense.

—I want to believe, added Mme Dajobert, that that man did not deceive me, for I noticed that he did not mumble, that he did not question me, as so many others do in order to know in advance from me what he would have to say to me. When he presented me with his sibylline book, I had only to pose my question mentally. And then, in a language simple and precise, he spoke to me of my mother, of her ancestors, of my son, of his age, of his illness, of my house, of the persecutions which are besetting me, of macaqueries,¹²³ that someone came to make in front of my door; finally he told me everything. The unbelievable thing, Julie, this man of whom I speak, is not from the Capital; he is a man from the South who came here for the first time; I went to see him the same day he arrived.

—I no longer have faith in these people, who most often do nothing but exploit the credulity of ignorant persons; but what he told you may be true.

—How may be? Doesn’t his declaration conform to what you told me concerning Lala’s illness? Could I have doubts after that? You believe me then, Julie, capable of shrinking in the face of sacrifices? You suppose me to have less heart than you?

—No! I don’t say that; but I must confess to you, Francine, that the evening of that little drama where we discovered the blood ties that unite us, I had understood it all; but I dare not tell you anything out of respect for your name, for your status, for the society that you frequent and for the aversion that you might have for these things.

—It’s true, I will not deny it. All the time before my son was
struck by this evil, I did in fact have this aversion of which you speak; for nothing in the world, would I have consented to give into things that have always been repugnant to my character, but now that my son is on the point of going mad, there is no sacrifice that I will not make to draw him out of this condition. You speak to me of honor, reputation, social station, but these are so many titles that one buys with money in our country! I care nothing about all that, do you hear, Julie, nothing at all, so long as Léon returns to his normal state.

In the face of such an energetic declaration, Mme Georges could only put her on the right track by telling her what she had to do.

Mme Dajobert, without losing any time, had three candles purchased. Her cousin brought them into her chamber, lifted a crimson curtain, and placed Francine in the presence of the *plats marrassas*. The latter knelt, lit the tapers, affixed two to the ground and held the other one between her fingers until she was done making her invocation.

Before leaving, she had told Julie that from then on she would have to count on her help and her presence every time there would be a duty to fulfill; and that here and now she was committing herself to sending her a bottle of palma-christi oil for the lamp of the *marrassas*.

Mme Georges asked no better; she would not be alone in the breach. She needed help more than ever, especially at this moment when she was on the eve of making great expenditures for the accomplishment of the last duties.

In the fullness of joy, Mme Dajobert had given her the formal assurance that she would pay for three-quarters of the expenses.
Julie had a property in the vicinity of the city, next to St.-Martin; there her mother, Tante Rosalie, had been buried; there also should the *manger-les-morts* and the *manger-marassa* take place, so that the thing could remain as secret as possible. But as a preliminary, they had to build on the same property a little pavilion which would serve to house the *dieux-lares*.125

Mme Georges, with her cousin’s help, had been able as best she could, to construct the little temple. The boards from the late Georges’s barn, some large wooden chests that Mme Dajobert had sent, the assistance of some unemployed workers, summoned for a kind of *coumbîte*,126 several gallons of tafia, a large pot of broth, cigars at her discretion, such were the outlays that she had to make. They took care to construct on the inside of the little house a little masonry platform destined to receive the holy vessels; it was decorated with peculiar designs and images; this was the altar where one must sacrifice to the papas.

This done, they carried the gods into their new home not without having performed the customary ceremonies.

The greatest need accomplished, Mme Georges actively occupied herself with preparations for the two *mangers*. Already she had bought chickens, cocks in large quantity, had brought in from the plain a superb goat.

All the necessities for the funeral repast were ready: white tablecloth, white plates, little jars for the desserts, whale blubber, cornmeal, two *canari tè*,127 bois-de-pin,128 etc., etc. There was nothing left but to fix the date for the grand ceremony and find the *papa* or the *priest* who had to preside over it.

On the advice of Tante Marguerite, Mme Georges came to an understanding with Frè Ti Dor who was not a *houngan* properly
speaking, but a servant. He had been initiated into the Vodou religion by his father, negro Alladah-Fêda-Whydah-Dahomey.\textsuperscript{129} He spoke the language of the ancestors fluently and was in perfect possession of the sacred formulas.

Frè Ti Dor had an original countenance, bushy hair, eyes fervent as two firebrands, two little circles of gold in his ears just as people wore them at the time; on his fingers many rings set with stones of all shades. He had an awkward air in his accoutrements: a big blue canvas costume. He was coiffed in a hat of coarse wool with a frayed ribbon, shod in goatskin slippers with holes in the bottoms that allowed one to notice his too-short pants. His voice was sometimes thin, sometimes full: an oddity of nature rather than a professional artifice the better to deceive as those with malicious tongues thought.

What charmed beneath this coarse envelope was that true emphasis that he put into his invocations, into his converse with the faithful who were possessed. To hear him invoke his gods while singing strange airs; to watch tears fall from his ardent eyes; to see him indicate with significant gestures, sometimes the earth, sometimes the sky, smile sometimes in the midst of his tears, one truly asked oneself if this hieratic language did not conceal its poetry, albeit a naïve, childlike poetry, full of grace and freshness like that of the peoples of antiquity. Each air sent a thrill of joy or of sorrow through your body. For all the feelings expressed in these songs were reflected on the face of the priest. What a gentle and agreeable curiosity! what a delight for artists in search of novelties if they could free this poetry of all the corruptions which spoil it! What a triumph if the African Muse let herself be seduced? But alas! we no longer know the secret of the language of our fathers, and the few
who have preserved some fragments prove themselves egoists, misers, or are reduced to jabbering them without understanding the meaning…

Since Mme Dajobert had addressed her request to the *plats marassas*, Léon had felt much calm. In his conversation, not the least trace of rambling. In the face of such an immediate result, Mme Dajobert was convinced of the power of the African divinities. Only she carefully kept herself from saying anything to Léon who held these things in horror.

It was agreed that they must baptize the pavilion and the *plats marassas* before all else. They fixed upon a Sunday. Mme Dajobert charged herself with inviting some bigwigs: merchants, deputies, Senators, some military authorities, and ladies of her acquaintance. Albert would also be in the party. As for Léon, his friend would know how to go about producing him. He would speak to him of a housewarming at St-Martin: which would be altogether the occasion for a promenade and the excuse for a distraction. And besides, had not the doctor ordered Léon not to shut himself up inside, to take walks, to create distractions for himself? He would have three good days of them: Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. After the baptism, Albert would still find a way to bring him back there in spite of his aversion. Mme Dajobert held as much, and for good reason.

The day of the baptism, the godfathers and the godmothers, dressed in style, repaired in the afternoon to St-Martin. Along the route that leads there one saw buggies, busses…

Under a ramada, covered with coconut branches, decorated with national colors, the guests had taken their places. The *hounfô* was smartly adorned. On the inside, on the “pé” or
the platform, one saw little flags, garlands, ribbons of all colors, artistically arranged.

Mme Georges moved from place to place; made sure that all was in order.

Lala, who since her return from Saut d’Eau, had again become taciturn, melancholy, and brooding, had a joyous air, triumphant in her mauve outfit. Because she was agreeable in her manner, in her appearance, all eyes were focused upon her. Albert’s presence moved her deeply. She did not know how to defend herself against a certain timidity, when he addressed her. She dare not look him in the face.

They paired off the godfathers and godmothers: Mme Da-jobert had her companion, Léon his, and Albert jauntily took Lala under his arm.

They had just ended the procession of the couples who took their positions under the low door of the little house.

Père Jean, dressed in white, white hair, white beard, was standing, having in hand a lighted piece of whale blubber.

They proceeded first with the baptism of the little house, then they baptized the *plats-marassas* which they sprinkled with holy water. The godfather or godmother was obliged to give each baptized object an ordinary baptismal name. After which, Père Jean presented himself before each of the male sponsors with a salver into which rained metallic coins and bills of one and of two gourdes. Next the godfathers and godmothers went back to their places under the ramada.

Mme George, helped by some friends came to serve the liqueur, the candy, and the cakes to the congregation.

But there the program must not stop. They also had a *p’tit suyé-piè*. Musicians numbering five—trumpet, saxophone,
trombone, bass, drum—had responded to the call of the two widows.

They executed four contra dances, one or two polkas, some Scottish reels, two or three waltzes, and they closed with the national dance, a hot and voluptuous merengue. Surrounding the ramada, a whole crowd was there who participated in the evolutions of the dance. Some people from Bel-air, from the region of the calvary, from the grand gate, no longer being able to resist the solicitations of the merengue, dispersed into the courtyard and exhibiting no restraint executed incredible hip moves.

When they went their separate ways, it was almost seven o’clock. On the road, some women of the streets who came to participate in this ceremony did not fail to gossip and to make comments:

“Cé pa nou sèlè; toute moune gangnin ti macoute pas yo. Dinmain soè toute lan nouitt’ après dinmain toute la jounin, nou là di-di.”

—Cé loua qui tapé toumenté pititt’ là conça! Et si Madanm’ Geoye pâte ranmassé platt’ li you vite, lit a pèdi Lala.

Ou té rouè bell’ Madanm’ milatresse qui quimbé boutique côté marché en bas là? Ou pas rouè què li semblé ac Madanm’ Geoye? Et bin cé cousine li. Ti M’sié clè avec linette là, ce pititt’ Madanm’ milatresse là. Li té manqué fou, pace que yo pa té vlé ranmassé mystè manman yo qui té néguesse guinin…

The next day which was a Monday, Frè Ti Dor arrived at the head of his faithful or hounsis, his red scarf wound around his neck by way of a cravat. Each hounsi carried on her head a little bundle of laundry. On an ass, one saw a kind of metallic case and an iron rod, three drums of different size having the form of cylinders terminated by a conical trunk, and
covered on the top with oxskin fixed by means of thongs and pegs. The metallic case is the *hogan*; the first or the largest of the drums is the *houn*; the second or the middle, the *hounli*; the third or the smallest, the *hounla*.

Next to Frè Ti Dor walked a woman and a man: the two dignitaries of the society, the *hougnènicon* and the second, *frè servant* or *la place de danse*. The woman had under her arm two flags whose staffs protruded from the end of the canvas which enveloped them, and the man held in one hand a sabre or a machete twined in a sheath of paper.

The *society* halted in front of the fence. It was necessary to proceed with a *ceremony* before introducing themselves into the courtyard.

Madame Georges had brought a *coui* containing cornmeal, a pot of water and a flask filled with liqueur. Directly, the *hougnènicon*, in her most beautiful voice, intoned the song for the occasion: *Acoyo, na salué drapeau-là, nou rivé... Acoyo, etc.* At the same moment, she drew out from the canvas the satin flags, in the spangled national colors which she presented to two *hounsis* who had just girded up their loins. The latter turned themselves to the right, to the left with a certain grace, sunk to their knees, kissed the ground three times and took hold of the flags that were tendered to them. The *hougnènicon* raised the women up again together while twirling them once around. *Laplace Ti Djo* having pulled the machete from its sheath placed himself in the middle of the flag-bearers; and all three commenced their advance. The two women made the banners float, the banners where one saw inscribed in sparkling letters, these words: *Fleurs-Da-Dahomey*; it was the name of the *society*.

*Ti Djo*, holding his weapon like a flamberge, rent the air
in all directions. They placed themselves first facing the east, which they saluted with deep bows. Next, they turned to face the west, the north and the south while repeating the same gestures. After which, they went down on their knees at the foot of Hounsèvan (this was the ritual name of Frè Ti Dor), who raised them up again with one hand, one after the other, while twirling them around in a circle.

During all this time, the dance went on briskly. Gaily the hounsis let their pure and clear voices be heard, all while executing ungainly moves with their shoulders and hips.

The houngan beat the iron case rapidly with his stick, the hountô, a leg in the strap of the houn, the hountôgui and the hounlaqui squeezing the drums between their strong thighs, made the calf hide resonate under agile sticks falling hard.

Frè Ti Dor, bent toward the ground, executed bizarre designs with the cornmeal, made libations by pouring the liqueur and the water onto the ground, while the hounsis came with their perfumed scarfs to wipe his face, which was streaming with sweat.

The ceremony completed, the society-Da erupted into the courtyard, preceded by the flag-bearers, Laplace Ti Djo, Hounsèvan, and the hounguènicon.

After having bowed to the hounfô, they went to lie down under the ramada.

Madame Georges had served to this world of people a large pot of broth which had been prepared expressly for the occasion, received certain instructions from Frè Ti Dor, and put all in order for the boulé-zin which must take place that evening.

Around six o’clock, Laplace Ti Djo had ordered the faithful
to make themselves ready for the ceremony of the dead. Two steps from the ramada, one saw in a little enclosure a tomb recently painted white; it was there that Tante Rosalie, the African, lay in repose. There they had brought a large white tablecloth, whale blubber, three white plates, a pot of coffee, rice pudding, chocolate bonbons, sugarplums, *acassan*, melon slices, *acra*, corn, and pistachios, a *coui* containing cornmeal, and flasks filled with liqueur. They laid all that on the tablecloth, spread out fully in front of the sepulchre. There they had hollowed out three holes of the same size, and before each pit burned some whale blubber. The *hounsis*, dressed in white, were squatting near Frè Ti Dor, seated on a low chair. He held in one hand his little bell and his *acon*, long-necked calabash, covered with a mesh of threaded coral shells, of *hounguèvè* of little grass-snake bones and finished at the base by a knot of ribbons. All heads bowed toward the earth, he expressed himself in the African language while shaking the little bell and the *acon* simultaneously; it was the invocation of the dead. This done, Anérose, the *hounguènicon*, intoned in a doleful and lugubrious voice the *bohoun* or funeral chant, a profound and sad air, cut into at each reprise by little macabre cries which the *hounsis* emitted in low tones by striking their lips. Only the *hogan*’s strident sound accompanied the song. During this time, Frè Ti Dor, himself, made crosses over each pit with the cornmeal, threw into them a bit of each food deposited on the tablecloth, poured over it the liqueur, the spirits and the water. He called Mme Georges and Lala who followed suit. They proceeded next to the sacrifice. Near the pits were sitting two white hens who were pecking some melon chopped into little pieces, corn meal and grilled pistachios, mixed together, out of the palm of
the hand of the *hounsévan*. Taking a chicken in each hand, *Frè Ti Dor*, made a sign to Madame Georges and to Lala to kneel, and passed these unfortunate feathered creatures, who began to squawk, several times over their heads, their shoulders, their backs, and their chests. He did the same with his faithful. Then taking the first hen by the neck, he twisted it vigorously like a peppermill, until the head tore away from the body. That done, he plucked a few feathers that he stuck with the victim’s blood along the edge of each hole. The other met the same fate. They took the hens, they plucked them and prepared them for the *calalou-des morts*[^1] which they served with *hounsa* or *moussa* in the Creole patois. The funeral repast being ready, they then served it in the white dishes, which they buried in the pits.

Thus the *manger-les-morts* or the funeral repast took place.

* * *

[^1]: *calalou-des morts* is aCreole term used in Haiti, similar to *calalou* or *calalou des morts*. It refers to a cooked dish typically served during funerals and consists of various meats, vegetables, and sometimes rice. It is a traditional dish in Haitian culture and is often served during religious ceremonies and events held in honor of the deceased.
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After this repast the *boulé-zin* must follow. All the preparations had already been made.

The *hounsis-kanzhouns*[^154] always dressed in white, their *agouessan* falling from their shoulders[^155], entered into the *hounfô*[^156] in single file, preceded by *hounsèvan*. Once they were inside, the entrance of the little temple was forbidden to the uninitiated.

Some moments later, one saw them reappear in the same order, one carrying a *canari tè*, a kind of large terra cotta pot, another, a pair of chicks, the next, some cornmeal, the next, a bundle of *bois-de-pin*, etc., etc. all things to be used in the ceremony of the *boulé-zin*. *Laplace Ti Djo*, armed with his machete, *hounsèvan* shaking his little bell and his *acon*, opened the procession. Anérose holding a chick in each hand turned in all directions, followed by her subalterns who were doing the same. One saw among them those who tottered, swaying forward and backward and from right to left.

The *hounsis bossales*[^157] who had not left the ramada, stood up as though to greet their arrival. They waited not long before mixing their voices with those of the *hounsis-kanzhouns* who were singing: *Miré, n’a miré*, etc.

They had just presented to *Frè Ti Dor* a superb pitcher filled with water. Little by little as he described a large circumference, *Ti Djo* scattered the cornmeal over the moist circle. This space that they had just circumscribed (the pentacle or magic circle) must be their field of action throughout the entire duration of the ceremony.

*Frè Ti Dor* had placed himself in the middle of the circle; Anérose and *Ti Djo* had taken their places at his side, all three seated on low chairs.

[^154]: hounsis-kanzhouns
[^155]: agouessan
[^156]: hounfô
[^157]: hounsis bossales
The hounsis, one after the other, came to lay before the trio the objects that people had entrusted to them, kissing the ground and remaining crouched in circles around the three figures.

Hounsêvan soon gave the signal by shaking his little bell and his açon. Immediately all heads were bowed; then slowly, and with a voice almost lifeless, the hounguènicon led the prayer of the lares. She led with that air, sad, melodious, full of a broad, poetic spirit, which is considered, in the African rite, as a litany in genre. All the names of the African lares rolled forth, interspersed with the vocable Djor repeated by the choir like the “pray for us” in the litany of the saints. What strikes one above all in these rites is the name of God, of the Virgin Mary which mingles with those of the papas lares: Legba avadra atibon, Loco atissou azamblo guidi, Dambala ouèdo, Odan missou ouèdo, Sobokessou an nanman, Agoué-houyo, Ogoubadagri-nèg-Nago, Guédé hounssou, Ninglizin, Bossou kinlindjo, Silibo vavou, Agassou hièmin, Ossang neagoué lingui, are so many divinities that they invoke in this kind of litany. After that other airs followed, having the same rhythm, the same languorous tone. There seems a certain gradation in these different melodies, so subtle that, by the end, they had gone from sad notes to gay notes without one realizing it. To each new air the tremor of the drumsticks and the aguidas responded on the hide of the drums; and the hounsis were striking their lips with their fingers while sounding: abobo hou hou hou…

*   *   *
XV

The prayer of the *lares* completed, all the *hounsis canzhouns* rose after having kissed the ground. Now they started to turn in circles while singing gaily, loudly, excited by the frenzied unity of the drums.

On three iron rods driven into the earth were placed the *canaris-tè* in which they had poured the water. Each *hounsi* was provided with a piece of lighted bois-de-pin. All these lights also turned in circles, filling the ramada with a vivid clarity. *Laplace Ti Djô*, little by little as the *hounsìs* arrived within reach of him, despoiled them of their torches in order to place them under the *gožins* whose the exterior walls were soon covered with a thin coat of soot produced by the smoke.

*Anérose* had immersed the chicks in the boiling water, after having thoroughly plucked them. She pulled them out, shredded them into little pieces with her fingers, despite the immense heat steaming off them, and threw them once again into the vessels. Then with her left hand (it is always this hand which one uses in the ceremony of the *zin*, for one would extremely risk burning one’s fingers while making use of the other) she added the cornmeal into them in ample quantity.

From time to time *Laplace Ti Djô* fed the fire with bois-pin. When the *hounssa* was cooked, *Hounsèvan* crossed himself, dipped his left hand into a terrine containing olive oil, plunged it into the smoking vessel, withdrew from it a quantity of *hounssa* which he kneaded in his hand while presenting it to the four cardinal directions. He repeated the ordeal three times. *Anérose* and *Ti Djô* followed suit. The *hounsis-canzhouns*, each in her turn, came to plunge her left hand covered in oil into the vessels until they were completely emptied.
Then *Ti Djo* fed the fire one last time, putting into it all that remained of the bois-pin.

_Hounsêvan_ poured a little olive oil in each *canari-tè*, rang the bell “clinkh” and shook the açon “tcha” over each of them while mumbling some unintelligible words. At once flames rekindled by the alcohol that had been poured on them rose from the bottom of the empty vessels; _hounsêvan_ at this moment seemed transfigured: the _gozins_ had caught fire. Eyes fixed, opened enormously wide, he spoke volubly, staring at the tongues of fire that licked the orifices of the vessels. The bamboula had come to its climax. All faces were illuminated by the vivid glow cast by the mounting flames. The _hounsis_ were no longer walking; they were running as though the flames were also rising in their sweat-covered bodies, hurling themselves one against the other. Those behind push those in front. Suddenly, they make an about-face to turn in the opposite direction. The possessed totter, jump on one foot, shake their heads furiously, whirl themselves rapidly about and are going to fall backwards onto the _hounsis-bossales_. When the last tongue of fire in the vessels had extinguished itself slowly, gently, exhaling a sui generis odor of burnt oil, the _hounsis_, arms crossed around their hips, advanced of one accord, and from the tip of their left foot, set the vessels on the ground; then, still interlaced, they danced on the cinders dying thus under their feet…

There the ceremony must not end. A hole wide and deep enough was dug out in the middle of the ramada. They en-shrouded in calico the balls of cornmeal that they laid in the grave as well as the terra cotta vessels which had served in the roasting of the “_hounssa._” Crouched in circles around the hole, the _hounsis-canzhouns_ in a uniform movement covered the
objects over with the earth amassed around the orifice. This
task finished, they planted a piece of whale blubber on top of
the little mound, and the adepts taking up again their move-
ments around the place where they had just buried the canari-tè
sang funeral airs:

*Bohoun bocô hilé bis*

*Yé guédé bohoun bis*

*Boco hilé, ago*

All of a sudden prolonged cries are heard; a chair is over-
turned; women run: it was Lala who had just collapsed to the
ground, hands and feet contorted. They tried to get her up.
Impossible. Her legs shook; all her limbs were trembling as
though she were freezing. Her features had altered and sud-
denly took on the expression of an old face wrinkled with age.
*Hounsevan* approached her, took her two hands in his and spoke
the word to her in the language. He immediately recognized that
Lala was under the influence of a spirit. Who was this spirit by
whom she was possessed? *Frè Ti Dor* alone was able to discern.
It was the spirit of her grandmother, *Dan-Maoua*.

Madame Georges, upon hearing this name, and seeing her
daughter in this state, cried into her handkerchief.

Lala, or rather *Dan-Maoua*, took her in her arms, clutched
her for a very long time to her heart while shedding tears. Some
women moved by this little drama, blew their noses with their
dresses, or wiped their moist eyes with the backs of their hands.

The presence of the spirit, which had deigned to honor
the audience with its visit, denoted that the ceremony had fully
succeeded.

*Dan-Maoua* was pleased. This joy, she had visibly manifest-
ed it by smiling in response to the language of *Frè Ti Dor*. 
Nothing was left but to send the spirit of Dan-Maoua back, with all of those, relatives and friends, who, in a form immaterial, unembodied, had undoubtedly accompanied her to this feast for the dead.

Anérose intoned the song of exorcism which was to close the ceremony.

_Héya dodo ikan hé!
Ye guédé ikan hé!

And the choir responded by clapping their hands in the air:

_Ya dodo ikan hé!
Ye guédé ikan hé!

Ya dodo

Then it was something arch-macabre.

Those who were sleeping awoke with a start, throwing themselves also into the circle, fearing that the spirits that were being chased would freeze them asleep forever.

The hounsis-bossales jostled the hounsis-canzhouns in the indescribable pell-mell.

When the ceremony came to an end, it was four o’clock in the morning…

*  
* *
XVI

Tuesday at noon, all around the ramada, a curious crowd, avid with distraction, waited impatiently.

Madame Georges was very busy. They called to her on all sides to ask her this and that. She nearly went mad given how insistently they pestered her from every direction.

Each hounsi was armed with a pair of chickens whose feet they had taken care to wash thoroughly.

Pratique had gone to retrieve the goat that was tied to a tree. They made him up, dressed him in a kind of mantelet, crimson, decorated with ribbons and garlands. Passing around his horns, a red scarf flowing across his protruding forehead fell in a knot. This mantelet draped over his spine and his flanks, this scarf and this long beard truly gave him the air of a lord; and I doubt not that his peers, upon seeing him, would not have hesitated to recognize in him their prince, so superb and proud was he…

All was ready for the sacrifice.

The two flag-bearers Ti Célie and Ti Marie are standing, the shaft of the banners leaning against their shoulders.

Laplace Ti Djo, still armed with his machete has just given the last orders.

Hounsèvan is already inside the hounfô with the hounsis.

The little bell and the açon make themselves heard, and Anérose begins the prayer of the lares. When she completed it, Hounsèvan proceeded to the vêvê by tracing geometrical figures in front of the “pé” or altar with the cornmeal. Madame Georges came forward to kiss them and laid a piece worth fifty centimes on the ground. After her, it was Lala’s turn and the turn of the faithful.

The sacrifice begins. Silence most absolute reigns in the
temple. They hand to Frè Ti Dor a pair of chickens in honor of papa Legba awadra atibon katahounlo, maitre carrefour, maitre grand chimin. Anérose welcomes this venerated lare with three songs. He is, it seems, of all the dieux-lares the one who inspires the most respect and the most reverence, for he is considered by the descendants as the most remote of the ancestors. This is why they always represent him, body ossified by the ages, scorched by the sun, with a broad-rimmed straw hat on his head, a macoute at his back, and a long pipe in his mouth. They always invoke him first in the ceremonies, because he is the sentinel who, rain or shine, watches night and day over the roads, at the center of the crossroads, at the doors of houses, who sees the good and denounces the wicked, the evildoers. That tree placed in front of the entrance gate of a fenced-in yard and from which one sees suspended a macoute, containing an ear of grilled corn, is Legba’s tree or otherwise known as his resting place.

Also, fail he did not to manifest himself when Hounsevan invoked him in the African language while sounding his little bell and his açon…

Poor Lala! She was again, this time, the medium, the body which the lare took possession of.

Where could this magnetic fluid come from? Lala, was she duped by an aberration? These lares or ancestral spirits, do they have the power to manifest themselves like the other spirits under the influence of a mighty willpower and unconscious channels? The houngan, would he be a mesmerizer in his own right? The noise of the hogan, the songs, the drums, the little bell, the açon, the invocative words, would all that have the power to transmit animal magnetism?........
XVII

Lala, her limbs curled inward, her lips trembling, her face discomposed, dragged herself over the ground as though she had lost the use of her legs.

They passed from *Legba* to the other *lares* successively and in the order that one habitually observes in these rites.

Each new invocation, each new *lare* named was a martyrdom, a torment for Lala.

It was said that all these gods had acted in concert to conquer the young woman.

Often, judging by the sudden changes in her face, they believed they were witnessing within her inner struggles.

During this time, the heads of the victims that they sacrificed fell to one side, and their bodies to the other.

They piled the feathered beasts in front of the “pé”; *Hounsévan* made a cross on top of the pile with cornmeal; and the women appointed to serve the food carried the beasts away in order to go pluck them, to prepare them according to the received instructions.

They had just left the interior of the *hounfô*. The *hounsis* had reassembled in front of the door of the little temple. There the sacrifice of the goat must take place.

*Pratique* held him by the horns.

Anérose intoned the customary song:

“*Minmin,*”168 *minmin, minmin, Midohoua.*

Straight away, Lala, under the influence of I don’t know which other *lare*, climbs astride the animal, takes him by the horns and makes him turn in all directions, caracoles as if she were on horseback.

And the poor beast was bleating, ready to break under the
weight of the young woman who, barefoot, hair in disarray, corsage in disorder, was laughing, dancing, gesturing wildly.

It was with much difficulty that they convinced her to get off the animal, who could endure no more.

_Hounsevan_, after the usual ceremonies, presented a twig of _Monbinbata_ to the goat.

Hardly had he begun to eat it than he pulled it brusquely back out of his mouth. Three times he eagerly ate of it, three times he tore it away from him.

Madame Georges, also furnished with a little branch came to follow the lead of _Frè Ti Dor_, and each _hounsis_ did the same.

After which, _Ti Djo_ stripped the animal of his ornaments; aided by _Pratique_, he turned him upside-down, his four hooves in the air. The one had taken his two front feet, and the other the rear.

They rocked the quadruped back and forth while all the women’s voices sang:

_Yà pé touyé Minmin._

The unremitting cries: “bêêê, béêê, bêêê” of the victim carried loudly over all this uproar. Finally, they laid him on the ground on his back, his head resting on a chopping block.

_Ti Djo_, sleeves and pant legs rolled up, cut off his head with his sharp-bladed machete.

The blood of the victim was gathered in a _coui_ which they went to lay on the “pé.” Lala, still under the influence of the _lare_, opened her eyes wide upon the sight of the blood, as though to express her joy, her drunkenness. She went to drink it, steeped her hand in it and came to imprint little red crosses on the foreheads of the _hounsis_.

They prepared the _dja_, mixture of blood, cornmeal, liqueur, spirits which they made the initiates drink.
The trunk of the goat was carried into the courtyard and laid under a tree, while his still bearded head, resting on the ground on its horns, threw upon the onlookers doleful and veiled looks wherein one seemed to read I know not what sadness, what regret at having died.

Hardly had they consummated this sacrifice when a woman appeared holding in her hand a coui filled with chopped meats and smoked plantains, all coated with olive oil: it was the manger-de-Legba that they were coming to distribute in little morsels to the faithful and the onlookers.

When Lala returned to herself, she complained of aches in her head, in her stomach. She was ashamed to see herself in such disorder. Her mother, whom she interrogated, did not want to tell her what could possibly have put her into this state. However, she believed she could guess the cause of it. Had she not been witness, more than once, to the astonished, haggard mien of the hounsis after having been possessed by papa-lares? Did they not seem to her like sleepers startled awake? With this type of somnambulism, didn’t they look for slippers, a neckerchief, an earring, a ring which would be misplaced? In the presence of all these signs she had ultimately convinced herself that she too had been under the influence of some papa-lares. Had she not been deprived of her shoes, of her earrings? Hadn’t her beautiful braids unraveled? Last night they had been able to produce a tall tale in order to justify her state: an indisposition, fits. This time, there had been no way to invent anything. This blood which stained her blouse spoke eloquently. She inspected herself in order to assure herself that she had suffered no injuries. She wanted to gather together her memories which were dancing confusedly in her head. In vain. She
recalled only that at noon, she was in the hounfô with everyone else, and that since then she had no knowledge of what had happened. The unfortunate Lala had become the focal point of all the onlookers. Already, her name flew from mouth to mouth. The presence of the two young men, Albert especially, rendered her much more confused: she cried in shame. Her mother, having understood her embarrassment, led her into a little room where she changed her linens and put her hair back in order a little.

Toward six o’clock in the evening, the manger-marassa was ready.

They had placed the different foods into terra cotta dishes. The hounsis, each one holding a plate, headed single file toward the hounfô while singing: marassa171  min dounou.172 Madame Georges and Lala walked at the head preceded by hounsévan.

Gradually as they entered, they each in their turn handed the plates over to Frè Ti Dor who laid them on the “pé.” In a platter, on the ground, they saw a kind of amalgam: fragments of boiled or fried chicken, calalou-gumbo, peas, yams, malanga, plantains, spuds, tonm-tonm, tchaka, a sort of mixture of peas and ground corn, cooked together, etc. etc.

Madame George, upon a sign by Hounsévan, girded her loins with the help of a handkerchief, seized the platter and went out into the courtyard followed by all the kids.

She held it high over her head. The youngsters, little boys and little girls, their shirtsleeves rolled up, knocking each other over, squeezing forward urgently, lifted their arms into the air while screaming. Woe to those who would dare to thrust their hand into the dish before it had been laid three times upon the ground!
Madame Georges, had placed it briskly on the ground a first time and had immediately lifted it over her head saying:
—*Nou vlé li*? 

And the children responded together expelling prolonged cries:
—*Oui!!!*

A second time, she repeated the same movement from high to low and from low to high:
—*Nou vlé li?*
—*Oui!!!*

A third time, the platter did not go back up anymore. At that instant, all those kids threw themselves onto both the platter and onto Madame Georges, who tried to clear out a pathway for herself.

It was a never-ending scuffle, tumbling, shoving.

Some got back up, both hands full of this mix, others brought away a thigh or a chicken wing; those on one side had their head, their face, the front of their shirt smeared with pea juice and grease; those on the other, the littlest, surrounding the almost empty platter, regaled themselves of the last debris and of the tasty morsels strewn in the dust, all while avidly licking their fingers.

After this orgy, Madame Georges poured water into the platter and invited the little guests to come there to wash their hands; then, according to the custom, she presented her head to them, which took the place of a hand towel. So that the meal was complete, she distributed at last some corn and grilled pistachios, some liqueur and water to the children.

The next day, they shared the dessert among their closest relatives. Of the two *plats marassas*, Madame Georges took one
of them, the contents of which she ate with her daughter; the other was sent to Madame Dajobert.

In this way did the manger-marassa come to a close.
XIX

As had been agreed upon, Albert and Léon had attended all the ceremonies from beginning to end. But it was not without some difficulties that Albert had dragged his friend to that place. After having passed an entire night watching the terrifying scene of the boulé-zin, Léon had decided not to go back there anymore to attend the manger-marassa, so repugnant was it to him to find himself again in contact with people who inspired the most profound contempt within him. There was a real struggle between the two friends. Albert pressed the point so well that he had ended up winning. And as though to persuade him that there was no peril within the abode, he added:

—And then, besides, they know us. Our presence in that spot cannot possibly lend itself to any shady interpretation. We are above all curious ones, researchers who want to understand and be apprised of everything. As for those there who don’t understand us and would like to gossip, we shall disregard them as ridiculous.

The two friends had met at the rendezvous agreed upon. Nevertheless, Léon did not participate in these burlesque scenes without visibly manifesting his repugnance. More than once, he made like he was leaving, but Madame Georges always found a good word in order to bring him around to staying.

When the last item in the program had been executed, Albert and Léon took the road back to the city after having graciously saluted the good woman and Lala, and gratified the onlookers with a tip of the hat.

All along the route, they conversed regarding the scenes that they had just witnessed.
—Let’s confess, my dear Albert, that we are still barbarians and that foreigners have good reason to treat us like savages when they see that we still wallow in Vodou in the midst of civilization... And then, Vodou, what can that be? What justifies its existence? Truly, I have thoroughly racked my brains, yet I find it impossible to discover the reason for the existence of so much vulgarity...

—But this Vodou worship is not as strange as you seem to believe it to be, Léon! what our Fathers did, what we are still doing today, we and our brothers in Africa and elsewhere have done it and still continue to practice it under other forms and different names. The cult of Vodou is none other than the cult of the ancestors as all primitive peoples understood it. This serpent or Dan that some claim to be the god of Vodou, does one not find it at the origin of all ancient beliefs? The word loua for which none has ever been able to find the origin and the meaning is the corruption of the Roman lare; whence papa-loua or papa-lare!

These African divinities, are they not, in fact, the spirits of the ancestors that people venerate, to which the respectful and grateful descendants devote a cult? These names Legba, Dambala, etc. that our houngans invoke in the hounfô, are they not the names of some powerful warriors, of some tribal chiefs enjoying a considerable influence over their subjects, or of some venerated patriarchs?

The hougan himself, or the priest as they will like to call him, is he not likely to become, after his death, the object of this same veneration on the part of his children, of his hounsis or faithful?

Will they not make libations in his honor?
Will they not bring him offerings?
Will they not offer him the funeral meal or the manger-les-morts as they did yesterday for Tante Rosalie?

The hounfô or rather its “pé” under which they most often construct a basin, isn’t it the altar of the lares? doesn’t this basin represent the impluvium of the Romans?

You are not ignorant of the fact that the sacrifice of the male goat was practiced by the Romans with the same observances. Everything that Frè Ti Dor did this noon is all that the priest offering the sacrifices or the Roman papa did.

Over the animal’s head, he poured wine, cornmeal, after having adorned it with garlands (serta) and ribbons (vittae). Next he cut its throat, and the blood collected in a vessel was poured out on the altar.

As with the Africans, this sacrifice was preceded or accompanied by dances and songs.

There is no rite in the cult of Vodou which does not have its equivalent in those of the ancient peoples.

Up through the worship of the tree on which we saw rags of fabric attached, nothing that exists in Vodou was unknown in classical antiquity. “The Orient had its sacred trees.” They built altars there at the foot of those trees; they made libations, oblations, there.

The same cult was found among the Celts, who themselves venerated apple trees and oak trees. As you see, nothing is missing…

—But after all, is this a reason why such practices endure amongst us?

—No, only I insist upon pointing out to you that we are not the first to practice it. The cult of Vodou was not born in Haiti as
certain intellects are inclined to believe. Our fathers, transported to Saint-Domingue by the odious trade, looked for secluded places in which to hide their household gods. They sheltered them in caves, in the hollows of boulders, in tree trunks. In this way, they were able to reconstitute their *Papas-lares* on a foreign soil and continue to devote themselves secretly to the same religion. During their tortures, in the midst of battles, it was them, these gods, whom they invoked. The macabre scene of invocation at Morne-Rouge, isn’t it in everyone’s mind? Well, it is this blind belief that they had in the power of the African divinities which made them so fanatical. I do not want to know to what extent this belief was founded or not, but what is certain is that it contributed in large part to making us masters of this land where the negro can call himself respected.

—Whatever you say about it, my dear Albert, I am of the opinion, myself, that it is time we abandon all these horrors which tend toward nothing less than to debase us in the eyes of the foreigner. These peoples about whom you have spoken to me just now, didn’t they abjure their past errors? Don’t they enjoy the benefits of Christianity and of a greater and greater civilization? Why wouldn’t we also renounce our ugliest faces, our gargoyles? Why wouldn’t we profit from this progress which solicits us on all sides, this civilization which manifests itself everywhere around us? Truly, the more I reflect upon it, the more black thoughts invade me. As for me, I am radical; slowness irritates me. The only remedy to apply here is the brutal destruction of everything which tends to render us immobile, to hinder our step.

—Listen, Léon, I am no less a partisan of progress. My whole dream as well is to see my country evolve. But the surest
means to bring that about is not, to my way of thinking, a premature radicalism. A skillful doctor, before administering medication, seeks first to understand thoroughly the nature of the illness that he has to cure. Unfortunately, we do not yet know the experimental method; we have not lived enough to know it. However, it is not surprising that we join in chorus with the foreigner, that we ourselves exclaim against Vodou as if it were something exceptional in the existence of the human race, yet without ever having on our part made this old custom the object of a special study. This contempt that we ostensibly profess for our ancestors, this disdain that we have for all that relates to our origin, is perhaps one of the causes of our errors, our prejudices of all sorts. “We no longer want to be like our fathers” appears to be the formula under which we parade our contempt for them, as if truly, we blush to have been born of them. If it had been thus, we could just speak like that darling of the “Précieuses,” who said of her father: “I can hardly persuade myself that I could really be his daughter and I believe that some adventure, one day, will arrive to unfold for me a more illustrious birth.”174 We will be neither more nor less “précieux” in our own way. No, we have no right to speak of our ancestors in that way. If we have an obligation not to imitate them in what perhaps is coarse, even crazy in their ideas, on the other hand, let us honor their memory and respect their beliefs.

The foreigner himself, who has never missed a single opportunity to throw stones at us, knows better than us that the illness from which our social organism suffers may be found at the origin of all peoples, and that he, too, he suffered from it in the person of his ancestors. The Celts, the Saxons, the
Germans, the Slavs, what have you? Everyone passed through it; no race of men escaped it. If he seems to forget, himself, his roots, it is because it has been a long time since he divorced himself from the beliefs of his Fathers, and he has come to find an order of things that he did not create. If he arrogates to himself the right to reprimand us with a certain arrogance, it is because he is our predecessor in the evolutionary succession of the human races, and because the pomp of civilization dazzles us to the point where we are unable to discern the vestiges of some old errors still existing with us.

The mature man scarcely recalls the gambols of his first years. If sometimes he wants to relive these moments, it is only through remote mists where his unsure eyes try to settle upon some vague, fugitive forms,—similar to the traveler who, standing on the summit of a mountain, plunges his gaze down into the foggy distance in the hope of discovering there a path, a landscape, a site that might have charmed him yesterday.

We laugh at the naiveties of childhood without suspecting that we are just an infant moving toward childhood. In each age we commit errors, follies that another age notices or corrects, though that never prevents us from committing new ones. The big baby of today can boast about not resembling the little baby of yesterday: this is but a clear effect of the inherent pride in human nature. In favor of his cause, he could, if necessary, invoke reason, which should be the invariable guide of all his actions, but what is reason in the hands of one who is guided solely by his passion? Shared among so small a number, it is only secondary in the self-interested schemes of man. Just as unconsciousness or ignorance makes the child commit acts that we believe punishable, so passion renders man guilty of certain
misdeeds that he claims to have been dictated by reason and that only his conscience condemns.

But let us pass on to another order of ideas.

When you invoke Christianity, you must not appear to believe that it had immediately won its case. For centuries it had to struggle against paganism. Old beliefs do not let themselves become supplanted without an energetic resistance. And then, this Christianity on which we pride ourselves so much today, does it not exhibit some striking analogies with its ancient adversary? Hasn’t it rigged itself out in its rags? Isn’t it still the cult of the ancestors which persists in the person of the saints who are like haloed satellites of the one God all-powerful? Those saints themselves, aren’t they deified beings who had undoubtedly distinguished themselves during their passage here on earth through certain acts of piety and charity?

Whatever progress science may bring about, the need to deify will always remain the religious foundation of man; for insofar as he is by his nature weak, he inevitably needs protection. This is also why he always places himself under the aegis of the invisibles to whom he attributes a certain power.

When we glorify the benefactors of humanity, savants, our heroes, with anniversaries, we perform an act of recognition and of filial piety, but with a larger, broader conception, and under a more civilized form.

The domestic gods, the sacred lares of yesteryear are today replaced by gods of country and of humanity. We, the grandsons, still allot to the ancestors, through the instrument of history, their rank according to the grandeur or the character of their respective role.

Pagan Olympus is displaced and finds itself everywhere
where there exist avengers of sacred right, reformers conscientious of their task, martyrs to the idea and victims of duty.

Each citizen’s heart erects for itself an altar to honor their memory.

Make no mistake: when we go to throw flowers on our marble or bronze statues, or when we exhale from our chest a word of recognition directed to them, it is the same feeling which animated the primitives and impelled them to burn incense on their altars. Just as the gods of the antique city, our statues are the vigilant guardians of the ground that we tread with such pride.

In all religion, some crude form that it might clothe anew or some show, some ceremony with which one wants to adorn it, one must be able to distinguish a healthy part from an unhealthy part. Indeed, what is more beautiful in itself than the cult of the ancestors, whether it has to do with paganism or Christianity itself? But, when in addition to sacred worship one seeks to exploit the ignorance of the weak, the gullible, and the simple, for the sole purpose of trafficking one’s wares, one falls directly into the superstitions which constitute the unhealthy part within it.

Yet, on this terrain, the houngan is not solely culpable. For just as his fetishes find initiates so do Christian amulets. The perlimpinpin of the papa-lare has its equivalents in the oil of the Virgin, earth of the Virgin, Saint John’s fire and a host of others.…

This St. John’s fire, just to dwell upon that one, “formerly pagan, today Christianized,” which I had the opportunity to witness once at Saut-d’Eau, was imported into the country not long ago. This custom is practiced still today in and around Paris and in the greater part of France.
Therefore, as to that which concerns Christian superstitions, we have invented nothing, to the contrary!

“Gullibility is everywhere,” as one author says; superstitions reign over all zones, that they clothe themselves anew in forms pagan or Christian; but it is unfortunately the backward races or peoples who alone carry the burden of them. *Cé sous chin maigue yo rouè pice as the creole adage says.*

Strictly speaking, only the large centers are civilized, if one understands by civilization that ostentatious display of wealth and luxury, that transformation which takes place in mores, in traditions and worship. Let us go into certain European countrysides, we will still be witness to numerous vestiges of the old superstitions engendered by paganism and nascent Christianity.

You asked me just now, Léon, why don’t we renounce our absurdities, our errors? To that I will say to you that, if we still continue to pay our tribute to paganism, it is because we became acquainted with the religion of Christ too late. As a consequence, time is still needed before it be understood by a whole agglomeration of men immersed in the most vulgar ignorance. And then, if you knew how many centuries had been necessary for Christianity to accomplish its work thus far imperfect, you would not be astonished to see that there still exist new races, peoples whose eyes are hardly open to the light and who still sacrifice to paganism…

—Therefore, according to you, we are condemned to flounder all our lives in Vodou?

—I neither say so nor think so. A very slight comparison will make you understand. Infant races and peoples are like our little girls. They attach themselves to their beliefs with the same ardor, the same love that these feel for their doll. These beliefs
are their toys, their jewelry. Woe to him who would threaten to deprive them of those! The little girl will only cease to adore the beautiful porcelain eyes when she becomes a mother, rocking on her knees another doll of flesh and bone, who will be the incarnate realization of a dream. Just as the doll is an unconscious aspiration towards maternity, so as well are vulgar beliefs an aspiration toward the Supreme Being. The little girl who presses to her heart her scrap of cloth never thinks ahead to the transformation that will be effected within her at her first birthing, to the metamorphosis which will make of her, one day, the mother giving the breast to her baby.

She loves with a naïve, artless love, without suspecting that one day she will have to bear in her womb the fruit of her dream.

The day of maternity come, it goes without saying that she will have nothing more for her doll than disdain and contempt. So, on the one hand, we have the dream, vague and imprecise aspirations; on the other, the realization, the fixed, immutable idea. It is through childbirth, through the birthing of the latter, that our eyes will be opened to the full light.

How much time, you will ask me, will it take for the triumph to arrive? I don’t know, but it will come nevertheless...

In mutilated Africa, where the central regions are exposed to the cruelties of the Muslims, and where at this very hour the overland trade is still being pursued in its most horrible form, for a long while the work of missionaries will remain fruitless; but they will die at least with that consolation of having sown the seeds, and knowing that others will come to harvest the fruits of a long and painful labor. For a long while also with us, we will have to suffer with these beliefs whose tenacious
practices will survive for many years; but it is no less true that with a well-organized league we will come, if not to the end of them, at least to diminish their intensity. For, to properly account for what is happening under our eyes, this poor people, already stupefied by ills of all kinds, has most of the time been encouraged in its vices by those very same people whose mission was to put an end to this state of affairs. If our sociologists and our moralists, or those who arrogate these titles to themselves, instead of preaching to the void or overwhelming the poor shorn sheep with their sarcasms, wanted to strip off their arrogance and descend into the middle of this unselfconscious people, they would soon be convinced of the nature of this social wound,—as they are only too content to call it,—and of the hygienic measures to apply to it. But no, they will not want to touch it for fear of dirtying their fingers just as the surgeon would fear to contaminate himself through contact with his patient.

I who have pretensions toward neither the former nor the latter, who have no other title than to have lived and to live still among these people, who do not blush to live elbow to elbow with them night and day, who know perhaps better than another their inner sufferings, their privations, their barely formulated aspirations, I do not believe I am mistaken in maintaining that this mass, plunged in the gloom of ignorance, needs a good direction, and education in its whole comprehensive force. That this last would spread through all social strata, that like a trail of dust, it would invade the faubourgs, the suburbs, the lowlands, the mountains, and that the superstitions where they come from will count fewer adherents. And I do not doubt that, well directed, it would make us abjure not
only our erroneous beliefs, but, furthermore, anything else that might shackle our evolution. It is either one or the other: either the nail that one drives in is susceptible to bending or surely it is capable of breaking. In the first case, if it bends, the fault would be known to be none other than that of the worker who has poorly directed his hammer blows or who did not know to study first the number or the nature of the font which was suited to his skill: he has thus shown incompetence. In the second case if it breaks, it is that the font was bad; but here the hypothesis is unrealistic because it has already been demonstrated that the science of the Founder is infallible. The wrong of having caused an evil cannot prevent the repair of that evil. What is important is that one have the courage to admit it. The nail which bends under a maladroit hand can be straightened and follow the direction that one imprints on it until it be riveted.

Education! The whole secret is therein.

Accordingly, let us build schools in our countryside, let us open libraries, conference rooms everywhere where the need makes itself felt. Good and healthy distractions would be a power repulsive to the evils from which these masses suffer: let us erect theatres in our principal centers, let us offer concerts, let us make at last all things capable of initiating them into the sentiment of the beautiful. With that, who knows if, one day, our grandsons will not have to rejoice at the results obtained?

It will be slow perhaps, but sure. As for felling with a single blow the heads reborn from the hydra, one must not think of it.

The two friends parted at Fronts-Forts street, near the upper Market, still under the influence of their respective ideas.
Years had rolled by since then.

Tante Marguerite, Madame Georges, and her cousin had followed one another to the grave, the first, oppressed by the years, and the other two ruined by the fatigues and moral tortures that the long illness of their children had caused them.

Pratique, become old, no longer able to carry his quart, had gone to die in the hills of Léogâne.

Albert, not having been able to find any employment in the Capital and leaving his beautiful dreams and his projects for reform there, had gone to work in a factory at Arcahaie.

Lala had become the priestess or the mambó. Each year, she is the one who officiates in place of Frè Ti Dor who also had ceased to live. They said of Lala that her grandmother had initiated her while she was sleeping into the secrets of the cult. The days of grand ceremony, one saw her under her skirt, striped in gaudy colors, her catougan raised in a horn on her head and her agouessan falling from her shoulder toward her left side: She was possessed with the spirit of her grandmother or Grann’ Zalie.

As for Léon, he had returned to the North after the death of his mother; it was a long time before anyone heard any news of him, when one fine day they were utterly shocked to see disembarking upon the Wharf a monsieur looking bewildered, distraught and astray, hair disheveled, rigged out in a patched-together morning coat, and dragging shoes that were quite down-at-heel: It was Léon.

He was decidedly insane. He believed he was taking a trip in France, and asked for the train which ran toward Paris. His friends in seeing him pass by, did not fail to remark: “Poor
Léon! he let himself get lost in that obsessive idea that he had to want to return in any event to Paris”; and the good women of the streets pointed at him while whispering: *Ou rouè m’sié capé grignin avec soleil là, cé loua qui fait li fou.*

**THE END**
NOTES

1. “L’Histoire d’une Cassette,” the alternate title of Antoine Innocent’s work, may be translated in a few ways: The History or Story of a Casket (or Coffer, or Jewelbox, or Treasure Chest). After a talk with my good friend, Susan Kim, an early medievalist, who was on her way to London for a special, exclusive, scholarly viewing of an artifact known as the Franks Casket, I determined to retain the meaning indicated as first in all the dictionaries I consulted. As she pointed out, and as is confirmed by the Oxford English Dictionary, the term casket simply meant “box” for centuries, and only became associated with coffins in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. “A small box or chest for jewels, letters, or other things of value, itself often of valuable material and richly ornamented; money-box or ‘chest.’” Given the association of Tante Rosalie’s cassette with her death and the deaths and souls of others, it seems not inappropriate even in the late US connotation, though it is the original one that prevails.

Part I

2. Aunt Rosalie. Innocent writes that she came to Haiti at the “age of puberty.”


4. Good day, my little one (ÉF, page 2).

5. To fix a zenith is to locate oneself in relationship to the sun at noon, generally for navigation.

6. A lare is a household god, a spirit which inhabits and guards the home. I have left this term untranslated in the text for three reasons: first, its appearance within “lares and penates” within Merriam-Webster’s; second, the association of the lares with African and Haitian religions. In addition, third, Innocent will not fail to investigate later the distant and distinct association with ancient European religions, an investigation which should not go unremarked and an association which should not remain forever uninvestigated by contemporary scholars.
7. Gehenna is a valley near ancient Jerusalem associated in Jewish thought with great suffering and idolatrous cults, where infanticidal human sacrifice by fire was said to be practiced. It also evolved into a term for a process of purification of the soul. It is significant that Innocent compares the slaves’ experiences under colonial rule, or their witnessing of their children’s suffering, with the sacrifice of children to the god Moloch in the Old Testament. It has been associated with Hell, with the place where sinners go in the afterlife, with a place of future torment and with a place of this-worldly torture.

8. Although Innocent consistently uses the term banane, and although I have been unable to find a reliable recipe for tom-tom and other dishes, I have usually substituted plantain for banana throughout the text. Both are grown in Haiti and both are mixed with starchy foods like sweet potatoes and yams, though it seems plantains more frequently as a more starchy, less fruity food than bananas.

9. Though it was difficult to locate a good reference, hoholi appears to be sesame, or a seed or plant related to it.


11. Corruption of the word “nation” (ÉF, page 6).

12. “Julie, my little one, I am going to die. I would return to the country of Guinea, if it were not so far away...But there are secrets that the Creole cannot penetrate...Take courage, do you hear, my little one.” (ÉF, page 7). It is slightly unclear whether Creole (le créole) here refers to persons born in the Americas or the language Haitian Creole, but it is probably the former.

13. Laboring man, carrier of burdens generally known under this name (ÉF, page 9). Jasmine Narcisse of the Graduate Center at CUNY adds that the term in Haiti means “customer,” so that Pratique is known by his relationship to Madame Georges (and hers to him) rather than by a personal name. This appellation situates them as people who trade services with one another—him bringing her water and acting as a porter of heavy items, her feeding him and allowing him to keep casual but non-intimate company in a family setting.

14. La saline can mean “the salt-mine,” or “the salt-pit,” or “the salt-works,” so I have here interpreted this phrase to mean that they headed toward the saltworks (near Fort Dimanche). La saline is not capitalized.
in the text, but Innocent might be referring to the neighborhood of La Saline just south of Fort Dimanche in Port-au-Prince, now considered a high crime area by the US Department of State. Fort Dimanche became notorious during the Duvalier era of the twentieth century for its use as a prison and place of torture.

15. A close reader of the French would wonder if deposer son fardeau has multiple meanings. Interestingly, it both recalls the laying down of the cross by Jesus on his way to his own crucifixion and seems also to refer obliquely to the mining of the salt: a mass or load in mining being referred to as un fardeau. Both intriguing given precisely how Tante Rosalie has “swallowed so many barrels of salt” during her lifetime. Pratique and even Madame Georges are also likened to Christ in the laying down of burdens.

III

16. Perhaps considered a narrative intrusion by twenty-first century Americans, “I know not what” and other like interpositions are common in French-language literature, and perhaps exist to remind us that someone is telling the story. See for example, Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables.

17. Mangots, caïmittes, and sapotilles are all types of tropical fruits: mangos, a type of plum, and sapodilla.

18. Innocent’s imagery here—bijoux, anneaux, joyau—seems to figure Julie and her family as though they are jewels circling the same bracelet or ring.

IV

19. My little one, there are mysteries that Creoles are incapable of penetrating, do you understand? You do not know Dan-Maoua, my little one? Well, Dan-Maoua, it is the name which your mother bore, over there, in the country of Whydah-Alladah-Dahomey. (ÉF, page 17).

20. Charlatans (ÉF, page 18). Subsequent translators and cultural interpreters might be more generous in their translation of bocor. A bocor is the equivalent of a medicine man or woman, also termed a witch doctor or a “magician” of healing. In other words, a bocor uses the beliefs and rituals of non-Christian spiritual systems to heal the body, mind, and soul. In some cases, persons do engage in charlatanism by claiming powers under these systems that they do not possess. It is interesting and somewhat puzzling that this note, embedded within a text giving much credence to non-Christian beliefs, dismisses all bocors as dishonest imposters, posing as sages.
21. Although Madame Georges is clearly Catholic, it is worth noting that Baron Cimetière is one of the deities in Haitian Vodou who guards graves and the dead. I have translated Innocent’s word calvaire, in the other part of this sentence, through an urban, church-centered context as Stations of the Cross, but later will interpret otherwise.

22. My mother who is in the other world, save Julie! Save Lala! (ÉF, page 20).

23. It is me, Dan-Maoua, do you hear, little Lala? Tell Julie to meditate well on what I had said to her: “There are secrets that Creoles cannot penetrate”…The good that I had trusted could be realized has changed to evil. Doesn’t Julie love you, my little one? She would not wish to see you die? Well, my little one, your life is found in that. (ÉF, page 22). La vie ou lan ça, or ta vie se trouve dans ça, might ordinarily translate as “your life is therein.” I have kept a more literal translation of Innocent’s French to emphasize Lala and Julie’s quest to save Lala’s life.

24. Your life is found in that (ÉF, page 23).

25. Is it true, what you say, my little one? (ÉF, page 24)

26. Well, my little one, listen to what I am going to tell you (ÉF, page 24).

27. My friend and her sister Manzila were twins (ÉF, page 25). In Haitian Vodou, the Marassas Jumeaux are divine twins whose rich symbolic meanings cannot be succinctly summarized. As the story progresses, we will see that Rosalie and her sister may be subtly linked by virtue of their twin-ness to these super- eminent loas.

28. It appears that Madame Georges interrupts Tante Marguerite as she is about to enunciate the belief that the Haitian Revolution succeeded through the help of the gods and the African-descended combatants’ belief in them and offerings to them.

29. The text is slightly equivocal here. Bord-de-mer was a commercial district in Port-au-Prince; bord de mer means seaside. The text reads Bord de mer, leaving it to the reader to decide whether Madame Georges goes to the capital’s commercial district or to the seaside (perhaps both at once) to buy these things.

30. Literally translated: to eat the souls, to eat the dead, to eat the (divine) twin(s); or the souls (to) eat, the dead (to) eat, the (divine) twin(s) (to) eat. Perhaps best translated as feast, feast of the souls, feast of the dead, feast for the (divine) twin(s).
31. Cylindrical envelope or mould made of the bark of the palm tree and containing raw sugar (an indigenous product) (ÉF, page 28).

32. Pinewood (very flammable) (ÉF, page 28).

33. Cob is slang for a five centime piece. [Hyperlink to external source]

34. Winnowing basket to agitate and clean grain (ÉF, page 28).

35. Who goes there? (ÉF, page 30)

36. It’s me, Pratique (ÉF, page 30).

37. Thank you, Ma’am! (ÉF, page 31)

38. It appears that Madame is initiated (ÉF, page 31).

39. A coui is the gourd of a large melon-like fruit called the calabash used as a bowl.

40. Gourdes, bacchanalia (ÉF, page 33).

41. Gourdes are the Haitian currency, equivalent to the US dollar but valued at between forty and fifty gourdes per dollar in 2013. Gourdes are divided into one hundred centimes.

VI

42. The fire of Bacchus is mentioned in many pieces of nineteenth-century French literature and criticism, and in classical literature translated into French in the century or so prior to Innocent’s career: C. A. Devineau de Rouvray’s *Les Quatres Saisons* (1801), the sixth volume of the *Journal des Gourmands et des Belles, ou L’Épicurien Français* (1807), Louis Aimé-Martin’s *Letters to Sophie on Physics, Chemistry, and Natural History* (1811), Pierre Ronsard’s *Le Bocage Royal* (late sixteenth century) printed in his complete works in 1858 and mentioned by Auguste Blignières in his Essay on Amyot and the French Translators of the Sixteenth Century (1851), Charles Monselet writing about eighteenth-century author Louis Abel Beffroy de Reigny (le Cousin Jacques) in 1857, Portius Licinius’s “L’Union utile” as translated by Edouard-Thomas Simon (1786), and Euripides’s tragedy *Ion* (fifth century BC) as translated by Nicolas-Louis-Marie Artaud (1842).

43. Come to see manger-les-âme (ÉF, page 39).

44. Men’s prison, actually National Penitentiary (ÉF, page 39).

45. Body louse [Pediculus corporis s. vestimenti] (ÉF, page 40). Pediculus corporis or pediculus vestimenti is a skin condition caused by lice who live on the body (below the head) and the clothing. Properly today the lice themselves are called Pediculus humanus corporis.
46. The Édition Fardin edition indicates that this is “actually Dar-tiguenave barrack” (ÉF, page 41). This is a slightly mysterious reference, since it seems to refer to a Marine barracks behind the President’s palace during US Occupation, which actually occurred nearly a decade after the book’s publication. The note seems intended to orient Haitian readers, or specifically residents of Port-au-Prince, to the locations described.

Part II

I

47. The construction of the first sentence in French makes it hard to determine whether Innocent meant that the man who dishonored the woman was spitting his own blood (as from a self-inflicted bite during the fury of his assault upon her, or from her having drawn his blood while attempting to resist him) or the slave’s (as perhaps biting her in the act of raping her). Given that the only antecedent in the sentence is the masculine and given the later repetition of the phrase in this same section, which seems more definitely to imply his blood, I have chosen the masculine, but it is possible that Innocent is using a “postcedent” or “consequent” here. One may also translate the sentence in one’s mind as “by spitting his blood upon her” rather than “while spitting his blood upon her,” so that rather than describing an action that is related to and simultaneous with the action of the main verb, he is explaining how the dishonoring took place. This construction closes down a few possible interpretations that I would like to leave open (seeming either to turn the phrase into a euphemism for penetration or forcible insemination, or substituting one violent action for another simultaneous one). I was unable to find evidence that the phrase is an idiom.

48. Caro nigra is Latin for black flesh.

49. African here is in the masculine form in the 1906 source text, referring to the father, not the mother. In the 1981 reprint, it is in the feminine form.

50. Mama, is it papa? (ÉF, page 45)

51. Literally, “no rings, no chains,” a phrase seeming to echo slave shackles ironically. In English, “rings” (on fingers) seems to underemphasize the beauty of the face and body which Innocent here stresses.

52. It is important to note here that rumors persisted well into Innocent’s time as well as the times he is depicting in this scene, and despite abundant
evidence to the contrary, that women who were half black African and half white European could not bear children: thus the term *mulâtre* or mulatto, likening such men and women to mules, who are usually sterile because the offspring of parents of two different species of the genus *Equus.*

53. The word Innocent uses here for “soul” is “manes.” Manes were deified underworld souls of deceased loved ones in Roman belief.

II

54. Evil spells (ÉF, page 55).
55. Half of a round calabash, emptied and dried, serving…(rest of note lost) (ÉF, page 55).

III

56. The 1906 edition contains a contradictory image within this last line that the 1981 reprint seems to correct.
57. Date consecrated to the miraculous Virgin of *Saut-d’Eau* (ÉF, page 57).
58. One says: Ville-Bonheur or Saut-d’Eau (ÉF, page 59).

IV

59. Keg which water vendors make use of (ÉF, page 60).
60. Customer.
61. Ten o’clock rings! (evening)
   Turned out at the door by my mother,
   I have only my machine under my arm
   And my child in the other.

   **REFRAIN**

   Don’t cry, my child!
   Don’t cry!
   Don’t cry, my child!
   Take courage. (twice) (ÉF, page 61)

V

62. Straw bags
63. The “plaine du Cul-de-Sac” is known in English as the Cul-de-Sac Depression, but the French Haitian word emphasizes its flatness rather than its valley-like, low, or sloping qualities, and so has been retained.
64. Thank you, old friend (ÉF, page 67). Words such as commère and compère, according to my recollection of an informal conversation with
Jasmine Narcisse, have no good translation into English. They indicate a relationship of close fictive kinship or shared responsibility, as for childrearing, etc.

65. I will gladly accompany you, my friend (ÉF, page 67).
66. You will make me happy, my good friend (ÉF, page 67).
67. A fiber similar to hemp made of certain types of agave plants.
68. “Troquett”: Little collar or strip of fabric that one puts on one’s head to absorb the weight of the load. Which is to say: “This one here is nothing in comparison to what we are going see” (ÉF, page 71).
69. Madame seems to me never to have heard “Pensez-y-bien” (a very steep and rugged mountain, spiraling upward) spoken of (ÉF, page 71). Pensez-y-bien means literally “think about it well”; in other words, “think carefully about it” or “think twice” (before you attempt to summit!).
70. Well, my girl, are we on the point of arriving at it? (ÉF, page 71)
71. It is there, at this bend (ÉF, page 71).
72. A stage on the route (ÉF, page 73). La chapelle des Orangers is, literally speaking at least, the chapel of the orange grove or orange trees. The 1906 edition simply says “at Orangers” without reference to “the chapel.”

VI

73. That little hill that we just climbed, Madame, is nothing next to this colossus that we are now about to climb (ÉF, page 74).
74. Hold firm, Ti Mâle! (ÉF, page 75). Ti Mâle would be the equivalent of “little man.” This translation out of Creole does not appear to be exact.
75. Cétoutt (for the only mule that I own) (ÉF, page 75). “C’est tout” in French means “That’s all.”
76. Fanmpabouqué (for woman is never tired of working) (ÉF, page 75).
77. The largest lake in Haiti, also known as Lac Azuéi, a salt lake.
78. Almost 3,300 feet (quite a strenuous hike or even ride for those not used to such exercise).
79. Another stage along the route (ÉF, page 79).

VII

80. We are arriving at the Chapel, said Maripiè (ÉF, page 80).
81. Minced and fried pork meat (ÉF, page 80).
82. The possibly fictional Saint Genevieve of Brabant was the wife of the Count Palatine Siegfried, also a figure of dubious historical actuality. According to the fifteenth-century legend, while on a crusade, Siegfried
left his wife in the care of his majordomo Golo, who wanted to have an affair with her. When she refused, he falsely accused her of adultery, and she was ordered to be put to death with her infant son. The executioners instead released her, and she fled to hide in a cave in the Ardennes. Eventually, her husband found her while out hunting and repented his condemnation of her. A chapel to the Virgin Mary was built at the site of the cave, near Laach. (Remy, Arthur F.J. “Literary or Profane Legends.” The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 9. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. 13 Jul. 2015 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09121a.htm>.)

83. Are we on the point of arriving at Saut-d’Eau? (ÉF, page 82)

84. Not yet. We have passed the Madame-Michaud savanna, it remains for us to cross the Madame-Michel savanna. That is our last stage. (ÉF, page 83)

85. Literally, their castles of cards (houses of cards). Cf. my choice of “mansions in the sky” to Sinclair’s “mansions of the sky,” The Jungle, chapter 1. Two paragraphs later, I have converted a literal “projects in the air” into “castles in the air” to recapture the chateaux part of this line.

86. We are about to cross the Tomb (river found at the entrance into Saut-d’Eau) (ÉF, page 85).

87. The longest river in Haiti and on the island of Hispaniola, it is almost 200 miles long.

88. Sapotille is French for sapodilla. The sapodilla is an evergreen tree bearing large fruits also known as sapodillas. The bark is made of chicle, a natural gum.

VIII

89. Loose women; prostitutes. Cf. Hopkins’s fille de joie in Contending Forces, chapter XIX.

90. Saut means jump, leap, or spring in French, so the location rather than being thought of merely as “the waterfall” would more aptly be envisioned as the Leap of Water, or the Water’s (Playful) Leap. Perhaps even, the Water’s Frolic or the Water’s Gambol, to match the idea two sentences later.


92. Sacred palm trees (ÉF, page 91)

IX

93. The image here is of troops of an army staggered about in echelons.
94. There is an ambiguity in the French here, which reads “pour mieux apprendre à souffrir aux generations qui ne l’ont pas connu.” The verb connaître is generally used with people, so it would make sense to translate this line as one of teaching the generations who did not know Jesus. However, the antecedent also seems to be the concept “how to suffer,” so after much hesitation, I have lighted upon that alternative.

95. This image of Christ never having a moment of weakness is rejected by many, and even the speaker rejects it in the first sentence of this same paragraph. His words on the Cross—“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me”—are a touchstone of Catholic faith and of identification with Christ’s trials of faith. Innocent may well have intended this irony of scriptural error given that the last line of this chapter confirms these thoughts not as the author’s themselves, but as Albert and Léon’s. It is however, quite ambiguous; the passion with which they are articulated seems Innocent’s.

X

96. Meat of fried pork (ÉF, page 100).
97. Half of a round, emptied, dried calabash (ÉF, page 100).
98. July 16 is the feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which, though perhaps not directly responsible for these festivities, marks the day as a day of wider importance within the Catholic calendar. See also note 57.
99. An arrondissement is a district, as a quartier is a quarter or neighborhood.
100. Popular rejoicings to the sounds of drums and bugles (ÉF, page 101).

XI

101. Battre aux champs: literally, beat to the fields; this is a manner of drumming that designates military honors upon the person or persons for whom it is performed. The expression appears to come from a stance opposite of retreat.
103. As in a square dance; these might be translated as “Step forward, ladies,” “(Everybody) Cross,” “To your places,” “Swing,” and “(Everybody) Join arms.”
104. Earlier, “Saut’d’laise” or the people of Saut d’Eau.
105. A kermess is a fundraising fair, named after outdoor fairs in the Netherlands, Belgium and part of Germany.
106. Le feu de la St. Jean is a bonfire named after those lit during the Feast of St. John the Baptist in late June around the time of the summer solstice.

107. calvary: an open-air representation of the crucifixion of Jesus, according to Merriam-Webster’s; also an experience of usually intense mental suffering.

108. An allusion to the Aeneid by Virgil, in which the priest Laocoon and his sons are killed by two serpents in punishment for assaulting the Trojan horse. Laocoon is Aeneas’s uncle and a priest of Neptune who foresees the danger presented by the Trojan horse but is neither believed by men for his prophecies nor rewarded by the gods for his actions.

109. We are arrived, says Pièrismé (ÉF, page 108).

110. Well, we cannot see the Waterfall, responds Albert (ÉF, page 108).

111. In order to see it one must descend to the bottom of this ravine, but on the condition that you dismount, because of the incline which is too steep (ÉF, page 108).

112. One doesn’t stop long in these parts, observes Pièrismé (ÉF, page 109).


114. Here, one is known to hear voices which speak…sounds of drumming…the rumbling of the storm…And he adds. What we see there is nothing. There is another waterfall some steps from here that is twice as large as this one. People who desire to see it have to take off their clothes…and then, one must be brave! (as though indicating a mysterious place) (ÉF, page 109).

115. Although I have declined to translate this phrase literally as “bleeding bark,” it seems apropos that Innocent images the tree as bleeding or bloody, given the two men’s insensitivity to their individual human insignificance in and environmental impact upon this locale, rather sacréd in more than one sense.

116. Pétion-Ville (ÉF, page 113). Pétionville sits on a hill above Port-au-Prince that is nicknamed “la coupe charbonnière” or the Coal Cut because it provides charcoal to the capital city.

117. Here’s (our) neighbor, here’s Lala (ÉF, page 114; word in parentheses mine).

118. Good evening, Pratique. How are you? And the trip (ÉF, page 114).
119. As one will note here, the numbering of the sections or chapters in the original is irregular.

120. Twin (ÉF, page 118). Earlier in this paragraph, Innocent again uses the word manes for spirits.

121. Twin (ÉF, page 119).

122. A *houngan* is a male priest in Haitian Vodou. Sometimes seen as the equivalent of *bocors*. Female priests in Haitian Vodou are known as *mambos*.

123. This term means mimicry or aping in French but has a second meaning in Haiti that refers to the African gods of the Haitian religion. In this context, Madame Dajobert could mean either, given both the witchcraft with which she believes she is being targeted by her neighbors and the *papa-lares* of her aunt Rosalie and perhaps her mother.

124. Dishes or plates of (the) twins.


126. Reunion of farmers with the aim of furnishing for free one or more days of work to another, and that in exchange for like favor (ÉF, page 125).

127. Earthenware pot (ÉF, page 126).

128. Pinewood (for torches).

129. These names appear to refer to kingdoms in West Africa: Allada, Fida, Whydah (or Ouidah), Dahomey. Frêda, a word substituted for Fêda in the 1981 edition, is possibly a partial name of a spirit in the Ezili family from this region.

130. Literally, plates of the twins.

131. The lower house of the Haitian parliament is called the Chamber of Deputies. Though in the text, the word is not capitalized, perhaps it should be: merchants, Deputies, Senators, some military authorities…

132. Literally, house-baptism.

133. To this point, I have translated *tonnelle* as market canopy (a free-standing open-air tent, or stall, usually square, possibly made from cloth, or more permanent and covered with vegetation), a simple structure from which vendors sell their wares). Here the size of the congregation implies a structure quite a bit larger, but one still open-air and shaded with vegetation, and the narrative & vocabulary used both discourage the concept of the peristyle sometimes used today in Vodou worship next to a
temple. The term ramada also links it to the religious ceremonies of other peoples across the Americas.

134. An informal dance (*sauterie*) (ÉF, page 130).

135. We are not the only ones to sacrifice to Vodou. Each one has his little family secrets. All tomorrow night, all the day after tomorrow, we will be there, without coming home to rest (ÉF, page 130).

136. It is the papas lares who were tormenting the young woman. And if Madame Georges had not consented to make these sacrifices, she would have lost Lala (ÉF, page 130).

137. Did you see that beautiful lady, the mulatress who owns a shop next to the Market down below (Place Vallière)? The resemblance with Madame Georges, isn’t it striking?

Well, it is her cousin. That fair-skinned young man who was wearing glasses, that is the son of the mulatress. He almost went mad, because they had not wanted to sacrifice to the *dieux-lares* of the grandmother who originated from Guinea. (ÉF, page 131)

138. The *hounsis* are female servants of the temple who assist the houngan or the mambo. They sing and perform ritual dances accompanied by drums that are considered loas (https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/tout-haiti/Ba6beQIZT10/ohot1sEXs0J).

139. A hounguenikon directs the choir of *hounsis*. Frère servent translates as “brother servant,” while *la place de danse* means seat of the dance or ballroom.

140. The French reads “un sabre ou une manchette.” Generally, *manchette* would not be translated as machete, but there seems no logical alternative.

141. Formula of salutation (ÉF, page 132).

142. In French, *espadon*. An espadon is called either a flamberge or a bastard sword in English, depending on which sources one credits. According to Larousse, it is a grand and large sword from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries that one held with both hands. Some pictures show it with either serrated or bluntly scalloped double edges, while others translate it as the smooth double-edged bastard sword that is either a bit smaller than a Claymore or Claidhmore or in some accounts larger than one! http://parleferetparleverbe.free.fr/images/Armes/familly-great-sword.jpg; https://www.play.net/gs4/info/armory/twohanded.asp

143. East, west, north, and south here are *l’orient*, *l’occident*, *le septentrion*, and *le midi*. Midi is not noon, but rather the south as a cardinal point; *orient
is the cardinal point where the sun rises at the equinox, etc. So Innocent was careful to use the specialized names for the four cardinal points, the cosmic points of the globe’s orientation, rather than the unceremonial terms l’est, l’ouest, le nord, and le sud.

144. That is to say the name which expresses his power (ÉF, page 133).
145. The man who makes the metal case resound (ÉF, page 133).
146. He who strikes the large drum (ÉF, page 133).
147. He who strikes the second drum (ÉF, page 133).
148. He who strikes the last drum or the smallest (ÉF, page 133).
150. Funerary rite (ÉF, page 134). This is a public trial by fire to which the initiates are subjected (http://www.iza-voyance.com/lexique_magie_vaudou.htm).
151. Balls made of little pulverized peas (ÉF, page 134).
152. I was unable to find a translation for this term.
153. Special food prepared for the occasion (ÉF, page 136). Callaloo is generally a stew-like dish prepared with a base of leafy vegetables.

XIV

154. Those who are initiated in the secret ritual (ÉF, page 136). Kanzhouns, as spelled with a k here, is an introduction of the 1981 edition that I have left in place should it help clarify the ceremony for some. It does appear in the next paragraph in the 1906 edition as canzhouns, so may have meant that they were initiated while inside the hounfô, not before. It is likely inaccurate to call them kanzhoun prior to the initiation but the editors of the 1981 edition must have been preparing the reader for the fact that not all the hounsis entered the hounfô.

155. Large coral necklace of diverse shades (ÉF, page 136). An agouessan is generally a type of scapular or sleeveless outer garment hanging from one’s shoulders. It is often a strip of white cloth symbolizing access to higher worlds, a cloth band worn across one’s body from shoulder to opposite hip. (http://www.iza-voyance.com/lexique_magie_vaudou.htm)

156. The secret and intimate part of the vodouesque temple where the altar consecrated to the dieux-lares and intended for sacrifices is erected (ÉF, page 136).

157. Those not yet initiated into the secret ritual (ÉF, page 137). The term bosales is best known in the Caribbean as a reference to slaves born in Africa rather than the Americas, and may have the connotation “savage.”
XV

158. Same meaning as gozins (ÉF, page 139). This note from the 1981 edition of course makes no sense. Perhaps it means to refer to the meaning of zin below.

159. Large earthenware pot made for this purpose (ÉF, page 139).

160. A scene from Louise Erdrich’s Tracks is interestingly reminiscent of this scene: as Nanapush prepares to try to heal Fleur, he coats his hands and arms with a mixture of yarrow and another plant so that he may plunge them into boiling water. Fitting Mimola’s discourses on Catholicism, he is interrupted by a would-be nun, who scalds herself while attempting to vaunt the Catholic god over elements of power in the Ojibwa universe.

161. A bamboula is a dance performed to the sound of a drum (http://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/bamboula).

XVI

162. A vèvè is a symbol that both represents the lare and calls upon the one depicted to descend to earth. Each lare has its own unique symbol. They are generally traced out on the bare earth using cornmeal or another like substance. (Milo Rigaud, Secrets of Voodoo, San Francisco: City Lights, 1969).

163. The last five words are in French and translate as Master of the Crossroads, Master of the Great Pathway, or Great Road.

164. Straw gunnysack that men from the country carry (ÉF, page 145). Note the connection to the later Tontons Macoutes who terrorized Haiti under the Duvalier dictatorships starting in the 1960s. Tonton Macoute or Uncle Gunnysack is another figure from Haitian folklore who kidnaps naughty children, carries them away in his gunnysack, and eats them.

165. Resting place is “reposoir” or street altar in the original. Appropriately, it is simultaneously the place where he rests his body while staying on alert and the place where he is worshipped and honored.

166. The concept of animal magnetism originates in 1775 with Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), a German physician. Mesmer posited that an invisible fluid in the body was magnetic and could be activated by similarly magnetic objects as well as by person trained in how to influence it. There was some belief that one could cure or heal the sick through such animal magnetism. Innocent’s conjectures upon these theories regarding superhuman or postmortem agents are fascinating.
167. One might potentially interpret this line—*assister en elle à des luttes intérieures*—in the most literal manner: the witnessing of the gods struggling against one another for supremacy inside Lala.

168. This is the name of the goat (ÉF, page 147).

169. Tree known under this name (ÉF, page 147).

170. They are going to sacrifice the goat (ÉF, page 148).

171. *marassa* means “twin children” and by extension “little children,” “angels”… (ÉF, page 150)

172. *Dounou*, in the Guinean patois is to say “food,” “nourishment.”

*Marassa min dounou* is translated in these words: “Children, here is your nourishment,” to eat (ÉF, page 150).

173. You want some? (ÉF, page 151)

174. Lines written by the seventeenth-century master of comedy, Molière (1622–1673), are being referenced here. His play *Les Précieuses ridicules* (or *The Pretentious Young Ladies*; alternately, *The Affected Young Ladies*) features a pair of young ladies who spurn a pair of young men, only to be given a comeuppance. This play was apparently Molière’s attempt to check certain Parisian women who took authentic efforts toward refinement in language and manners to an extreme. The character Madelon’s line from Act I, Scene 5 is the one Innocent quotes: “J’ai peine à me persuader que je puisse être véritablement sa fille, et je crois que quelque aventure, un jour, me viendra développer une naissance plus illustre.”

175. Though unlikely as anachronistic to the date of wide publication, this phrase may be a reference to Canto V of the Letters on Savitri by Sri Aurobindo (who was a contemporary of Antoine Innocent’s), or to the Mahabharata to which it refers. Compare: “He plunged his gaze into the siege of mist / That held this ill-lit straitened continent / Ringed with the skies and seas of ignorance / And kept it safe from Truth and Self and Light. / As when a searchlight stabs the Night’s blind breast / And dwellings and trees and figures of men appear / As if revealed to an eye in Nothingness, / All lurking things were torn out of their veils / And held up in his vision’s sun-white blaze.” If so, it would thus be a reference as well to the nationalist movement in India, and perhaps the one in Ireland upon which Aurobindo drew for inspiration. (http://savitrithepoem.com/poem/66—the-god-heads-of-the-little-life.html and other links on left of page).
176. *Perlimpinpin* is a reference to “la poudre de perlimpinpin,” or a kind of fairy dust or placebo, billed as curing all ills, yet curing none.

177. It’s easier to see fleas on scrawny dogs (ÉF, page 163). (Hyper-literally: Fleas see themselves more easily on scrawny dogs. Or: Fleas are seen more easily on scrawny dogs.)

**XX**

178. A *catougan* is a bun or a ponytail or any other, more elegant way of pulling one’s hair back decoratively. See note 155 for *agouessan*.

179. Look at that Monsieur who winces at the sun, it’s the papa-lares who drove him insane (ÉF, page 169).
Antoine Innocent’s publicly stated reason for writing may have been to ennoble both Vodun\(^1\) and its followers by showing its roots in already respected civilizations and cultures, but the text does far more than that. That it does so should be no surprise to avid readers of literature, nor is it inconsistent with the idea expressed early on “that being is multiple, changeable, that within one being stir and persist an infinity of individuals with diverse temperaments, as numerous perhaps as there are germs in a drop of water.” It is fitting, then, that time may reveal even Innocent’s conscious purposes to have been multiple and will certainly reveal his inability to control the extra-conscious semantics and effects of his words.

Innocent was writing during one of the most hostile periods in the history of Haiti’s neighboring nation, the United States, for individuals of black African descent. Yet while this translation of his work was in progress, the first black president of the United States delivered a eulogy for a man killed in a political
assassination and hate crime with eight other church-goers of a historically black church, on the same day that the Supreme Court of the United States affirmed the civil right to marry the individual of one’s choice. His words and the acts that necessitated them remind us that the past is not past.

In 1906, the past was not past. Just over a century had “rolled by” since the declaration of independence by the first black state in the Americas and the first postcolonial black nation in the world. While Haitians may have had nominal political and legal freedoms, the wide circles of global capitalist social control still structured the lives of its citizens in force. *Mimola* is a novel about the next revolution, the second Haitian revolution, a revolution that may still be in the offing or still in progress in our time: the revolution in Pride, the full and comprehensive revolution against internalized self-hatred and psychological control, the revolution against shame of one’s cultural, religious, and intellectual heritage from Africa and of one’s cultural, religious, political, intellectual, and social constructions in the face of racial oppression, the revolution against structural racisms and colorisms, against the ideologies that keep structures in place. Against the ideologies that keep structures in place because citizens of black African descent have believed them and held them consciously and unconsciously along with other citizens of the world.

With this argument about *Mimola*’s greater purpose and significance in mind, I would like to follow the text with some observations about its reception, narrative features, contexts, and period that arose while I was translating it.

What little we know of the initial reception of the novel comes mainly through the words of Duracíné Vaval,
augmented by a letter from Haitian poet Masillon Coicou as well as Innocent’s response to that letter. In other words, we know only about its reception by two of his “high culture” friends, and of that very little. Vaval wrote a rather minimal, praising foreword, as well as a later article for his History of Haitian Literature, or “The Black Soul,” that is mostly a recap of Mimola itself. He compares it to the Odyssey, specifically to a scene showing Ulysses worshipping and sacrificing in a manner very similar to Frè Ti Dor (xix). He also likens it to Dante’s The Divine Comedy (xxi) because he asserts that Innocent’s design was to represent a fragment of black humanity at a given moment, arranging in print the customs of Haiti’s popular classes such as he saw them. It is a poem of mystic reality, he says, where the human soul finds itself grappling with the world of the gods. Thus abetting Innocent’s stated purpose and his world literary reputation, Vaval likewise extends material connections between Vodun and both King David and Moses (xxi–xxi, xxvi).

Vaval and the more overtly critical Coicou both read the work in ways that seem to me to miss some of its main points and perhaps Innocent’s indirectly stated point of view. Coicou wrote to Justin Lhérisson (the editor of the periodical Le Soir and a novelist in his own right) and to Le Soir’s readers. His letter was printed as forematter with the first edition, perhaps to give Innocent an opportunity to answer it, however cagily and obliquely. Coicou says that he does not find that that essential cause, “our profound ignorance, our superstitious faith” is placed in evidence in a clean enough fashion (x). He would have wanted to see denounced in a manner more firm the hysterical temperament of the unfortunate Lala, without neglecting to affirm the sovereignty of the ancestral influence
as a result of the life of the African elders (or forebears), but in a more scientific and modern and less occult way (x–xi). For his part, Vaval believes Mimola never to have agency. He says she is neither good nor bad, not being free to act of her own accord, and that, therefore, she is not responsible for her actions, since she suffers from a neurosis or lesion of (injury to, wound to) the nervous system (xxvi–xxvii). She has no will, her will is annulled, thus making the literary work very sad, somber, and infinitely poignant.

Yet the work is neither sad nor somber in its overall tone or conclusions, nor with respect to Lala. In fact, one may easily see that Lala emerges into fuller agency and health in the last pages of the novel, that despite her fits, attacks, or trances she exercises a growing agency and consciousness throughout the novel even while displaying often meek or shy traits, that there is no suggestion of bad or evil about her character at all or even about the occupation of her body by spirits, and that it is Vaval alone (though certainly not alone among readers) who attempts a specific psychiatric/physiological diagnosis, perhaps as a sop to Coicou’s call for modern, scientific denunciation of her—likewise misdiagnosed—“hysteria.” Such comments, indeed, evade how the text impresses upon us the potential validity of alternative ways of conceiving what the West knows, only recently, as mental illness. Despite Innocent’s concessions to Coicou, his recognition that some will find it a crime for him to have written about a subject so unsympathetic, his begging off the role of a sociologist or psychologist, his Albert-like adherence to progress and the evolution of human ideas, there is little to indicate that he accepted his friends’ critiques. Would it not be just to say, he wrote, that the little novel transformed
itself like the heroine who is in question here? Lala, like the novel, grew into something, someone that she and her authors did not expect, rather than staying static, irresponsible, childlike throughout her existence. His line subtly undermines Vaval’s inclination to apply European literary and moral expectations regarding good and bad, freedom, responsibility for one’s actions, character and character development in literature, rather than transforming them through encounter with African and Haitian thought.

He likewise distances himself from Coicou’s judgments about “our profound ignorance” and “our superstitious faith” by placing those judgments in quotation marks. He describes himself ironically as having the impudence to put certain scenes under the reader’s eyes that he has witnessed himself (implicitly in person) many times. When he begs his readers to pardon him a poorly disguised tendency to analysis that might belie his disavowal of social scientific aims, his tone is slightly over the top, as though their forgiveness is the last thing he needs to solicit. Even his use of the term “burlesque” to describe those scenes of Vodun that he deems proper for proper literature may be read against the grain, not just as “comical,” “preposterous,” or “ludicrous,” but as “comedy versus tragedy,” as “extravagant, frenzied, irrational, humorous in ways that challenge the status quo or common sense,” as “presenting a serious subject in a way that lightens its grave aspects,” as “treating the commonplace lives of commoners in an elevated manner,” as “doing serious cultural work by caricaturing the overly serious cultural work performed when westerners vaunt their religious superiority.” What I observe as translator is a text through which the author uses irony, narrative conflations
of identity consistent with his themes, and sociopolitical consciousness raising to undermine and question even his own allegiances: to Western education, to literacy, to rationality. Readings informed by Native American literature as well as African American and US period literature raise our own awareness of how American Indians and blacks globally faced similar civilizationist projects and policies during the period, and responded in similar ways. Lala, Léon, and Albert explore their debt to Africans through journeys that remain unfinished at the close of the final scenes.

At times, Innocent’s sociopolitical commentary is subtle and implicit, as when he shows the prejudices and advantages of color within a nominally uni-racial state through Francine and Julie’s differing life trajectories. Manzila is the victim of sexual abuse in addition to the physical beatings she and her twin both experience, yet her daughter’s life prospects are raised above her niece’s by virtue of her ability to offer a husband a “blond” child. Monsieur Dajobert’s racial heritage is never directly stated, but can be inferred from this passage as mixed, perhaps lighter than Francine’s. And while Monsieur Georges leaves his wife and daughter with multiple properties and country servants, raising them above the grand majority of black Haitians, Julie’s occupation as seamstress once widowed lingers an economic rung or two below the merchant widow who hobnobs with legislators, generals, and “ladies” rather than butchers, salt merchants, and curers of meats, fish, and hides. Her lighter skin likely grants her a higher standard of living.

If Innocent need not state these observations outright, they are likely an impetus to his attention to other social injustices,
and his apparent admiration for practices of faith that instill in the privileged a greater, more active social conscience. Julie does not visit the prisons of Port-au-Prince until Tante Marguerite reveals to her the secrets of the African religion. Yet it is clear that these African beliefs are more effective than Catholicism as practiced in Haiti at calling her to feed the poor and the starving and to visit the prisoner. That the prisoners themselves are starving as well as brutalized, and perhaps murdered not by each other but by their guards, reinforces the critique of middle class complacency and the failings of the state. Innocent does not go so far as the reader to question how many of the men and women were political or economic prisoners rather than the true criminals—brigands, thieves, and bandits—they appear. Yet the trajectory of Haitian underdevelopment forces us to ask what the difference might be under such national conditions of poverty. Are they “cattle” covered with lice and other parasites, or generations never truly released from the bondage to master and land that converted them in perception into chattel? Could this question have been lost on his Haitian audience?

Even Manzila suffers from the infection of color privilege and internalizes its imperatives when she compares her own hair, now “frizzy,” her own lips, now “thick,” to her daughter’s “blue eyes,” “regular features,” and “sharply defined profile,” all implied to be more beautiful and marvelous. Innocent highlights the irony of such valuings when he has her grieving inwardly at not being able to procure Francine “all the luxury of her age,” as though she must deserve luxury rather than mere comfort. “Fully she had to resign herself, since all she possessed was her own person, sad wreck of vanquished slavery.”
Yet under slavery, Manzila possessed neither her own person legally nor any of her children. And this irony is itself reversed when Innocent, rather than asking her or us to settle for how far she has come, insists upon how little her gains mean, since the crime of slavery disables her from restoration to the normalcy of her once untroubled life: “She felt not even the courage to work. The vampire had sucked her blood, drained her strength and her energy. If it were not for the thought of her daughter for whom she had to find bread each day, she would have let herself die, impassive assistant to the complete ruin of that dilapidated body. With no kin, she had been abandoned to herself on this soil that she had fertilized with her sweat, with her blood, far from her Africa, far from her wild solitudes, far from her streams with the mysterious songs, far from her tribes so dear whose names Lagos, Badagri resounded so often in her head!”

One initially takes in the book’s extended sociological commentaries, by Albert in particular, as expressions of authorial oneness with that character. Yet there is irony here, too, perhaps mixed with indirect self-deprecation. Deltan and Innocent are neither the same person nor “innocents,” capable of escaping the text’s penetrating vision. What are we to make of the fact, for example, that Albert believes that the African lares gave the revolutionaries the power to win independence while Dan-Maoua, Rosalie, has experienced them as deaf to her beseeching of relief from torture? On their way from Port-au-Prince to Saut d’Eau, enveloped in the riches of Innocent’s extraordinarily beautiful descriptions of the natural environment, neither Albert nor Léon “get it.” It is the natural beauty of the valley they gaze on that is Haiti’s prize, not its ability to
hold a major metropolis like Paris. (And this not for the sake of ecotourism but for reasons beyond commodification, for the sake of basic nourishment of life and soul whether human or non.) As the two walk on from the site of their vain observations, the narrative perspective nicely pulls away to look down naturalistically on them, juxtaposing the grandeur of the earth to the ant-like animalism of these men and their human company. Innocent here reminds us who is boss.

As the two continue on, they continue to be exposed as both “getting it” and “not getting it.” It cannot but be seen as a sacrilege for them to carve their names on a tree after visiting the remote waterfall at Saut d’Eau whether or not the reader is religious. Meanwhile, although a reader might adhere to their arguing their resentment with the Virgin Mary, no one can miss the incredible irony that this argument goes on while their female relatives are devoting themselves to her and that by virtue of this devotion Julie and Lala, if not also Francine, find elevation out of their suffering. That Francine does not certainly does not fall squarely or unequivocally on Mary, Jesus, or one’s belief in them, as I will discuss further on. Innocent seems to be up to something by not allowing us to see until the end that this soliloquy addressed to Mary is Albert and Léon’s inner thoughts rather than the voice of the narrator or the author. If a late narrative gesture toward disavowing their stance, it plainly does not work. Character conflates with author.

Narrative conflations of identity indeed appear frequently and seem a deliberate molding of form to theme. If the most evident is our difficulty distinguishing Albert from the author despite evident distancings through critique of Albert and Léon, it is not singular. In the first several pages, the narrator’s
voice seems to combine with Rosalie’s, Dan-Maoua’s, consciousness in a double-voiced discourse when the text lapses into questions about whether Catholic altars did not remind her of masonry platforms for worshipping her lares or religious hymns resemble primitive airs. Later Mme Georges cries out to the great God to end her losses just as her mother had done when being whipped and tortured. Dan-Maoua then appears in Lala’s dream as Lala will later be dressed, and it is of course believed that her spirit inhabits her body during one of the ceremonies, so much so that their faces become indistinguishable.

Perhaps even the narrator’s likening of all people and the month of May to trees in flower and then Mme Georges’s likening Lala to a tree in flower may be seen as a double conflation of narrator with character and characters with nature. Hymns are also a second time likened to “savage” music, transforming themselves and “rhythmed in a rude, barbaric language.” While the surface meanings put the religions in contest, the line also hints at similarity and continuity between religions, especially as it is ultimately unclear whether the barbaric language is French or an African tongue. In his longer piece, Duraciné Vaval enters a brilliant moment of metaphor when he says that oriental and occidental Christianity are like two sisters whose visages resemble one another (implicitly jumelles or marassas, like Dan-Maoua and Manzila), sisters who do not love one another, yet who labor at the same work for the good of poor humanity (xxvi). Julie’s mother is characterized as seeing monotheism and polytheism as compatible, believing that “the worship of one God did not preclude the worship of other divinities,” and the text seems also to ask the reader to question the separation of their identities (monotheism’s and
polytheism’s) particularly when Albert confronts us with the panoply of Catholic saints. So narrative conflation of character works to reinforce Innocent’s commentary on the intertwined identities of seemingly separate institutions and on the similarity of abstract thought, especially theological, across cultures.

Historically, polytheistic religions have often accepted outside gods and venerated figures into their panoply of gods or their litany of saints. In modern times, in parts of Native America as in Haiti and other African-predominant Caribbean cultures, this acceptance has seemed not merely an expression of the essence of polytheism itself, but influenced by some of the same colonial forces. For reasons indigenous to the form of polytheistic religions, they are often open to finding value in anything from inside or out that either denotes power or deserves reverence for goodness; yet they are also often forced to disguise their continued existence or vibrancy to survive the onslaught of intolerant monotheism. Father Jean’s involvement in the Catholic blessing of Julie’s pots and plates, however, reminds us that monotheistic religions have engaged in similar kinds of openness and syncretism, disguising them in their very monotheism or clothing them in secrecy like Father Jean and Julie. Where does the difference between “ancestor worship” and “the veneration of ancestors” lie? Does the conceptual distinction exist solely in order to revile religions that seem to worship when in fact they only venerate? Or to suppress those that believe in a transformation from human to divine that would justify worship, in order to elevate Christians’ centering of the inverse, salvational transformation from divine to human?

Ultimately the novel seems to be not a failed or even an innovating bildungsroman about its title’s heroine. After all, the
subtitle points to the *casket*, not the individual. Instead, with the ironic gestures of its open ending, it offers a challenge to internalized self-hatred and asks its audiences to interrogate the links between Western education and literacy on the one hand and the development or underdevelopment of Haiti through ideological sabotage and self-sabotage on the other.

One of the more difficult constructions in French conceptually occurs in Part II, Chapter II where the narrator has just introduced Léon and Albert and is elaborating on Albert’s moderation. “Toward that end, we had to take as our basis the progressive march of other peoples, who had preceded us in civilization, to seek by thorough study what was good and what defective in our institutions, whether the chain of our traditions perhaps broken brusquely and with impunity, which is the source, the origin of our superstitions, whether Vodou, that social wound as people are happy to call it, is not a religion in the sense, well understood, in which that word was taken by the Hindus, the Greeks and the Romans of antiquity.” Albert believes that Haitians should seek to understand—using techniques learned from the West—whether there had been an African religious tradition the “chain” or lineage of which was ruptured through slavery, corrupting a “true” religion, like those of the Hindus, Greeks, and Romans, into superstition. It is significant that Innocent employs the word “chain” or *chaîne* here. It clearly alludes to the chains of slavery as well as the positive idea that Haitian beliefs may be linked back to a purer African antecedent corroded through no fault of the Africans transported to the Americas. Albert clearly sees religions as an avenue used by humanity to seek knowledge and truth, but the passage also indicates that “superstition” has been decided on
the West’s terms and that outsiders to Vodun are the ones who study it thoroughly rather than its practitioners.

Yet the statement may be contrasted to Léon’s much more thorough adoption of western *mépris* or contempt of his own people, reflected in nearly all the passages about him. His experiences on the pilgrimage to Saut d’Eau and at the final ceremonies have no transformative effect upon him because his pre-formed theories of what he is seeing and how to see itself are inflexible and inflexibly allied to self-consciousness about how whites see. He has absolute certainty in his epistemological righteousness. “It is time we abandon all these horrors which tend toward nothing less than to debase us in the eyes of the foreigner….Why wouldn’t we profit from this progress which solicits us on all sides, this civilization which manifests itself everywhere around us? Truly, the more I reflect upon it, the more black thoughts invade me. As for me, I am radical; slowness irritates me. The only remedy to apply here is the brutal destruction of everything which tends to render us immobile, to hinder our step.” His statements reflect the same kind of thinking that drove allotment, compulsory boarding schools, and other civilizationist projects against tribal nationhood in the United States during the same period. In this alone they seem to differ from the white foreigners’, as whites were little concerned with “civilizing” Haitians rather than simply extracting the maximum from their labor and national resources. Léon’s idea is that one must completely pull non-European cultures up by their roots and replace them whole with the civilization from western Europe that he sees as the only true civilization. If *Mimola* shows us ties between Haitian and Native American faith practices, it also links these nations with respect to
the colonization, recolonization, and neocolonization that they faced and still face.

The novel’s second-to-last chapter is punctuated by Albert’s idea—“Education! The whole secret is therein”—which falls deaf on Léon’s hyper-educated ears. When we then see him undone by insanity, wandering the streets of the capital, we are left with an open question: why has his mother’s embrace of Vodun failed to effect a cure even while Lala moves into a higher position of authority than either he or Albert? What are we to conclude of literacy, Western education, and their future ability to unlock the secret of Haiti’s progress? After all, Lala’s journey begins when she “instinctively” diverts her eyes from her book. Is this “distraction” symbolic of a rejection of Western literacy for literacies and oralities of African origin?

Innocent comes to no conclusion. He forces his reader to fill in the blank. Perhaps Léon’s failure to regain health is an indictment of Western education and the half-promises of belonging held out by the dominant culture only to be yanked away. (Mourning Dove is one Native American writer who writes in Cogewea about such stunting of the Western-educated, mixed-race graduates’ ability to find a niche wherein to apply their education for the social good.) Perhaps it is because Léon himself is an unbeliever. But if this is so, perhaps it itself is due to his mother’s withholding from him the secrets revealed to her by her cousin, a withholding similar to Julie’s mother keeping silent about the casket and its meanings. Francine does not let Léon in on the secret of his temporary respite, and so does not allow him to grow in faith as Lala does. Perhaps it is because she does not perform the first rituals, the first promises that her cousin had already performed for Lala before they met.
But enough blaming of the mother for the son’s mental illness! Perhaps the two are indeed victims of the witchcraft and/or the persecution of their neighbors envious or insulted, having little or nothing to do with Léon’s ancestors and perhaps much to do with their mulâtre status, their class, his arrogance, or other factors. Perhaps it is because he never returns to France, plain and simple. He is unable to readjust culturally. Although Mme Dajobert is nominally quite rich prior to her misfortunes, perhaps Innocent is indicting an economy that does not allow her to send her son to the place where he “grew up” and wishes to reside, an indictment of a structural global comparative poverty of means. Or is Léon being “ghost danced” out of the Americas and Africa because of his grandfather’s or grandfathers’ white blood and supremacist ways, as well as his own affinities and talents.

Finally, we are likely to settle on the obvious: there is always the possibility that Léon is not helped by his mother’s vows, prayers, and practices because he needs science to help him. He needs Western medicine to cure or at least treat, his mental illness. So perhaps Innocent lays out multiple paths toward healing—Vodun, Western medicine—and asks us to lament Léon’s lack of access to the one that would most have helped him.

On the other hand, if we follow the textual logic of Lala’s reconciliation with her seizures we must equally return to the power of self-concept and our theoretical, epistemological approach to the world, as well as the potential validity of alternative ways of conceiving what the West describes as mental illness. According to one Vodun way of looking at Léon’s predicament, Léon is the reincarnation or a spiritual host for his
grandfather and is driven crazy with him and by him by the contradiction of inhabiting the body of a man he reviles because he believes blacks natural slaves. Such a theme echoes in similar explorations in broader American literature, as through William Faulkner’s 1936 *Absalom, Absalom*. In this way, the literal impossibility of returning to Paris becomes figurative as well. Dan-Maoua’s legal owner can no more return to Paris than she or her sister can return to Africa, physically or in identity, now that their selves have been transformed by the American experience. Léon’s self-hatred deepens, doubles, in such a reading. Yet it is as “obvious” as the scientific reading in the ontological world that the novel strives so diligently to delineate faithfully. It is written quite clearly into the final line. Either his white or black ancestors—*papa-lares*—drove him insane.

Innocent chooses to close his book without the romantic union of Lala with Albert, despite their feelings for one another. Despite, indeed, the suggestion that Albert’s Western education *ought* to be married with Lala’s spiritual elevation in order to achieve Haiti’s promise. What then does their separation signify? Earlier, Albert likens sociologists and moralists to a distant Christ, who didn’t want to soil himself by touching real human beings too much. Whatever one thinks of his reasoning, one recognizes his effort to be that -ist who willingly mixes with humanity. He himself states as much. “I who have pretensions toward neither… who have no other title than to have lived and to live still among these people, who do not blush to live elbow to elbow with them night and day, who know perhaps better than another their inner sufferings, their privations, their barely formulated aspirations, I do not believe I am mistaken in maintaining that this mass, plunged in the
gloom of ignorance, needs a good direction, and education in its whole comprehensive force.” So it is not, or at least not simply, a matter of Albert’s refusal to live elbow to elbow, night and day, with a *mambo* or priestess. Nor can we conclude that just because their journeys remain unfinished in the closing scenes that a future union is promised. Innocent disables such wishful, incongruous thinking.

We may seek out signification in the tone of irony—not sadness, somberness, or even absolute poignancy—that pervades the final four paragraphs. “Albert, not having been able to find any employment in the Capital and leaving his beautiful dreams and his projects for reform there, had gone to work in a factory at Arcahaie.” Earlier, he and Léon were not only disappointed but deceiving themselves in their hopes that as intellectual workers their task would be easy and that they would find a position capable of permitting them to realize their dreams immediately. Indeed, Innocent points back to the political corruption, the failure in sound governance of the Haitian state, which has ironically given Léon the gig that Albert should have earned on his merits and temperament and relegated Albert to the position of independently wealthy scholar that Léon had craved. And all because a family member of Albert’s had offended some petty official. As an educator of children, Albert could have done much good. That the state allows him to be further relegated to a factory where the type of education he received likely cannot be fully exploited and that the state of underemployment in Haiti is such that he can find no other job is Innocent’s indictment of a system fully out of kilter, utterly inadequate to the project its power brokers ought to embrace. Corruption, colorism, and nepotism must be rooted out.
Yet is that all?
Are Albert’s views compatible with Lala’s?
Could she live free and free of ailment with a husband who sees her as an object of analysis?
Innocent is a realist.
Enlightened Western educators cannot unite with the leaders of the Haitian masses in their quest for knowledge, truth, or progressive advancement until the former do not see themselves as more advanced than the latter.

NOTES

1. In general, I use the word Vodun to capture in meaning not only Haitian Vodou but the world religious complex with roots in Dahomey. While West African Vodun experienced a diaspora that changed its specific forms and rituals, among other things, using the term recognizes the commonalities, just as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism encompass a large variety of worship grown from common roots. Innocent and his contemporaries tend to use the term Vaudoux whether writing in character or not. He once uses Vaudou. Although the term Vaudoux might have been translated Voodoo in 1906, we here use Vodou for the speech of the narrator and two male characters, despite their differing levels of respect for the religion.
While much has been written on the War for Haitian Independence and its immediate aftermath, the US Occupation of Haiti from 1915–1934, and the Duvalier regimes, most Americans would be hard pressed to recite even the most significant details of these three events, much less the period from 1804 to 1915. A brief sketch of this history is necessary to contextualize the period in which Antoine Innocent and his contemporaries were writing. As Gordon Lewis and several French-language Haitian critics and anthologists have pointed out, this century witnessed the emergence of a strong corpus of Haitian literature, much of which anticipates philosophically late twentieth-century scientific “findings” about race. It was also the century in which both international and national conditions of Haitian economic, social, and political life hardened into destructive patterns of neocolonial exploitation. Paradoxically, while Haitian writers were some of the leading participants in a distinctly Caribbean intellectual history in
its nineteenth-century inflection, Haiti becomes victim of a progressively worsening and ultimately unprecedented under-development among nations in the Western hemisphere.\(^1\)

The political and economic trends within the Haiti of the nineteenth century must be described briefly before I detail more minutely the sequence of events. Since the Haitian Revolution, and particularly in the half century succeeding it, there was and continues to be an ongoing internal struggle for power and maintenance of elite control, based upon the continuance of an unjust system of land distribution and property rights inherited from the colonial period. While it is unclear whether Haitians would have secured—or the world community accepted—a truly egalitarian state or anything approaching one (i.e., one without an elevated status for mulâtres and other light-skinned blacks that occurred partly through control of military power\(^2\)), it is clear that ruinous elite rule and mass poverty depended upon uneven inheritance of an unjust legacy.

According to historian David Nicholls, there have been two main political camps in Haiti, which correspond roughly with conservative and liberal camps in the US or conservative and labour camps in the UK. Many designate these two camps through terms associated with color and thus global racial politics. From 1845 on into the first two decades of the twentieth century, an alternating succession of elite noiriste and mulâtriste leaders replaced a mulâtriste hegemony that had persisted for twenty-five years. This hegemony had itself been preceded by a physical division in the country into noiriste and mulâtriste polities just after Independence. In general, the noiristes have been seen as representing the more populist or laborer-oriented platform, though often only slightly and as
a mask to the maintenance of elite power in general. Nicholls writes, “it is interesting to see how black politicians from the middle and upper classes have consistently used the colour issue to divert attention from the question of economic class, and to convince the black masses that their interests are the same as those of these leaders themselves” (87). Noiristes during this period were in office slightly more years in total. This alternation of noiristes with mulâtristes mirrors the processes of two-party elections in the US, though without the orderliness or regularity of change.

Under three presidents, Jean-Pierre Boyer (1822–43), Faustin Soulouque (1847–59), and Fabre Geffrard (1859–67), Haiti experienced stability and order. However, these regimes were dictatorial and suppressed opposition by force and intrigue. The general predominance of military over civilian power had its origins in several factors. The colonial administration and its ousting by war left a military legacy in the first years of independence. Unremitting external threats to the nation, which were intensified by a racializing global climate beyond levels seen toward the white-dominated independent nations in the Americas, kept those forces at the forefront of politics. The split nation’s first leaders, Henri Christophe and Alexandre Pétion, consolidated power both against internal enemies and one another by promoting their military allies. Finally, with little widespread public education, the army was one of the few means of social mobility for noirs, or darker-skinned blacks.

Both noiriste and mulâtriste elites promoted European forms of civilization. They downplayed or discouraged the African heritage. They also sometimes discouraged education for the masses because of a fear of disorder and possibly of
an infusion of African elements (Joachim 103). As a corollary, then, race and color played key roles in politics. Yet, the most extreme proponents of the mulâtriste and noiriste ideologies downplayed divisions (Nicholls 113). Eventually a non-elite, politically conscious class emerged in the form of the rural peasant middle class. It played a decisive role in political affairs three times over the course of the long century.

The racialization of politics is apparent from the historical evidence if not the arguments of all historians of Haiti. For instance, Henri Christophe, who ruled the North from 1807 to 1820 sold land to both noirs and mulâtres; his counterpart in the South, Alexandre Pétion, to mulâtres only. In 1845, President Pierrot felt compelled to pass a race relations act prohibiting discussion of color. Later, Hannibal Price denounced author Frédéric Marcelin for collaborating with President Louis Salomon by writing, “You are an undisguised scoundrel… because you, as a mulatto, serve a negro government…Being a mulatto, I am sure that you have a horror of negroes, just as I have” (qtd. in Nicholls 110). Ironic, given that Price was one of the foremost internationally known Haitians to argue for the equality of the races! There was hostility to African traditions in both noiriste and mulâtriste camps.

Significantly, writers of literature like Marcelin were often involved in politics or held power in several administrations. At least as early as the early twentieth century, some semi-independent though partisan writers did emerge. Advocacy of noiriste and mulâtriste politics by writers in the 1890–1915 period did not preclude their mutual collaboration in periodicals of the era.

Thus, while we might distinguish concepts of race (white/black) from those of color (mulâtre/noir), nonessentialist and
sometimes unconsciously essentialist racisms, upon which colorisms were based, appear to be explicit or implicit components of Haitian national life throughout the nineteenth century.

With the trends laid out, we can look more minutely at the sequence of events that form the political and social backdrop to *Mimola*. On New Year’s Day of 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines formally declared Haitian independence (Nicholls 33). White colonists who had not fled the island by 1805 were killed by the armies of pro-independence soldiers and by civilians in order to safeguard their freedom (James 370). The new constitution contained a realpolitik provision prohibiting white ownership of land except to those European soldiers who had helped oust the French. Yet, those mulâtres and noirs who had been free before the War and who had held land not only retained ownership of their lands but sometimes gained lands from their white parents or relatives. Those individuals often signed the property over before leaving or bequeathed it in their wills (Nicholls 38). So suspicion and hostility between these mostly mulâtre affranchis or anciens libres and the predominantly noir nouveaux libres did not disappear with the exodus of the whites, especially since many mulâtres had allied with pro-slavery colonists at significant stages of the war for independence (Nicholls 7).iv

The subsequent political history of Haiti can be traced through the struggle for hegemony of the two factions within the upper classes already mentioned: the mulâtriste and the noiriste. These factions did not become firmly institutionalized until around 1867, when the Liberal and National Parties emerged, but their existence is evident from 1804 on.
Dessalines ruled as Emperor until 1806. His official rhetoric called for an alliance between mulâtres and noirs; this alliance politics constituted a practical threat to mulâtre supremacy. He was soon assassinated for his intent to confiscate and either re-distribute or nationalize the land and thereby erase the colonial legacy of inequity (38).

Following the death of this proto-noiriste leader, then, the country split along geographic, economic, and color lines. Henri Christophe ruled the predominantly noir rural North (ironically the region from which Francine of *Mimola* migrates). From 1806 to 1811, he was president, and from 1811 to 1820, he was its self-declared monarch, modeling his state along the lines of the liberal monarchy of Great Britain. The more urban mulâtre-dominated South and West, while disunited at times—through the activities of men such as the Comte de Jérémie (a marron, or man who had escaped slavery), André Rigaud, and Jérôme-Maximilien Borgella—generally fell under Alexandre Pétion’s aristocratic republican government from 1807 to 1818.

Nicholls has claimed that the rivalry between the Northern and Southern States that ensued had to do with regional and personal loyalties, not a struggle between economic classes or differing conceptions of government (57). Yet the rhetoric of ideologies of government from both areas makes it clear that differing conceptions of government were tied up with the economic interests of the elite classes as they differed according to region. In the republic, the existence of class was rhetorically erased; all citizens were equal. Government was government by the masses. Popular sovereignty was the ideal, and “the voice of the people [was] the voice of God” (Dumesle qtd. in
Nicholls 58). As in the US constitutional model, a divided and limited government was the ideal, the leader making a contract with the people. The South had liberty, Pétion claimed, compared to the despotism of Christophe; the civil ruled over the military in his state while Christophe’s turned this hierarchy upside down.

Christophe, on the other hand, saw equal rights before the law as the only true equality. Equality in economics, strength, bravery, and education was impossible and unnatural. The South’s democracy debased Haiti in the eyes of other nations, or so wrote Baron de Vastey, a political theorist of Christophe’s (Nicholls 59). Only a monarchy was truly compatible with liberty, as could be seen by the fact that the English were the freest people on earth. While Europeans might laugh, he sallied, at the pretentiousness of a black king, in reality royalty was no white prerogative. An enlightened monarch was needed to keep the population under restraint because they were unstable in character, averse to labor, and disorderly.

Evidently, both North and South suffered from major contradictions between rhetoric and reality, though perhaps more so in the case of the South where democracy was a cover for the oligarchic version of Christophe’s frank ascendancy of “excellence.” In either case, both governments protected the regionally determined economic and racial interests of their elites and their rulers. The immediate hold of neocolonialism becomes evident during this period, despite a highly strained relationship with France, the rest of Europe, and the United States.

The ascension of Boyer in the South in 1818, the suicide in 1820 of Henry Christophe, the subsequent reunification of
North and South under Boyer, and the conquest of eastern Hispaniola in 1822 marked the beginning of twenty-seven years of consolidated mulâtriste hegemony. While the period from 1822 to 1842 was one of relative peace and stability seeing little violence or crime (67), it was also a period when class and color lines began to harden, when Boyer closed power structures to noirs, and when Haiti started on a road to underdevelopment which it had avoided for a quarter of a century.

In 1825, Boyer agreed to pay France an indemnity of 150 million francs to “compensate” the ex-colonials who had lost lands in the Haitian victory. In return, France recognized Haiti’s independence, helping secure it against constant external threats (threats which had not prevented a healthy trade with Haiti for the very powers who had kept it the only unrecognized independent nation in the Americas). Along with the indemnity, Haiti was to knock 50% off the customs fees for French goods, a move which invited clandestine participation by others through French traders.

Boyer immediately took out a twenty-four million dollar loan through a Parisian bank to pay the first of five installments. He taxed the coffee trade and in 1826 instituted a “Rural Code” to control labor on exportable goods. Thus, ex-slaves, who had never been paid an indemnity for the alienation of their own bodies, labor, and capital from themselves and their ancestors, were entailed in the enterprise of paying moral criminals for a freedom that the ex-slaves had won fair and square and which no nation had yet been able or willing to reverse militarily.

By 1836, a split in the mulâtriste hegemony began to emerge. It appeared when writers of the cénacle de 1836 (or
nascent romantic movement) and opponents of Boyer began to argue for Haiti as a symbol of black rehabilitation with a distinctive culture fusing European and African traditions (73–76). Regarding Haiti as a symbol of black rehabilitation was not entirely new, but arguing for acknowledgment of its syncretic nature was. While accepting the mulâtriste version of history which exalted mulâtre leaders of independence and denigrated noir ones, it warned Haitian writers against slavish imitations of European writers and promoted pride in a unique inviolable nationhood which made US claims of distinction pale in comparison. Within two years of Emerson’s “Nature” essay, Hérard Dumesle and Emile Nau were pointing to the derivative Britishness of the United States as a foil for the unique cultural fusion that was Haiti. While the comparison was more telling of the representation than the reality of elite sentiment, it foreshadowed developments in both countries, and forms a counter to insular notions of the uniqueness of American transcendentalism and exceptionalism. Anti-francophile sentiment was likely at work, implicitly critical of the elites’ dependence upon imported luxuries and overseas education at the expense of nationalistic development.

This split in the mulâtriste camp compelled Boyer to abdicate in 1843 (77). In the South, the Salomon family, large noir landholders, took advantage of the split to assert noir military power and express noir discontent. Demanding justice for noirs, they led an insurgency. Boyer’s successor Charles Hérard aîné, (the cousin of the aforementioned poet Hérard Dumesle), suppressed that insurgency. Its leaders were arrested. Thus, subsequently, peasants known as the piquets and led by Jean-Jacques Acaau revolted, armed with wooden pikes. They
demanded reform in education and politics and were also suspected of planning a massacre of mulâtres (78). (Unsurprisingly, the suspected massacre exhibited some striking parallels to the 1805 massacre of the whites.)

Around this time, the Spanish part of the island declared its independence. Noir discontent was also growing in the North. The Hérard government fell, and to shore up their position the mulâtriste faction erected a noir general, Guerrier, as a puppet ruler to be controlled by Dumesle and the writer Beaubrun Ardouin. This and subsequent puppet governments became known as la politique de doublure (79). (Doublure means understudy or stand-in.)

Following this move, the North itself seceded under Pierrot, a nationalist and noiriste. When the noir mulâtriste Guerrier died in 1845, Pierrot took over the South, reuniting the country. But Pierrot was replaced in 1846 by a mulâtriste named Riché, who was backed by the Ardouins. Riché himself soon died; then, in a compromise, a noiriste, General Faustin Soulouque, was elected president in 1847. One sees then in this short four-year span the intensity of political instability.

Soulouque had also been a doublure candidate. However, he soon eliminated actual and potential opponents, proclaiming himself emperor. He filled his cabinet with mulâtres and Freemasons, but allowed Vodun to be practiced more openly (82, 84). Though his administration undermined the power of certain local and foreign speculators, it posed no threat to foreign interests in general.

A dozen years later, in 1859, General Fabre Nicolas Geffrard came to power with mulâtriste backing (83). Geffrard is recorded in some accounts as an elite griffe—griffe being a colonial
racial category exactly between mulâtre and noir—while others name him as mulâtre. Geffrard encouraged immigration by blacks from the US during the US Civil War while expanding cotton cultivation to take advantage of its rise in price. He was, however, accused of encouraging entrée only of light-skinned US blacks while discouraging the immigration of Africans. He also went back to suppressing the practice of Vodun.

Geffrard’s fall from power marked the beginning of greater instability, though instability that had been presaged during the years from 1843 to 1847 and would intensify even further after 1911. Surviving an attempted coup by the Salomons in 1862 and an 1865 revolt in Cap Haitien by Silvain Salnave (a mulâtre general supported by the US), Geffrard was ultimately overthrown by Salnave in 1867 (85). This date marks the beginning of the institutionalization of noiriste and mulâtriste sentiment into the National Party and the Liberal Party. Salnave was a noiriste general whom many Northern noirs believed to be noir (108). Popular with the urban masses, he was ultimately driven from Port-au-Prince in 1869 by caco opponents (of the rural peasant classe intermédiaire, both noir and mulâtre), and killed (109).

Nissage Saget took his place and managed to last out his presidential term. Saget was said to be an elite griffe but in the mulâtriste camp. Under him, the Liberal Party emerged, led by Jean-Pierre Boyer Bazelais and Edmond Paul. Saget was succeeded in 1874 by his friend Michel Domingue, a noiriste general. However, Septimus Rameau, Domingue’s Vice President of the Council of Secretaries of State, actually held power. Rameau formed a group of largely noir politicians into the National Party. Domingue was then overthrown in 1876
by mulâtristes, led by General Pierre Boisrond-Canal. A split between the Boisrond-Canal and Boyer Bazelais wings of the Liberal Party led to the election of a National Party leader, one of the influential Salomons, in 1879 (110).

This president Salomon was accused of being a “mangeur des mulâtres,” an eater of mulattos, though he worked toward unity, at least rhetorically (110). He was brought down in 1888 and mulâtre general Seide Télémaque, his likely successor, was assassinated (111). F. D. Légitime and Florvil Hyppolite, noir generals with mulâtre support, then struggled for power. The puppet Légitime was replaced by the truer Liberal, Hyppolite, after eight months in office. When Hyppolite died in 1896, a noiriste, Simon Sam, succeeded him. Under Sam, German involvement in the Haitian economy increased.

In 1902, Pierre Nord-Alexis took power. Nord-Alexis was a noir general, a son of one of Christophe’s dignitaries and had been allied to two noiriste presidents before Michel Domingue had exiled him. He had switched to the Liberals under Canal and Hyppolite. During his administration, he brought out policies discriminatory to noirs and in 1908 he massacred the well-known noiriste-leaning poet, Massillon Coicou, and his family (112). This is the same Coicou whose reading of *Mimola* I treat in the afterword.

After a rising in the South that same year, Antoine Simon took power. At first, he enjoyed noiriste support but lost much of it in 1910 after signing the McDonald contract—a contract for a railway line between Port-au-Prince and Cap Haïtien with an American entrepreneur interested in developing fig banana plantations. McDonald’s “railroad concession became the basis of future construction work and expensive
claims against the Haitian government by American investors” (Schmidt 37). The cacos rebelled again in 1911, and the next six heads of state lasted in office, respectively, one year, ten months, nine months, nine months, four months, and five months. To prevent the anti-American noiriste leader Rosalvo Bobo from gaining power, the US invaded Haiti in July 1915 (Nicholls 146).

These shifts from political stability to instability and vice versa can be better understood by foregrounding two economic macro-events discussed by Benoit Joachim in Les Racines du Sous-Developpement en Haiti (The Roots of Underdevelopment in Haiti): official international recognition and the shift from a colonial to an independence economy. Haiti had experienced a unique fate among nations in the Western hemisphere in the modern era (68). For twenty-one-and-a-half years, the nation had no diplomatic relations with any other country or power in the world. International rapport with Haiti was almost exclusively commercial. When the United States and newly independent Latin American states (both aided to independence by Haitians) were being acknowledged as sovereign nations, Haiti’s self-evident sovereignty was ignored.

By 1814, France was desperate to regain its position in Haitian commerce (72–75). The French government sent delegates to Pétion proposing that the mulâtres agree to accommodate a renewed white presence in the nation, wherein the mulâtre would be just beneath the white in power and rights (76–77). This voluntary subordination would make it much easier to restrain the privileges of the caste below—those whose color was deemed “darker than” mulâtre. The noirs would return
to their pre-1789 position, and France would agree to institute rules on discipline, good order, and reasonable work, but none too severe. The worst noir agitators would be transported out of the country. When some of these French negotiators strayed into the North and were captured by Christophe’s men they were executed as spies. The South rejected the proposals as odious. But the rapist kept knocking on the door with proposals of marriage.

After at least three increasingly more realistic proposals came recognition by Latin American countries. Strengthened, Haiti threatened to break commercial ties to France at the ongoing international insult, and so King Charles X made his move (78). He promulgated a royal ordinance in April 1825 giving the impression that France was granting independence to Haiti rather than being put in the embarrassing position of concluding a treaty with them (80). The ordinance opened Haitian ports to all nations while granting France a permanent half-price sale on trading fees. It also required of Haiti a 150 million franc indemnity payable in five yearly installments and conceded governmental independence. At first Haiti rejected the ordinance as not capable of being received in form or content; so France put on pressure by menacing the Haitian coastline with a naval blockade (81–82). Having previously asked France to proclaim by royal ordinance Haiti’s independence, with quite another style of proclamation in mind, President Boyer decided to make it appear as though the word had been verbally transmitted to him that the king had recognized Haiti; he proceeded to establish diplomatic ties. (The United States, on the other hand, continued to withhold recognition until 1862.)
Historian William Chafe discusses five concentric circles of social control applied to racialized peoples (224–25). Haiti was visibly ringed by the first two: violence and economic domination. International recognition bought security, but at a dear price. As already discussed, Haiti had to pay an indemnity of unprecedented irony to the very people who by all concepts of equality still owe Haitians damages for converting them into property. To afford this indemnity while its economy, like most Caribbean islands, still witnessed far more imports than exports and possessed few facilities for the transformation of raw materials, several successive governments took out loans at usurious rates (Joachim 184).

Meanwhile, France’s “favored trading status” manufactured a further trade deficit. Laws against foreign (white) ownership of land began to erode as individuals in the government became personally and politically interested in the tie with European and American finance, at the expense of the nation as a whole (174–79). Many of the monetary deals involved transfers of virtual cash in France, meaning little or no money was flowing through Haiti’s treasury; moreover, cash there was being drained toward Europe (181). Printings of paper currency aggravated the situation. Some of the loan money went toward paying off foreign nationals whose governments backed them militarily and otherwise in claims of injury on Haitian soil (183). Another portion went to public works projects instead of development of production. When a National Bank was established in 1881, it was owned by an anonymous French society in Paris (185).

Noiriste and mulâtriste leaders each played significant roles in these poor economic decisions overdetermined by a
context in which the increasing threat of force played a large role. In other words, recognition ensured security only in the short term.

Meanwhile, throughout this stretch of time, Haiti’s economy was changing. The two most important shifts had been the freeing of the slaves and the dramatic increase in production for local consumption (195–99). These two changes resulted in a drop in sugar production (a labor-intensive and emotionally abhorrent reminder of slavery) and a rise in coffee production (199–206). Coffee was consumed locally by the masses, unlike in slave days, and it was also exported as the leading crop, but at a time when coffee cultivation and therefore competition was starting in larger countries like India and Africa. While still dependent on imports, especially from the US, Haiti became much less so than in colonial times, when food was a major import because of monocultural or cash crop cultivation for export. Indigenous crops and mixed or smaller plots began to replace the former non-sustenance agriculture. Haiti had also initiated trade with neighboring islands illicit during the colonial era. The sum of these two factors—the cost of recognition and shifts in the economy—equaled increasing threats to Haiti’s stability and independence as the sector responsible for repelling attacks became dependent upon its economic weapons of defense.

Given that *Mimola* takes place in an unspecified period setting, we are left to conjecture how these historical and economic contexts might play into interpreting the work. Do we see glimpses of Christophe’s authoritarianism or Boyer’s system of labor? Are the Georges or the Dajoberts part of or arrayed against a rural middle class political consciousness? During
what era do the Dajoberts and Deltans curry favor to send or in sending their sons to Paris, and what do the Deltans do to lose that favor that the Dajoberts retain? Presumably, Francine is born prior to 1804 or 1805, and perhaps Julie as well. Depending upon when we imagine the births of Mimola and Léon to have taken place, which could realistically be anywhere from 1820 to 1850, this places our action—once Mimola’s seizures begin—between 1835 and 1865.

The novel seems to end therefore (perhaps a bit unrealistically) at the present day, in the first decade of the 1900s. To some extent, Mimola’s identity as Julie’s youngest child and Léon’s as a child who arrives after an extended period of apparent barrenness in Francine, explain this longue durée. We might also figure that the last chapter brings us well into the maturity of the three younger characters, ending perhaps when they are in their fifties. Nevertheless, Innocent seems both to be playing a bit with time, perhaps to disguise or encode a particular historical context during a politically dangerous period, and to be impugning not a particular faction but the system and state that allows factionalism and factional unification against pro-Africanism to flourish. Perhaps further research into Innocent and Mimola will illuminate these intriguing questions.
i. I owe the observation regarding "a distinctly Caribbean intellectual history" to Professor Sylvia Wynter and her course in Caribbean literature at Stanford University in 1989.

ii. Controversy exists in the field of Haitian Studies regarding the extent to which color, white European heritage, and socioeconomic ties between white masters and their children by black women (and sometimes black men) have been factors influencing the positions of actors of black African heritage in the Haitian political and social landscapes of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries (Marlene Daut, keynote speaker, Haiti Beyond Commemorations conference, 12 May 2016). As a nonspecialist, my understanding has been shaped significantly by sources on Haitian political history that Daut and others critique for “leading” with skin color in their historical interpretations. While I find David Nicholls, among others, nuanced in his approach to incorporating terms like “mulâtriste” and “noiriste” into his work while refraining from assigning those terms simplistically to lighter-skinned and darker-skinned Haitian politicians respectively, it is well worth noting that the historical contexts given here are merely a sketch and must be questioned and complicated by the ongoing debates within Haiti and in the wider field.

Many writers would still say that an important principle to understanding race and color in Haiti is recognizing continuing influence into the post-Independence era of variations on formal and informal colonial division of blacks into distinct classes depending upon the admixture of European heritage. These divisions and distinctions work in markedly different ways from the United States’ default one-drop rule, or even the practice in parts of the US South during the nineteenth century of differentiating mulattos and quadroons (especially women) from others of African descent. Ultra-fine divisions in a French rather than English/US colonial context were based upon how much white European heritage those descended from interracial encounters possessed. Below is an example of how one Martiniquan writer of European descent from the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, who lived in Haiti for part of his
career, forged such divisions and influenced Haitian and French society to adopt taxonomic styles of perceiving human diversity:

Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint Méry’s Ten Classes of the Non-White Races in Colonial St. Domingue
(from Nicholls’ *From Dessalines to Duvalier*)

noir 0–7 parts white (8 increments)  
sacatra 8–23 parts white (16 increments)  
griffe 24–39 parts white (16 increments)  
marabou 40–48 parts white (9 increments)  
mulâtre 49–70 parts white (22 increments)  
quarteron 71–100 parts white (30 increments)  
métif (or métis) 101–112 parts white (12 increments)  
mamelouc 113–120 parts white (8 increments)  
quarteronné 121–124 parts white (4 increments)  
sang-mêlé 125–127 parts white (3 increments)

(For Moreau de Saint Méry, one African great-great-great-great-great-grandparent means that one is a sang-mêlé. Several of his terms can be found in other French writers earlier and later, such as Buffon and Hugo.)

iii. Noiriste and mulâtriste are political designations rather than racial ones. A very light-skinned individual with many generations of white European parentage could be in the noiriste camp just as individuals with only black African heritage could be mulâtristes. For example, as mentioned above, author Frédéric Marcelin supported Louis Saloman, although the former was mulâtre.

Heads of state in Haiti from 1804 to 1907. Term. Length of term. Political camp.
(Adapted from a text by L. C. Lhérisson)

1° Jean-Jacques Dessalines, governor-for-life starting on 1 January 1804, became emperor in September 1804 under the title of Jacques 1er. Died at Pont-Rouge, 17 October 1806. Nearly three years. Noiriste
2° Henri Christophe, president from 28 December 1806, took the title of king, 26 November 1811, died 8 October 1820. Nearly fourteen years (concurrent with Pétion). Noiriste

3° Alexandre Pétion, elected président 9 March 1807. Made himself president-for-life in 1816. Died March 1818. Eleven years (concurrent with Christophe). Mulâtriste

4° Jean-Pierre Boyer, 30 March 1818 to 30 March 1843. Twenty-five years. Mulâtriste

5° Charles Hérard, 31 December 1843 to 3 May 1844. Five months. Mulâtriste

6° Philippe Guerrier, 3 May 1844 to 15 April 1845. One year. Mulâtriste

7° J. N. Pierrot, 16 April 1845 to 1 March 1846. One year. Noiriste

8° J. Riché, 1 March 1846 to 27 February 1847. One year. Mulâtriste

9° Faustin Soulouque, president from 1 March 1847, became emperor from 29 August 1849 to 15 January 1859 under the title Faustin 1er. Nearly twelve years. Noiriste

10° Fabre Geffrard, 15 January 1859 to 13 March 1867. Eight years. Mulâtriste

11° Sylvain Salnave, 14 June 1867 to 19 December 1869. Two years, six months. Noiriste

12° Nissage Saget, 19 March 1870 to 15 May 1874. Four years. Mulâtriste

13° Michel Domingue, 11 June 1874 to 15 April 1876. Two years. Noiriste

14° Pierre Boisrond-Canal, 17 July 1876 to 17 July 1879. Three years. Mulâtriste

15° Louis Salomon, 23 October 1879 to 10 August 1888. Nine years. Noiriste

16° François Légitime, 16 December 1888 to 22 August 1889. Eight months. Mulâtriste

17° Florvil Hippolite, 9 October 1889 to 24 March 1896. Six years, six months. Mulâtriste

18° Tirésias Simon Sam, 31 December 1896 to 13 March 1902. Five years, two months. Noiriste
19° Pierre Nord-Alexis, 21 December 1902 to 2 December 1907. Five years. Mulâtriste

20° Antoine Simon, 17 December 1908 to 2 August 1911. Two years, seven months. Noiriste

21° Cincinnatus Leconte, 14 August 1911 to 8 August 1912. One year.

22° Tancrède Auguste, 8 August 1912 to 2 May 1913. Nine months.

23° Michel Oreste, 4 May 1913 to 27 January 1914. Nine months.

24° Oreste Zamor, 8 February 1914 to 29 October 1914. Nine months.

25° Davilmar Théodore, 7 November 1914 to 24 February 1915. Four months.

iv. *Affranchi* means enfranchised and/or holding landed property. *Ancien libre* means formerly freed while *nouveaux libre* means newly freed.

v. Eméric Bergeaud, the author of *Stella*, the first Haitian novel published posthumously in 1859, was Beaubrun Ardouin’s cousin. Bergeaud himself became a pro-Borgella, anti-Soulouque mulâtriste.


—. Introduction (to the Francophone Literature Section). *Arnold* 309–316


La Ronde: Revue Littéraire et critique. 5 Mai 1898–15 Avril 1902.


Tante Rosalie had first seen the light of day on the shores of Dahomey. Upon coming of age, she had suffered the same fate as so many others, unwitting victims, carried to Saint-Domingue by an odious trade. Father, mother, brother, sisters had all suddenly disappeared, dispersed, alas! to different parts of the island.

What dark days she had known! What atrocities, what tortures! Scars ranging all over her body attested to the inhumanity of the colonists.

But finally, the hour of deliverance rang; and there she is now, dragging her old carcass through the streets.