Revisionist and Feminist Narratives on Empire, Slavery and the Haitian Revolution

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Foreword

This book is organized around revisionist and feminist interpretations of the Haitian Revolution, colonialism, imperialism and slavery from the period preceding the beginning of the Haitian Revolution in 1791 through the mid-nineteenth century. The theme of the Haitian Revolution and the related historical contexts of colonialism, slavery and abolitionism in the United States, Britain and France are addressed throughout the book with a climax in Harriet Martineau's revisionist fictional biography of the leader of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint Louverture, *The Hour and the Man* (1841). "Revisionist" in this context is used in two opposing definitions: first, it is applied with a negative connotation to the racially biased French interpretations of the Haitian Revolution which were narrated from the perspective of white colonists who condemned the revolutionary black leader, Toussaint Louverture and his followers for their violence and duplicity. These accounts were intended as propaganda to explain the loss of the French colony and massacres of remaining white colonists. In some cases, as in Louis Dubroca's biographies of Toussaint and his general, Jacques Dessalines, they were also intended to foment a counter-revolution to reclaim Haiti after its independence in 1804. Those accounts are racist and diametrically opposed to postmodern 20th-21st century and Civil Rights era revisionist histories that correct historical inaccuracies and the racist biase that characterizes early histories of colonialism.

Second, the term, "revisionist" is applied with a positive connotation to subsequent abolitionist and feminist revisionist novels and poetry that anticipate modern 20th – 21st century revisionist histories by seeking to redress racist accounts of slave uprisings with a new discourse that condemns the evils of white colonialism and slavery. Women's unique perspectives as feminist social commentators shed light on the abolitionist movement which responded to the horrible abuses of slavery and racism in the nineteenth-century. The book chapter organization begins with Leonora Sansay's *The Secret History, or the*

Horrors of Santo Domingo (1808) in which she corroborates much of the racial stereotyping found in early accounts of the Haitian Revolution although her narrative is told from the perspective of white feminism. This study concludes with a final chapter about Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848) and "A Curse for a Nation" (1856). These texts, which support the abolitionist movement, especially in America, are revisionist feminist narratives in which the poet seeks to revise and retell colonial history from the perspective of slaves who condemn their masters' cruelty. The impact of nineteenth century feminist authors on public opinion and the politics of abolitionism is examined throughout within the historical context of contemporary revisionist texts.

The sequence of book chapters is roughly chronological and includes chapters on Napoleon's campaign to reclaim Haiti from Toussaint in contrast to Napoleon's brother, Lucien Bonaparte's condemnation of slavery and colonialism in his novel, *La Tribu Indienne, ou Edouard et Stellina* (1799). Chapters on Germaine de Staël's early novellas, *Mirza* (1786) and *Zulma* (1795), and her later anti-slavery activism, as well as Jane's Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Sanditon* address the widespread impact of the Haitian Revolution on French and British Caribbean and African colonies. Additional authors who significantly shaped contemporary views of colonialism, racism and slavery are also analyzed in the context of these feminist authors, including Mary Wollstonecraft and Fanny Burney, as well as male authors, Edmund Burke and Chateaubriand. The related events of Louisiana Purchase (1803) and the plight of Native Americans in French Louisiana are also included in an analysis of Chateaubriand's writings, *The Genius of Christianity* (1802) and his novella, *The Natchez*, since these events were also impacted by the Haitian Revolution and resulting immigration between these two regions.

Illustrations tell a parallel story about the racism, colonialism and the abolitionist movement. They are organized for emphasis and the overall impact on the analysis, beginning with a portrait of Harriet

Martineau (fig. 1), who made a lasting impact on the abolitionist movement in America. This portrait is followed by a contemporary French portrait of Toussaint Louverture as the leader of the Haitian Revolution and later posthumous portraits. Next, Agostino Brunias' paintings of both free mixed-race society and white planters are included. They were originally commissioned by a regional colonial British governor of Dominica and plantation owner, William Young, to promote a positive image of slavery in the Lower Antilles but were so widely distributed as prints and buttons that they also effectively promoted racial equality in Haiti and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Also included are illustrations to early historical accounts of the Haitian campaign which provide a context for their racist bias and revisionist discourse. In addition, major works in the history of art that reference abolition and slavery, including Girodet-Trioson's *Portrait of Jean Baptiste Belley*, Deputy to Saint Domingue and his painting *Atala* (1808), inspired by Chateaubriand's novella are included as well as Eugene Delacroix's *The Natchez* (1835), which is also inspired by Chateaubriand's novella. Other paintings include Joseph Mallord William Turner's *The Slave Ship* (1840) which depicts an event from Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Slave Trade* (1808) while Theodore Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) references the unsuccessful attempt to abolish the slave trade in French Senegal. Finally, Hiram Powers' *The Greek Slave* (1850) is included since it inspired Elizabeth Barrett Browning's' poem of the same title and was associated with both abolition and women's suffrage. All of the illustrations have been placed within the context of revisionist and feminist authors their historical contexts.

Chapter 1
Leonora Sansay and Aaron Burr: Empire and Revolution in Haiti

American author, Mary Hassal, also known as Leonora Sansay, published her novel, *Zelica*, in London in 1820. It is a revised and expanded version of her novel, *Secret History, or The Horrors of Santo Domingo, in a series of letters, written by a lady at Cape Francois, to Colonel Burr, late vice-president of the United States, principally during the command of General Rochambeau* (Philadelphia,1808). Sansay's character, Clara, is based on her own experiences as the wife of an American planter who returned to Haiti in 1802 when the French led by General Emmanuel Leclerc on Napoleon's orders sought to reimpose French rule. The Haitian Revolution inspired by the French Revolution of 1789 was led by Toussaint Louverture and in 1801 he declared himself governor for life. He was later captured by the French and died in prison in 1803. Initially, Toussaint did not fight against the French, but for them. After slavery was abolished by the French Constitution of the Early Republic in 1794, the French recruited former slaves to fight both the British and Spanish who sought to reimpose slavery on behalf of the white plantation owners. It was only after Toussaint declared himself governor for life and attempted to establish a new constitution for a free independent Haiti that Napoleon decided to remove him from power and regain control over Haiti in the French expedition of 1802.[1] Sansay's novel begins after the capture of Toussaint and places her heroine among the key figures of the revolution, including Pauline, Napoleon's sister and wife of General Charles Victor Emannuel LeClerc, French General Rochambeau, Jacques Dessalines (Toussaint's successor), and Henri Christophe (Dessalines' successor).

[1] Philippe Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801-1804* (University of Alabama Press, 2011).

Some of the male military commanders who determine the fate of the island with the outcome of the revolution also interact with Sansay's female character on an intimate level, making her novel's heroine a coquette. The role of her female characters within the political dynamics of the Haitian revolution heightens the perceived threat against whites by retaliating slaves and gives her audience a glimpse into expected future slave revolts. Sansay's novel supports the interests of plantation owning Southern states in America from the perspective of whites, not abolitionists. Her novel warns of the dire consequences of a slave rebellion but at the same time condemns the white colonial social hierarchy based on race that leads to the revolt. In addition, Sansay's analysis of the interracial dynamics between the white minority, the mixed race *gens de couleur* or mulattos and black slaves or negroes, sheds light on the unofficial policies of both Americans and French who contributed to the mixed-race population by producing children with their slaves. Sansay's emphasis on the violence of the Haitian Revolution suggests that Sansay supports a revisionist history that appealed to her white audience. The narrator's perception of the French campaign succinctly summarizes the goals of white colonists who returned to the island to restore their claims to their slaves and plantations. Sansay's narrator analyzes the historical setting:

> The natives of this country murmur already against the general in chief; they say he places too much confidence in the negroes. When Toussaint was seized he had all the black chiefs in his power, and, by embarking them for France, he would have spread terror throughout the Island, and the negroes would have been easily reduced, instead of which he relies on their good faith, has them continually in his house, at his table, and wastes the time in conference which should be differently employed. The Creoles shake their heads and predict much ill. Accustomed to the climate, and acquainted with the manner of fighting the Negroes, they offer advice, which is not listened to; nor are any of them employed, but all places of honour or emolument are held by Europeans, who appear to regard the Island as a place to

> be conquered and divided among the victors, and are consequently viewed by the natives with a jealous eye. Indeed the professed intention of those who have come with the army, is to make a fortune, and return to France with all possible speed, to enjoy it. It cannot be imagined that they will be very delicate about the means of accomplishing their purpose.[2]

Sansay's account of the Haitian Revolution cannot be separated completely from the politics of her patron, then US Vice-President Aaron Burr. Scholar Talia Argondezzi suggests that Sansay began "experimenting with two new ways of influencing public affairs by acting as Burr's courier…and composing a fictionalization of her experiences in the West Indies."[3] Burr's biographer, Nancy Isenberg, suggests that Aaron Burr knew Sansay as early as 1797. Sansay spoke French fluently and remained in contact with Burr at least until 1812.[4] They most certainly had a love affair, as Burr was known as an amorous adventurer and kept a secret cache of her letters. On the day before his infamous duel with Alexander Hamilton, Burr gave instructions to his servant to dispose of a certain batch of love letters tied with a red ribbon, in the event that he did not survive.[5] Sansay's narrative in the form of letters to Burr suggests that he was far more than an acquaintance, and also a lover. Her epistolary novel addresses Burr as the recipient of 27 out of 29 letters, demonstrating the significance of his role in Sansay's venture, and she refers to Burr as both a "friend and a protector."[6]

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[2] Leonora Sansay, *The Secret History; or, The Horrors of Santo Domingo, A Series of Letters Written by a Lady at Cape Francois to Colonel Burr* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1808), 9-10.

[3] Talia Argondezzi, "The Haitian Revolution and the Limitations of White Feminism: A Comparison of *Zelica, the Creole* and Leonora Sansay's *Secret History*," *Studies in American Fiction* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 1.

[4] Isenberg, Nancy. *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (Penguin Books, 2008), 239-40.

[5] Isenberg, *Fallen Founder*, 241.

[6] Sansay, *Secret History*, 154.

Sansay's relationship with her husband, Louis Sansay, was clouded by a domestic dispute that Burr resolved by agreeing to carry out her husband's legal wishes that $12,000 be settled on his widow in the event of his death.[7] Scholars Helen Hunt and Melissa Adams Campbell both acknowledge that violence of racial conflicts implodes in the domestic sphere that Sansay fictionalized in her *Secret History*.[8] In addition, Michelle Burnham asserts that desire is the drive that also motivates the commercial transactions concerning property and slaves in Sansay's narrative. Burnham states that "the bodies of women [act] as transistors between economic and sexual circuits."[9] Indeed, the economic strategies of Creoles were intimately bound to their sexual and social relationships which reinforced divisions according to class and race while creating a subdivision for mixed race people who often mitigated violent rebellions of negro slaves by siding with their closer peers, the white colonists. Sansay's later 1820 version of her novel, titled *Zelica*, includes Clara's rape by her husband, while he lusts after the beautiful *mulatresse*, Zelica, demonstrating the perceived climate of sexual license that permeated the Creole community. Burr's own efforts in producing mixed race children in the course of military and administrative duties is likewise evidence of an unofficial policy that was carried out by white slave owners.[10]

Sansay's later 1820 version of her novel, *Zelica,* features as the protagonist the mixed-race daughter of a white reformer and demonstrates that the survival of whites during the Revolution is

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[7] Isenberg, *Fallen Founder*, 240.

[8] Helen Hunt, "Fascinate, Intoxicate, Transport': Uncovering Women's Erotic Dominance in Leonora Sansay's *Secret History*. *Legacy* 33, no. 1 (2016): 32; Melissa Adams- Campbell, "Romantic Revolutions: Love and Violence in Leonora Sansay's Secret History, or the Horrors of St. Domingo," *Studies in American Fiction* 39, no.2 (2012): 125– 46.

[9] Michelle Burnham, "Female Bodies and Capitalist Drive: Leonora Sansay's *Secret History* in Transoceanic Context," *Legacy* 28, no. 2 (2011): 182.

[10] J. Heuer, "The One-Drop Rule in Reverse? Interracial Marriages in Napoleonic and Restoration France." *Law and History Review,* 27, no. 3 (2009): 515-548. doi:10.1017/S0738248000003898; Deborah Jenson, *The Slave Narrative: Politics Sex and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011). https://doi.org/10.5949/UPO9781846316517.

dependent upon their ability to wield the goodwill of their former slaves and mixed-race servants, but also includes episodes that illustrate the horror of this policy turned on its head. For example, a revolting slave promises to protect his white mistress only if she gives him her white daughter, Adelaide. This exchange ends in disaster as both mother and daughter are heinously murdered. Adelaide's gruesome murder mimics the torture and lynching of slaves when she is hung from the neck by an iron hook in the marketplace while another white mother and daughter are chained together and forced to work in the scorching sun all day while being whipped by negro overseers. [11] Scholars observe that Sansay's account of slave revolution in Haiti promotes negative racial stereotyping of African slaves and their power over whites and women. Matt Clavin observes that Sansay's account was a dire "apocalyptic" warning about the consequences of emancipation which would result in the torture of massacres of whites in a manner like that imposed by whites on their slaves.[12]

Undoubtedly Sansay's relationship with her patron, Burr, had a profound impact on her career as an author and her desire and ability to portray the events occurring in Haiti during the revolution. Burr, though condemned by modern historians for attempting to make himself emperor of the Louisiana Territory and killing the former U.S. Secretary of State and Senior Military Officer, Alexander Hamilton, in a duel over Hamilton's slander, embraced a heroic campaign that mimicked Napoleon's expansionist agenda in Europe. An attorney and politician, Burr's life was a contradiction of American republicanism. He owned household slaves but also represented the interests of manumitted slaves in court cases while proposing legislation for the abolition of slavery in New York. In addition, he made plans to free his slaves in the will he wrote prior to his duel with Hamilton.[13]

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[11] Sansay, *Secret History*, 145, 151-153.

[12] Matt Clavin, "Race, Rebellion, and the Gothic: Inventing the Haitian Revolution," *Early American Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007): 14.

[13] David Stewart, *American Emperor: Aaron Burr's Challenge to Jeffersonian America* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), 7, 28.

Burr's relationship with Sansay reflects the conflicting features of Burr's own platform in which he espoused women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery while at the same time owning slaves and promoting a dictatorial political regime that included Sansay's arranged marriage and the reinstatement of slavery in Haiti. The fact that he arranged Louis and Leonora Sansay's trip to restore white ownership of their planation attests to their mutual motivations. Sansay's marriage to an older French widower took place just prior to their departure for Santo Domingo after Sansay had travelled to Washington to meet with Burr, who, as Vice President of the United States, directed his cousin and District Judge of Connecticut, Pierpont Edwards to prepare a letter of introduction for her to French General Rochambeaud for her arrival in Haiti.[14]

> Madame Sansay will sail with her husband for St. Domingo (I believe the Cape) in a few Days -- She is the Lady of whom you may have heard me speak under the Name of Leonora, married about two years ago to Mr. Sansay a reputable French Merch[an]t. formerly of that Island but for some Years past resident of N York - I pray you to give Made. S. a very Warm letter of introduction to General Rochambeau [the French Commander at Haiti] -- You may speak very highly of her talents, her acquirements and her accomplishments - She speaks & writes French & has more sense & information than all the women to be found in St. Dom. -- Enclose the letter to her and direct as underneath -- leave open your letter to Rochambeaud & pray let it be written and signed in a legible hand.[15]

This imperialist agenda coalesces with Burr's own campaigns to extend the boundaries of America to form his own private empire from the Louisiana Territory since the sale of the Louisiana Purchase was the

[14] Nancy Isenberg, *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 240.
[15] Letter to Pierpont Edwards, in Mary-Jo Kline, *Political Correspondence & Public Papers of Aaron Burr* (Princeton University Press, 1983) 2:702.

direct result of the French campaign in Haiti.[16] The facts that Burr's 'agent,' Sansay, helped to shape public opinion with the publication of her novel and that she appeared in New Orleans at his treason trial demonstrates her complicity. On the other hand, the liberal tendencies in Burr's political philosophy owe to a trend during the Enlightenment that favored women's rights and shunned slavery. Burr's admiration for Mary Wollstonecraft is one example. While in England, he sought out her husband, William Godwin, to express his appreciation of her enduring legacy. Another example of his support of new Enlightenment ideals is his admiration of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and his friendship with the philosopher during Burr's exile in England. In fact, Burr, the politician, paid homage to the liberal intellectual fashions of his day while at the same time, clinging to archaic notions of imperialism which were closer to Napoleon than Jefferson, according to one biographer.[17]

Thus, Sansay's relationship with Burr influenced her portrayal of slavery during the Haitian Revolution. Burr represented such contradictions between democratic freedom and the hypocrisy of slavery and imperialism in Federal period America which championed the values of liberal democracy while at the same time condoning the barbarity of slavery and furthering imperialist designs. The sale of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 by Napoleon created the opportunity for land speculation by Americans as well as imperialist expansion. Burr mounted the possibilities of creating a Western Empire with himself as its emperor which included plans to also invade Mexico and Florida and liberate them from Spanish rule. Burr was not alone in these grandiose endeavors. John Jacob Astor also intended to create his own private empire to control the beaver pelt trade with the indigenous natives in the Northwestern Territory and name it, Astoria. After his indictment for treason, Burr turned to Astor to give him a loan from the

[16] Alan Forrest, *The Death of the French Atlantic: Trade War and Slavery in the Age of Revolution* First ed. (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[17] Noel Gerson, *The Great American Rascal: The Turbulent Life of Aaron Burr* (Heroes and Villains from American History, 1973; Sapere Books, Kindle version, 2021), 203.

subsequent successful property investments Astor made in Manhattan after Native Americans sacked Fort Astoria on the West Coast.[18] Sansay's novels can be viewed as an extension of this imperialist expansion plot which aimed at placing Burr as emperor.

Ultimately, Sansay's heroine becomes a victim of both white and black male oppression. As a woman, she narrowly retains her virtue from flirtations with General Rochambeau but is abused by her husband while the general lusts after her. In the later version of her novel, *Zelica* (1820) she dissociates her character from the evil institution of slavery by killing Clara off in an accident in which she accidentally receives a fatal wound from the dagger of Zelica's white father, De la Riviere, which was intended for his black assassin, Gaude, with the result that both Clara and Zelica's father die. This event is preceded by a vodou ceremony by the slave, Madelaine, that implies that the evil magic of the ceremony has caused an act of revenge that results in a white man accidentally killing a white woman with the blow intended for his black assassin, and then dying himself:

> Madeline gathered dry sticks from the walks and borders of the garden and raised with great symmetry a pile in the garden on which having placed a small cauldron…she put into it, all the while murmuring half uttered incantations, a large quantity of bees' wax with the black sealing wax she had received from the American consul. The negroes…gradually collected round the sorcerer to witness…against whom it was directed…Terror seized her superstitious audience when they discovered that out of the mass of wax, she began to form…the figure of a man. This was the most potent charm directed by African magicians against those whom they intended to… destroy.[19]

[18] Anderson Cooper and Katherine Howe, *Astor: The Rise and Fall of an American Fortune* (Harper Collins, 2023), 30-37.
[19] Leonora Sansay, *Zelica, or the Creole* (London: Fearman, 1820), III: chapter 7.

Victoria Barnett-Woods suggests that Madelaine is a protector against male oppression. However, in the novel's climax, Madelaine's powerful spell facilitates the black insurgents' goal of establishing their free Haitian state. Despite the devotion of the old slave Madelaine to Clara, the vodou ceremony causes a misfire in which Clara expires in the arms of Glaude, the black general and assassin who had previously kidnapped her. Madelaine is the first to arrive on the scene which she illuminates with a resin torch in one hand while she holds the magical image in the other from her previous vodou spell designed to ward off the evil, Gaude. Even in death, Clara is entwined in the power of Madelaine's vodou spell which now acts independently of its sorceress' commands. Monique Allewaert discusses the vodou fetishization of Clara's body when Madelaine wraps Clara's wrists and ankles with jessamine: Beneath "the dawn of the tropical sky illumined with its blaze of crimson… Madelaine, kneeling by the side of her murdered mistress…fastened round her wrists and ankles bands of flowering jessamine and covered her face with a veil…"[20] At the same time, the jessamine wrapped around Clara's wrists and ankles also suggests the bondage of slaves take vengeance against their white persecutors. Clara not only appears to be "adorned like a bride" but as the subconscious target of Madelaine's vodou spell. This interpretation is supported by Clara's death in Glaude's arms, the black general who lusted after her and kidnapped her. Madelaine constructs an altar-like structure around Clara's body with four stakes around the body, palm leaves and twigs which recall vodou altars constructed by slaves outdoors in nature. Clara's bier is "raised on a small natural terrace that overhung the sea" for her funeral. When Zelica witnesses the spectacle of Clara's death, she "gave one heart-broken shriek, flew to the edge of the rock, extended her arms to heaven, and plunged into the waves." The reference to the sea and Zelica's plunge into its waves suggests the invocation of another vodou lwa, LaSiren, who is a mermaid and wife of the ruler of the sea, Met Agwa. LaSiren, who is called with a conch

[20] Victoria Barnett-Woods, "Creole Nationalism, Mobility and Gendered Politics in *Zelica, the Creole*," in *Transatlantic Women Travelers, 1688-1843,* ed. Misty Kruger (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2021), 175-178.

shell, can also exert a strong malignant unconscious force in her other form, the whale, Labellen.[21]

Sansay never mentions vodou by name. Her subsequent move to New Orleans during Burr's treason trial would have made her aware of the numerous Haitian immigrants and their influence on the local versions of vodou, called voodoo and hoodoo. She may well have feared misrepresenting their powerful beliefs which were preserved orally and in the form of rituals. However, she also must have feared retaliation for her participation in the Haitian Revolution on the side of a French Haitian plantation owner. In fact, Louis Sansay had sold his Haitian plantation to Toussaint Louverture during the outbreak of the revolution in 1791.[22] This connection to the deceased leader of the revolution who was captured during the French invasion and invoked as a lwa in vodou by slaves would have triggered an enormous resentment against her by Haitians. Ogbu Kalu quotes Thomas Jefferson's reaction to Haitian immigration when he wrote to Judge George Tucker of the United States District Court for the District of Virginia: "Perhaps the first chapter of this history," he began, "which has begun in St. Domingo, and the next succeeding ones which will recount how all the whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy and necessity, and furnish an answer to the difficult question "Whither shall the coloured emigrants go?" Kalu believes that Jefferson referred to his own mixed-race children with Sally Hemings when he concluded, "But if something is not done, and soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children."[23]

[21] Mambo Chita Tann, *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Spiritual Traditions* (Llewellyn Publications, 2012), 60.
[22] Allewart, *Ariel's Ecology*, 150.
[23] Quoted in Obgu Kalu, "Ancestral Spirituality and Society in Africa" in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2000), 7.

Thus, without naming them, Sansay integrates their rituals into her narrative with their distinctive nature aesthetics as determining her white character's malignant fate. The author knowingly combines the syncretic elements of vodou which preserved and superimposed Catholic beliefs and saints onto vodou lwa. For example, Madelaine calls a reluctant priest to perform Clara's last rites at the picturesque location of her funeral on a precipice although the Catholic Church officially left Haiti during the revolution. Sansay's knowledge of vodou, came from her contact with Creoles and slaves as well as published descriptions of the vodou ceremony that was performed to signal the outbreak of the revolution in 1791. This event was widely circulated in the early published accounts of the Haitian Revolution. For example, Marcus Rainsford's *Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805) references the vodou ceremony led by the Jamaican born maroon, Dutty "Zamba" Boukman (d. 1791) at Bois Cayman which resulted in the burning of Cap Francois.

The most common source of knowledge about vodou actually came from a variant called 'obeah' or 'obi' which was prevalent in British colonies like Jamaica. The association of obeah with slave rebellion was so strong that slaves were severely punished for practicing it. A popular novel of the period that addresses the slaves' practice of obeah is William Burdett's *The life and exploits of three-finger'd Jack, the terror of Jamaica.: With a particular account of the Obi; being the only true one of that celebrated and fascinating mischief, so prevalent in the West Indies* (1801)[24]. There are some direct parallels to Sansay's descriptions of Madelaine's rituals. For example, Burdett writes that Amalkir, "an obeah practitioner, dwelt in a loathsome cave, far removed from the enquiring eyes of the suspicious whites, in the blue Mountains. He was old and shriveled…His cave was the dwelling place or refuge of robbers; he encouraged them in their depredations and gave them Obi, that they might fearless rush where danger flood." This obi is called upon by

[24] William Burdett, *The life and exploits of three-finger'd Jack, the terror of Jamaica.: With a particular account of the Obi; being the only true one of that celebrated and fascinating mischief, so prevalent in the West Indies* (London: 1801), 16.

persecuted slaves to aid them in their vengeance against whites. Sansay's vodou aestheticism that enshrouds her murdered heroine reveals this practice as the underlying cause of Clara's misfortune as well as Zelica's leap into the sea. The mermaid deity in obeah is Watra Mama or Mami Wata. According to an account by J[ohn] G[abriel] Stedman, *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1813), "sage matrons" would perform a dance to worship her in which they whirled around until they foamed at the mouth and dropped to the floor in convulsions when the spirit had possessed them. In this state they could give direct and dangerous orders to crowds of onlookers who observed the ceremony. The dance was considered so infectious by whites that it was outlawed in the 1770s in Surinam and Berbice.[25] When Zelica throws herself into the sea, she has certainly been possessed by the Watra Mama or the vodou lwa, Lasiren/Labellen.

In the earlier version of Sansay's novel, *The Secret History: The Horrors of Santo Domingo* (1808), Clara flees to Jamaica, where obeah was widely practiced, and is later joined by her sister, the narrator, Mary, who represents the author, Leonora Sansay or Mary Hassal in the 1808 version.[26] Sean Goudie suggests that the character of Clara, who is the married sister, becomes "prepossessed, if not possessed" by vodou lwa Erzulie in Letter 28, where she becomes the narrator after her separation from her sister Mary.[27] As evidence, Goudie cites the scene in which Clara enters a shrine in Bayam. This transformation into the Virgin/Erzulie occurs after Clara recognizes that the people's poverty is the direct result of their colonial exploitation, and she observes that "the image of the Virgin, fancifully adorned and reposing on a bed of roses, appears like the residing genius of the place." The location is the site of an abandoned copper mine and the people, she notes, are almost all

[25] Randy M. Browne, The "Bad Business" of Obeah: Power, Authority, and the Politics of Slave Culture in the British Caribbean, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (July 2011), 464-465.
[26] Sansay, *The Secret History, or the Horrors of Santo Domingo* (Philadelphia, 1808), 204.
[27] Sean Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 212-213.

mulattos who live in abject poverty. The shrine's location, however, "of craggy cliffs over barren rocks and precipices which the eye dares not measure, [makes] the mind almost involuntarily…[yield] to the belief of supernatural agency. The waxen tapers, continually burning, the obscurity that reigns within, occasioned by the impenetrable branches of the trees which overshadow it, and the slow solemn organ, re-echoed by the surrounding rocks, fill the mind with awe; and we pardon the superstitious faith of the ignorant votaries of this holy lady…"[28] The description of the shrine located in Bayam suggests the syncretic practices of African slaves that synthesized vodou lwa, or spirits, with the identities of Christian saints. This tranquil description of a holy site contrasts markedly with the prevailing belief that vodou was used to foment slave uprisings but also demonstrates how aesthetic its remote sublime location in nature is. In fact, Toussaint Louverture, often used vodou in his public ceremonies to unite the slaves under his cause, and after his death he was invoked as a lwa spirit. When Clara receives unwanted attention from General Rochambeau via one unnamed Major B___[Boyer], she replies: "you have a familiar spirit who informs you of my movements! Why not, he replied, are you not an enchantress and have you not employed all the powers of magic to enslave me?"[29] Major B__ also acts as an intermediary for the letters of General Rochambeau who also desires Clara. At the foot of mountain road that leads to the fort, the general draws her to the edge of a rock and kneels to implore her passionately and seizes her hand at the same moment that her husband, St. Louis approaches. The missing name of the anonymous Major B__ implies a potential indiscretion that the author dare not name, such as an illicit interracial relationship. However, in the later version, *Zelica* (1820) he is identified as Major Boyer, who is first introduced in *The Secret History* (1808) as Pauline's amorous companion and described as a "fascinating votary" who worships Pauline, Napoleon's sister and wife of General Leclerc, with vows at the Idalian [Idulim, Cyprus] shrine for the worship of Aphrodite.[30] When Clara's

[28] Sansay, *Secret History*, 212.
[29] Sansay, *Secret History*, 94.
[30] Sansay, *Secret History*, 12.

husband arrives, the major wraps a wreath of jessamine around Clara's arm as he tells St. Louis that he had come just in time to prevent General Rombeau from running away with his wife.[31] The implied tryst places Clara in a dangerous position with her husband who will assault her when he suspects her infidelity and also suggests that the practice of vodou can cause harm to whites. The action takes place in a remote location near Ft. Picolet, like the shrine in Bayam, but located at the foot of a mountain where "the rocks are covered with Arabian jessamine which grows here in the greatest profusion. Its flexible branches form among the cliffs moving festoons, and fantastic ornaments, and its flowers, whiter than snow, fill the air with intoxicating fragrance."[32] This incident is precipitated by a ball in which Clara is dressed, as Goudie points out, like the vodou spirt Erzulie/Virgin Mary: "Dressed in a robe ornamented with wreaths of flowers, she joined the sweetness of Flora [Roman goddess of Spring] to the lightness of the youngest of the graces…"[33] The attention that Clara receives from the general at the ball convinces her husband, St. Louis to send her and her sister to St. Jago de Cuba. Major B__ objects to this transfer and tells Clara "that she was wrong in being so entirely governed by her husband," to which Clara replies "that she had suffered much in consequence of coquetting with general Rochambeau…."[34] Mary's attempts at freedom are thwarted until the end the novel, *The Horrors of Santo Domingo* when she and Clara flee Haiti for Cuba, and finally return to Philadelphia, without Clara's husband, St. Louis. Mary's act of narration places her in a subordinate role to her male patron, Burr, until the success of the revolution itself frees her from male domination after she and her sister escape. In *The Secret History*, the narrator, Mary, who is the sister of Clara, observes that Clara is miserable in her marriage to a "loquacious" talker who bores her. She feels powerless in the bonds of marriage and her inability to dissolve them. In Letter 1 in *The Secret History* (1808), Mary observes that Clara "repents everyday

[31] Sansay, *Secret History*, 96.
[32] Sansay, *Secret History*, 93.
[33] Sansay, *Secret History*, 88.
[34] Sansay, *Secret History*, 91.

having so precipitously chosen a husband. It is impossible for two creatures to be more different and I forsee that she will be wretched." Sansay, Secret History (Philadelphia, 1808), 2.

Sansay's story was consistent with the attitudes of whites about the hostile intentions of their slaves, and publicity surrounding the Haitian Revolution would only have confirmed her white audience's belief that enslaved Africans were a volatile revolutionary population that needed to be subdued and contained. In Haiti where whites comprised only 5% of the population, the ratio of slaves to whites was much higher, while in the Antebellum South by 1860, the ratio of whites to slaves was approximately 2 to 1 with a white population double that of slaves, who numbered nearly 4 million people. In addition, 70% of the Haitian slaves who began revolting in 1791 had largely been born in Africa, and had a life expectancy of only 7 years.[35] During the first revolts of 1791-1793, prior to the abolition of slavery, white newspapers had reported massacres of white plantation owners: "Thousands of women, old men and children who could not find the necessary means to embark… await, with consternation and terror, their turn to be massacred."[36] After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the United States suspended diplomatic ties and trade with Haiti until after the Civil War.

Sansay's novel takes the reader into the luxurious estates of Creole society but disrupts this idyllic paradise afforded by slaves with the ensuing French invasion and retaliation by Haitians in their fight for independence and freedom. Agostino Brunias (c.1730-1796) was an Italian born and trained painter who spent his career painting the people of the British Caribbean, especially the islands of St. Vincent and Dominica. After studying in Rome at the prestigious Accademia di St. Luca, he was employed by the famous neoclassical architect Robert Adam at his Rome studio and then accompanied him back to England

[35] M.J. Drexler and Leonora Sansay, *The Secret History, or the Horrors of Santo Domingo* (1808) (Broadview, 2008), 20.
[36] Quoted by Drexler in intro to *The Secret History*, 23; "From the New York Journal to All Sympathizing Souls," *New Jersey Journal*, Sept. 28, 1793: I.

where he completed murals for Adam's architectural commissions for grand stately English houses in the neoclassical style. Brunias was then hired by William Young to accompany him to St. Vincent and Dominica to portray the race-based classes of society through a lens that was acceptable to the slave-owning British who owned and maintained the plantations there. Brunias' subjects include free mixed-race women who enjoyed a higher social status than African born slaves and were known for their distinctive textile fashions which they also sold.[37] His paintings were applauded at the London Royal Academy of Art when they were exhibited in the 1770s and prints of his paintings were published in England and France through the 1790s. They provide an idyllic and romanticized portrayal of colonial life from the perspective of white plantation owners and never bely the slave rebellions that began fomenting throughout the Caribbean after the French Revolution. In fact, Toussaint is said to have worn 18 of Brunias' painted buttons on his general's uniform, including one depicting an African chief.[38] This button in the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum (fig. 6) depicts a dark-skinned man wearing a headdress, suggesting his status as an African king, with two dark complected women and one lighter skinned woman standing outside of a humble hut in a tropical setting.[39] Toussaint's adoption of Brunias' buttons for his uniform connects positive attitudes about the artist's depiction of race in the portrayal of prosperous black and *gens de couleur* labor to the genealogy of Toussaint. According to his biographers, Toussaint's family believed their ancestry could be traced to Alladas' African royalty in the Kingdom of Ardra located in the Western Gold Coast. The African king, Gaou Guinoum, was sold into slavery by the African king, Agaja and the Dahomians after their defeat of the Adallas

[37] Kenna Libes. "Agostino Brunias: Free Women of Color with their Children and Servants in Aa Landscape." *Fashion History Timeline*. Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York. (fitnyc.edu). Feb. 3, 2021.

[38] Anne Geracimos, "A Mystery in Miniature: An Enigmatic Button Once Decorated the Uniform of Haitian Liberator, Toussaint Louverture," *Smithsonian Magazine* (Jan 2000) (smithsonianmag.com).

[39] Object ID 18383285. http://cprhw.tt/o/2CdHc/ Button | Objects | Collection of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

in 1724. Toussaint's father was Gaou Guinoum's second son, Hippolyte (b. 1740) who was also sold into slavery. The Adallas who were known as hardworking and became the largest African ethnic group in Haiti. Black freedman, like Toussaint, wore jackets with decorative buttons like those with Brunias' paintings as status symbols, and during and after the Haitian Revolution, buttons bore the portraits of revolutionary leaders like Toussaint.[40]

According to Patricia Mohammad, Brunias conveys a "sense of gender, class and race relations that typified the evolution of creole society" through a European lens.[41] His evocation of creole life gives the viewer a glimpse into the luxurious lifestyle described by Sansay prior to the revolution in Haiti and the creole society enjoyed by Josephine Beauharnais before the revolutions began in Martinique. Kay Dian Kriz elaborates that the bliss and harmony these paintings portray was necessary to promote the colonial system and the wealth derived from its economy: "Brunias attempted to promote these newly won colonies as a place where people, as well as raw materials, could be cultivated and refined… Within the context of a nascent abolitionist movement, successfully promoting these islands through art had to involve demonstrating the happiness and well-being of the slaves who lived there"[42] in contrast to the devasting reality of the mistreatment and exploitation of black slaves. Brunias' painting, *Free Women of Color* (fig. 5), is one of a series of paintings he completed of creole life for his patron, William Young, who oversaw the sale of ceded French

[40] Benjamin Hebblewaithe, *A Transatlantic History of Vodou* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 66; Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus,* 19, 37, 329; Philippe Girard, *Toussaint Louverture: A Revolutionary Life* (NY: Basic Books, 2016), 8-22; Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 2005), chapter 8.

[41] Patricia Mohammed. "The Emergence of a Caribbean Iconography in the Evolution of Identity" in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, 232-264, Meeks, Brian, and Folke Lindahl, eds. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/469341953, 255.

[42] Kay Dian Kriz. "Marketing Mulatresses in the Paintings and Prints of Agostino Brunias" in *The Global Eighteenth Century*. Nussbaum, Felicity, ed. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/826442343, 196.

Caribbean properties (Dominica, St. Vincent, Tobago and Grenada) following the Treaty of Paris of 1763. Young had been born in Antigua where his parents fled following the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 in Scotland. Brunias painted Young's portrait as the President of the Commission in 1770 (fig. 10), after Young had been appointed Lt. Governor of Dominica in 1767 and Baronet Young of North Dean in 1768. As president of the Commission, Young's role was to create model colonies in the newly acquired British territories, and he hired Brunias to create a visual record of his patron's success in this venture. Thus, the series of works portray only harmonious representations of race and class in the plantation economy. Young's tenure was short-lived, however; he acquired enormous debts and returned to England bankrupt in 1773. However, Brunias, in recording Young's ventures provides an unmatched visual representation of the wealth and status colonials hoped to reap in their Caribbean ventures.[43] This portrayal of wealth is also present in Johann Zoffany's *Portrait of William Young's Family* (fig. 11) in England in which the large family of Young is placed next to their English estate dressed in the extravagant Rubenesque fashions of aristocratic portraits. The inclusion of an African servant assisting the small child on horseback reinforces the notion that blacks were only docile helpful servants. The only note of conflict in Brunias' images is the engraving print representing the conclusion of a treaty between Young and the so-called Black Caribs (fig. 12) (runaway slaves, called maroons, and the remaining native Caribs on St. Vincent) after the war with them was concluded by giving them their own territory. The so-called Black Caribs successfully resisted the British occupation of St. Vincent but were finally removed from St. Vincent and completely obliterated following their insurrection in 1795. The engraving after Brunias' painting of the Treaty of 1773 appeared as a later illustration to the Jamaican planter, Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* in 1801 with the

[43] William Young, *Considerations which May Tend to Promote the Settlement of Our New West India Colonies by Encouraging Individuals to Embark in the Undertaking* (London: James Robson, 1764).

generic designation of *Pacification of the Maroon Negroes*.[44] Also, included in Edward's history was a description of creole women followed by an engraving by of the *Sable Venus* (fig. 22) after Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Raphael's *Galeta,* together with an Ode written in Jamaican: "Erato smil'd to see me come;/Ask'd why I staid so much at home;/I owned my conduct wrong--;/but now, the sable queen of love;/Resolv'd my gratitude to prove;/Had sent me for a song" (Stanza 2).[45] This engraving of an African woman as Venus arriving on the ocean's wave astride a clam shell demonstrates the luxurious riches colonials expected to reap through the enslavement of Africans and concubinage with women slaves.

In Brunias, *Free Women of Color* (fig. 5), the notions of class based on race are illustrated here in the depiction of three mixed race, or *gens du couleur*, women in the foreground, flanked by their black servants, both men and women, who stand behind them on the right and left. Two small light skinned children are also included in the composition.[46] By contrast, *A Planter and His Wife, with Servant* (fig. 7) seems to convey the race-based laws of the slave market economy in depicting a white couple with a black servant while the artist's *Free West Indian Dominicans* (1770) (fig. 8), depicts a fashionably dressed group of dark skinned women who appear to be free of such biased racial designations. Thus, Brunias demonstrates the potential to rise in status among race-based classes where mixed-race and former slaves could become vendors and merchants and sometimes even plantation and slave owners themselves. The location of these paintings is the Lower Antilles islands of St. Vincent and Dominica, but the cultural dynamics of French, Spanish and British colonial influences is depicted as it was in Haiti and described by Sansay. Brunias' peaceful depictions of

[44] Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London: John Stockdale, 1801), vol. 1.
[45] Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies*, vol. 2, 32.
[46] David Bindman, "Representing Race in the Eighteenth-Century Caribbean: Brunias in Dominica and St Vincent." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 1 (Fall 2017): 1–21; Mia Bagneris, *Coloring the Caribbean: Race and the art of Agostino Brunias* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017).

mixed-race classes reinforced Spanish, French and British notions of creole society as prosperous and luxurious, and open to social mobility. Finally, Brunias' *Family of Caribs* (1765-1770s) (fig. 9) depicts indigenous Caribs as they lived prior to European colonization.

According to Cécile Accilien, Sansay's "nostalgia" demonstrates an "ambiguous" stance on slavery. Accilien discerns this contradiction in Sansay's first letter where the author contrasts the brutal subjugation of Africans to the affluence and leisure of the planter class.[47] By contrast, the natural beauty of Haiti makes Sansay wish that she could build a home there. On the other hand, the Creoles, or planter class, avoid the negroes and warn about negative repercussions for LeClerc who entertains Toussaint Louverture in his home.[48] The contradictions caused by disparity in race and class in colonial Santo Domingo are clearly communicated by Sansay, who, follows Burr own platform in her evaluations of race relations. Like Burr, she privileges her own race and nation over others, but also analyzes the well justified motivations of slaves who seek revenge. Historians point to the rivalry among political factions of Spanish, American, British and French whose interests in cultivating the plantations of the Americas led to the enslavement of Africans and native populations; rivalry among colonial powers seeking to expand their territory took precedence over the human rights of African and indigenous populations. Death by diseases, forced labor or genocide were the fate of these groups while colonial humanitarian concerns were limited to their own troops, white planters and their families.

Haiti, then known as Santo Domingo, however, had a large mixed-race population which was divided into various groups according to ratios of white European ancestry mixed with African and native populations. These mixed-race individuals had a higher social status than imported

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[47] Cecile Accilien, "Secret History: Or, The Horrors of St. Domingo in a Series of Letters … (Philadelphia, 1808): Saint-Domingue through the Lens of an American Woman on the Eve of Haitian Independence." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019): 66–89.

[48] Sansay, *Secret History*, 2, 9. (Philadelphia, 1808).

African slaves and formed an essential part of the colonial social hierarchy. The indigenous population of the Caribbean called the Tainos were largely decimated by diseases introduced by Christopher Columbus and the Spanish, and enslaved or massacred by them. Slaves, especially mixed race, or *gens de couleur*, however, could be freed and rise to own their own slaves according to this system. Toussaint represents one of these contradictions as does his methods for freeing the slaves of Haiti. He personally rose in social status from slave to ownership of slaves, and after the revolution changed the status of slaves to "cultivators" but continued to demand forced labor and meted out punishment by a gauntlet of stick beating if they failed to meet their quota of produce. He also declared himself dictator for life. Sansay's novel captures these contradictions that recurred throughout the revolutionary period of 1791-1804, ending with the creation of an independent Haiti under Emperor Jacques Dessalines in 1804, and following his assassination, General Christophe, who became King Henri I in 1805. The accidental murder of Sansay's heroine, Clara, illustrates the internecine conflicts among internal factions who shifted their loyalty back and forth from French colonial to Haitian revolutionary powers. Scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes this distinctive paradox between slavery and freedom: "those who were in positions of power could not conceive of slaves not only desiring freedom but being ready to give up their very lives in exchange for this freedom."[49] Sansay's heroine attempts to reconcile these contradictions in her mediation between mixed-race individuals, blacks and whites while maintaining her social status which was dependent upon her relationships with men, her patron Burr and her husband. Since her revisionist account of the Haitian Revolution integrates her struggles as a woman to become independent, it is also a feminist text.

Sansay's narratives also purport to illustrate the massacres of whites by blacks that occurred during the revolution from the perspective of a white planter's family. Gruesome atrocities were described in

[49] Accilien, "Secret History," 66-67; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995).