

GEOGRAPHIES OF EXILE AND THE MAKING OF FRENCH NATIONHOOD IN  
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyzes space, geography, and political discourse in the exilic works of Napoleon I, Victor Hugo, Louise Michel, Alfred Dreyfus, and Émile Zola to show how, through their constructions of island space and the Revolutionary legacy, their outcast voices paradoxically shaped the development of mainstream Frenchness.

Chapter 1 analyzes Napoleon's exile to Saint Helena (1815-1821) through close readings of the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* (1823); here, the Emperor emphasized his exilic island and martyrdom to re-construct his imperial legacy as a republican gesture. Chapter 2 discusses Hugo's exile to Guernsey (1856-1870); Hugo interpreted the Revolution as a conflict between good and evil, and his novel *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866) evokes the island as a site where that antinomy can be transcended to begin propagating French values around the globe. Chapter 3 examines Michel's works, especially her Kanak stories composed in exile in New Caledonia (1873-1880). Directly inspired by her exilic environment, Michel related political revolution with geological and human evolution to challenge the French authority on universalism. Finally, Chapters 4 and 5 examine the Dreyfus Affair's effects on French nationhood through, respectively, Dreyfus's memoirs from Devil's Island (1894-1899) and Zola's novel *Fécondité*, written during his exile in England (1898-1899). For Dreyfus, *laïcité* was meant to unite the nation against tyranny while, for Zola, a religion based on birth and soil would strengthen France and make possible a new French biopolitics. My narrative demonstrates the importance of the 1789 Revolution to French identity while highlighting how its ideological paradoxes continue to shape ideas of Frenchness today.

While most scholarship on exile focuses on twentieth- and twenty-first-century migratory experiences, this dissertation shows that exile is equally a nineteenth-century phenomenon, intricately tied to the development of the modern nation and its identity politics. Drawing on literary spatial theory, the political theories of (for example) Kantorowicz, Anderson, and Arendt, and especially the notion of the "body politic," this project offers new readings of literary and historical texts within their exilic contexts, and looks for the roots of contemporary French republicanism in the theocratic monarchical tradition of pre-Revolutionary France.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Un homme tellement ruiné qu’il n’a plus que son honneur, tellement dépouillé qu’il n’a plus que sa conscience, tellement isolé qu’il n’a plus près de lui que l’équité, tellement renié qu’il n’a plus avec lui que la vérité, tellement jeté aux ténèbres qu’il ne lui reste plus que le soleil, voilà ce que c’est qu’un proscrit.”

--Victor Hugo, “Ce que c’est que l’exil” (1875)

### *Marginal Discourse*

As I sit down to compose this Introduction to *Geographies of Exile*, I see before me a blank, white page. Text gradually fills in the center of the screen, while long white gaps remain to either side—the margins. Once I have completed a first draft, my readers and I will begin to fill in that empty space with notes, comments, and suggestions for improvement. Some of these marginal notes will then be incorporated into the center, absorbed by it, changing the way the text communicates its primary message, and sometimes they will even alter the message itself. Whatever their role on each page, the margins’ influence is undeniable, and these threads that hang from the edge are ultimately woven throughout the fabric of this dissertation. Such is the effect of the exilic, or marginal, discourses of Napoleon I, Victor Hugo, Louise Michel, Alfred Dreyfus, and Émile Zola, five writers whose experiences on the margins made them influential figures in French politics, literature, and society. By tracing the political and social thought that emerges in their exilic writings, this dissertation offers a narrative of the development of post-Revolutionary French nationhood. Exilic writings provide a unique perspective on the emergence of a sovereign national belonging, heritage, and identity, for they originate from a space of “otherness” while also reflecting on the principal qualities of the mainstream national community, both real and imagined. They are, so to speak, the marginal notes encroaching not only on the center of the page but, as a result

of their insistence, on the page's ultimate focus as well. In this dissertation, I analyze both what the influence of these marginal writings has been on the center, and how the margins serve as a particularly effective space of influence.

*"Exile" as a Nineteenth-Century Phenomenon*

Harry Levin's sweeping essay, "Literature and Exile" (1966), ties together exilic experiences ranging from Ovid to Joyce, Flaubert to Pound, reminding us that "exile" can be imposed, chosen, embraced, or embittered; it can be literal or metaphysical, shared or lonely, and it may apply to situations as diverse as political refugees, ex-patriot intellectuals, political dissenters, or simple travelers. In more recent scholarly literature, the term "exile" has frequently been juxtaposed with other experiences of physical displacement: emigration, migration, alienation, refuge, and diaspora are just a few examples. Some of these apply more easily to a twentieth-century experience of the world: existentialism fostered a psychological malaise and feelings of estrangement, genocide and regime changes continue to cause refugee crises, and improved means of travel have increased expatriation and voluntary migrations. The twentieth century is, in Edward Said's words, "the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (138).

Following these definitions of exile in literature, most studies of exilic texts focus on such twentieth-century exilic experiences. Terry Eagleton's *Exiles and Émigrés* (1970) or Nico Israel's *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora* (2000) are two examples of monographs on displaced writers in the twentieth century. Eagleton argues that exile afforded British writers on the margins an alternative perspective on society, tradition, and art that allowed them to produce exceptionally creative work. My project extends his findings to exilic literature in the nineteenth century political arena, arguing

(after Hannah Arendt) that “pariahdom” offered writers a privileged space from which to critique, and furthermore influence, the dominant national discourse. Israel, meanwhile, is interested in the relationship between displacement and language, and how exiled writers fashion themselves rhetorically in part through what he calls an “imagined alterity.” Each writer in this dissertation, in constructing a vision of ideal nationhood, also must confront some form of “other” or alterity in the exilic space—whether the “others” s/he encounters in exile, the newly-minted “other” back home, or the “other” within the self. While Israel focuses on twentieth-century writers, whom he characterizes as writing “between exile and diaspora,” or between the nostalgia for a geographically limited homeland and the unstable, fragmented subjectivity characteristic of diaspora, it is helpful to keep “imagined alterity” in mind as an important complement to the “imagined community” I will be trying to discern in each author’s texts.

At the same time, anthologies of exilic literature likewise focus primarily on twentieth-century authors, though some begin with chapters reaching back to Ovid or Dante (a selection of such anthologies includes Bevan, Gutthy, Lagos-Pope, Laroui, Luyat, Seidel, and Suleiman 1998). While many chapters in these works study exile’s influence on the political sphere, few analyze closely (if at all) any figures from the nineteenth century. And, of those that do, none examines any of the French exiles studied here. Those that devote chapters to nineteenth-century French exiles tend to overlook the political exile in order to focus on a more broadly-defined exilic experience, such as the *mal du pays* and other instances of exilic nostalgia, experienced from outside of France or from within.<sup>1</sup> Those chapters that do discuss political exile tend to ignore the French case. In fact, these compilations of essays on literature of exile neglect to offer

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<sup>1</sup> The only text I came across that exclusively examines nineteenth-century French writers in exile is *Home and its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*, edited by Suzanne Nash. Still, the stated topic of this collection is “homelessness,” and no chapter examines any of the authors considered in this dissertation.

any unified theme (other than that of “exile,” however broadly defined) for reading each chapter. In his introduction to *D’un pays sans frontières: Essais sur la littérature d’exil*, Fouad Laroui states outright: “je n’ai pas de théorie d’ensemble, je ne prétends pas forger des concepts” (7). This venture, though interesting and useful, again reflects a particular, post-modern conception of exile that is common to most studies of exilic literature: exile is de-centering, diversified, existentialist, self-effacing, and self-constructing. While at times these texts provide useful theoretical lenses and personal perspectives for understanding my study, they focus on the global, the personal, and the humanist, leaving aside the questions of nationhood that are my focus here. To underscore this point, many times the exiled writers under study do not return to the native country, discovering instead new sources of creativity and self-fashioning within the host country. Their experiences in exile become part of a new identity that is fundamentally personal, not national.

Furthermore, work on the authors under consideration here has tended to gloss over their exilic experience. Works on Napoleon, Hugo, Zola, and Dreyfus abound, but few scholars dedicate more than a short section to their life and work in exile, and they hardly ever read their works through the lens of this life-defining experience.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation thus endeavors to fill two gaps in current scholarship: first, by offering a cohesive study of exilic literature as a nineteenth-century phenomenon intricately related to the development of French nationhood; and second, by studying canonical authors as marginal figures, exiled from France and seeking to alter the national landscape in order to facilitate their return.

Rather than exploring feelings of lost identity characteristic of twentieth-century displaced persons, or the nostalgic *mal du pays* or *mal du siècle* common to many

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<sup>2</sup> A more comprehensive literature review pertaining to each writer, including the important exceptions to this rule, appears in the corresponding chapter.

nineteenth-century writers and thinkers, the authors in this dissertation seek to construct national identity by turning back toward their native land, France, and its history, the French Revolution. I argue that their visions of “Frenchness” influence their contemporary society and politics, and shape the next generations of French nationals. The success of their imagined France(s) on the public is evident in their continued relevance to today’s debates on French republicanism, universalism, and identity politics. This dissertation thus complements studies of twentieth-century exiles by interrogating the role of forced displacement in identity formation and creative writing, while offering a historical perspective on the construction of nation, heritage, and community. It seeks to read the current scholarship on twentieth-century exilic identities through the lens of nineteenth-century nation building. By looking back to how these debates are formed in the nineteenth century, this dissertation demonstrates how such absolutist notions as *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, and *laïcité* became the quintessentially “French” values that continue to be debated, defined, and refined today by French nationals, exiles, and immigrants.

For this reason too, I have chosen a narrower definition of “exile” than is often employed by scholars of exilic literature. Because I seek to understand how exilic writings influenced the national heritage, I focus on those who underwent a documented political exile that put them fundamentally at odds with the national doctrine of their time. The writers studied here were proscribed from France following a political conflict with the ruling powers. Each unwillingly fled the country, either as prisoners forcefully deported to a specific space of imprisonment (Napoleon I, Louise Michel, Alfred Dreyfus), or because their continued presence on French soil would have resulted in their arrest and imprisonment (Hugo, Zola). In each case, the legal necessity of their exile created a rupture, an identity crisis upon which they capitalized in order to theorize



a novel vision of French nationhood. While their personal vision conflicted with the prevailing dogma, it paradoxically influenced the mainstream political imagination as a result of their exile.

One important study specifically of nineteenth-century political exile does exist: Sylvie Aprile's *Le Siècle des exilés: Bannis et proscrits de 1789 à la Commune* (2010). Aprile interrogates the role of exile in shaping the national imagination, and her research on the demography of exile adds greatly to our understanding of how exiles like Germaine de Staël, Victor Hugo, and the Communards lived, worked, and traveled throughout their host countries. Unlike my project, however, her work focuses on the logistics of the exilic experience, rather than analyzing the exilic authors' writings (though she does refer to these writings often). In contrast, I rely primarily on close readings of exilic texts to explain how each writer's national vision, gleaned from the texts, is informed by his/her exilic experience, including in particular the geography of the exilic space. For this reason, Sophia McClennen's *Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (2004) is methodologically more compatible. McClennen takes issue with the scholarship's neglect of space and geography in literature of exile, and takes into consideration the material fact of exile and its historical contexts, including the role of geography and the nation during a time of globalized identities. Her theoretical lens is pertinent to this dissertation, though her focus (twentieth-century Hispanic literature) is on another time and place.

By focusing on nineteenth-century French writers and situating geography and nationhood at the forefront of my analyses, I hope to build on these scholars' work, as well as on the work of those who study the history of French nationalism, identity, and the legacy of the Revolution. The decade preceding the 1989 Bicentennial of the French Revolution launched a wave of scholarly criticism examining the Revolution's influence

on French identity and nationhood. I am especially indebted to François Furet's momentous study *Revolutionary France: 1770-1880* (1988), and to other histories of the Revolution, for their documenting and interpretive work that has allowed me to contextualize the literary works I analyze (see Hobsbawm and Jennings). The French Revolutionary legacy continues to inform studies of "Frenchness," whether their focus is nineteenth-century texts (Le Hir), postcolonialism (Dubois), the modernization of French Jews (Berkovitz "Revolution"), or contemporary French identity politics (Birnbaum). Marie-Pierre Le Hir, in her recent book *The National Habitus: Ways of Feeling French, 1789-1870*, examines the works of an equal number of male and female authors from the Revolution to the Commune to assess, much like I do, how the Revolution and its legacy in part generated the evolution of a French ethos in the nineteenth century. Her textual analyses aim to assess how the notion of "habitus" (defined by Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu) applies to visions of the nation in nineteenth-century texts, some by writers not commonly associated with writing about the nation (i.e. Stendhal, Sand). She too looks at the influence of the Revolution in building national identities, and concludes that nationhood was subject to interpretations and reinterpretations throughout the century. *Fictions of the French Revolution* (1991), edited by Bernadette Fort, compiles essays that also analyze various interpretations and reinterpretations of the Revolution in literature, theatre, visual art, and philosophy to show how these "fictions" are engrained in today's discourses. This dissertation further develops these studies of the Revolution's legacy, discourse, and influence on French society by looking more specifically at the role of exiles in shaping the post-Revolutionary national ethos. I contend that their writings from the margins not only document an evolving understanding of the Revolution's influence on French

identity, but also come to shape that very influence, and thus the development of French nationhood throughout the long nineteenth century.

Along with these scholars, this dissertation offers a historical perspective that helps to frame the growing increasing number of monographs on contemporary French republican thought. In their writing of and in the exilic space, each author studied here theorizes national boundaries, characteristics, and values, and ultimately proposes a new vision of nationhood that would hold sway over the French public well beyond their time. One important contribution I offer to studies of “Frenchness” is to note the persistence of a vision of nationhood rooted in the conception of the nation as body politic. The visions proffered by the writers studied here, though they each proposed a different interpretation of “France,” its Revolution, and its core values, were all profoundly imbued with a sense of the nation as body. Citizens were alternatively considered extensions of that body—healthy or gangrenous—or embodiments themselves of the nation’s enduring values and identity. These metaphors signal a particular understanding of the nation and nationhood that continues to have far-reaching implications on French politics, society, and identity.

### *Geography and Nationhood*

While my analyses remain rooted in the fictional, poetic, philosophical, autobiographical, and epistolary texts under study, the spatial theories of Bertrand Westphal, Robert Tally, Jr., Franco Moretti, and Edward Soja along with the more politico-social theories of Ernst Kantorowicz, Hannah Arendt, Eric Santner, Bernard Anderson, Deleuze and Guattari, and Michael Rothberg all help to shed light on the texts’ implications. In this section I offer a brief overview of each chapter’s thesis and the theories that inform them. Though I organize these chapters chronologically to build a

narrative tracing the development of France's revolutionary legacy and how it has defined, and redefined, French nationhood and identity throughout the century, the dialogues among all five chapters show how the idea of "France" developed through intertextual encounters among the nation's marginalized figures.

In Chapter 1, "Napoleon on Saint-Helena: A Hero of the Revolution is Born," I introduce the notion of the "body politic" as theorized by Ernst Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957) in order to better understand how Napoleon's "embodiment" of the French Revolution transferred the Revolution's promise of national sovereignty onto the Emperor's person. It was during his exile to Saint Helena (1815-1821) that the Emperor re-wrote his imperial legacy as a republican gesture loyal to the French Revolution's ideals. His memoir, written on Saint Helena by his scribe Emmanuel de Las Cases and entitled *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* (first pub. 1823), was a determining factor in establishing Napoleon's heroic legacy, yet remains largely overlooked by scholars of literature. Through close analyses of the text, I argue that the *Mémorial* accomplishes such a reversal of the Emperor's reputation (the transition from the "légende noire" to the "légende rose") both through its depictions of the island's geography and through its redefinition of popular sovereignty in corporeal terms. Napoleon established himself as a "savior" of the Revolution by virtue of his "agreement" to exile, and Saint Helena was instrumental in persuading the public of his self-sacrifice.

Meanwhile, Napoleon's memoir established important exilic tropes that allowed future exiles to build on the Emperor's national, romantic influence. First, as a Christic martyr in exile, Napoleon's exile set the stage for exile to be understood as self-sacrifice for the sake of the nation. Second, being banished to Saint Helena, he also introduced the importance of the island space in exile; the island's geography and foreignness, its

distance from France and prison-like isolation all contributed to the fashioning of the exilic experience in the popular imagination. Third, from exile Napoleon re-wrote history and, in so doing, shaped the legacy of the Revolution, his own legacy, and his sense of French nationhood during his time. Exile not only informed his political thought; it also allowed for that thought to be disseminated back home in a way that aroused public interest and, eventually, support. As the only one in this study to die in exile, Napoleon also demonstrates just how powerful the martyred, exilic experience can be on the public's imagination.

Exilic writers henceforth created an intertextual dialogue with Napoleon through their own use of the same tropes and metaphors. The romantic image of an exiled Napoleon shaped the memory of Victor Hugo in particular, who is also remembered as a lone hero fighting for the future of French republicanism from his exilic rock in the English Channel during the reign of Napoleon III. In Chapter 2, "Hugo on Guernsey: The Good and the Evil in French Republicanism," I argue that Hugo's understanding of the French Revolution as a conflict between good (1789) and evil (1793) that ultimately fostered global, peaceful progress informed his imagined national community as it appears in his exilic novel *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866). For Hugo, exile continued to function as self-sacrifice, but "progress" was achieved not only as a result of the exile's impact back home, but even more thanks to his work abroad. This "work" was the overcoming of conflicts—whether the political conflict between exile and emperor or the natural conflict between the novel's protagonist and the storm—to ensure the stability of France's revolutionary ideals. The widespread dissemination of such progress was not only the exile's duty; for Hugo, it was also a part of the divinely directed human teleology. Hugo built on the Napoleonic idea of French nationhood by envisioning French history and its republican ideals as the root not only of a greater France, but also

of a future global utopia. Inspired by both Christian religious values as well as French revolutionary ones, Hugo's utopian vision, I argue, remained rooted in a specifically French history of progress that pit good against evil, trusted God at the helm of progress, and held up France's foundational values as the ultimate goal for humanity.

While Hugo's political vision for the future of France has been well documented by historians and literary critics alike, Hugo as writer not only in exile, but more specifically *of exile*—its spaces and geography—has received less attention. This chapter proposes to fill that void by studying Hugo's geopolitics, and his novel *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* offers a useful point of departure, for it is dedicated to the island of Guernsey. I discuss how exile, geography, and the Revolution interact to create a national, and international, community for the most famous French exile of the nineteenth century. The geocritical applications of Franco Moretti and Robert Tally, Jr. (the latter directly inspired by Westphal's *La Géocritique: Réel, Fiction, Espace*, 2007) provide the inspiration for analyzing politically the cartographical aspects of Hugo's novel, while Edward Soja's *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996) sustains the theoretical backdrop for understanding Hugo's various categories of space. We see most clearly in this chapter how exile functions as a "Thirdspace," where one can rebel, resist oppression, and theorize an imagined national community.

The Paris Commune created thousands more exiles in 1871, just before the proclamation of the Third Republic. Chapter 3, "Michel in New Caledonia: From Revolution to Evolution," explores this epoch through the exilic writings of Louise Michel, a dedicated anarchist whose political thought developed significantly as a result of her nearly decade-long exile to the South Pacific. Like Hugo, Michel too imagined a utopian global community inspired by the ideals of '89. But, while Hugo made it the duty

of the French exile specifically to disseminate these “universal” Republican ideals globally, Michel considered the French nation but one example of a civilization working toward betterment, yet still not entirely successful. She greatly admired Hugo, whom she endearingly called her “maître,” maintaining a longtime correspondence with him and frequently invoking his poetry in her writings. In particular, she buildt on Hugo’s rapprochement of geological and political revolutions to theorize a novel understanding of human evolution. Yet, I argue that her ultimate dream of a peaceful, global humanity differed from Hugo’s fundamentally nationalist vision.

Unlike any other exile in this dissertation, Michel chose to live amongst and interact with the indigenous population of her exilic space, teaching them about her world while also learning their language, culture, and stories. Two texts that emerged during her time in exile, *Légendes et Chansons des gestes canaques* (1875) and *Légendes et Chants des gestes canaques* (1885), recount Kanak myths learned while living in New Caledonia. In these works, space and geography again frame what is ultimately a political commentary, and through close analyses of selected stories, I show that Michel’s anarchist vision was inspired by a maternal concern for the “other.” Though, like Hugo, her interest in the “other” motivated her utopian dream, she employed a familial, rather than the historical-revolutionary, metaphor to imagine a human, not national, community. Meanwhile, Michel resisted looking back to the specificity of the French revolution, and chose to support any and all revolution that would help the oppressed of the world rise up against tyranny. Michel’s political vision was equally teleological, but did not place France at the summit of “progress”; rather, for Michel, utopia would be born of the encounter among disparate civilizations that all evolve together as a result of their interactions. I invoke Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome to underscore how

the New Caledonian island, along with Michel's floral imagery, provide a metaphor for understanding Michel's innovations on the idea of French nationhood.

Just as Chapters 2 and 3 offer contrasting, though complementary, takes on an evolving definition of French nationhood, Chapters 4 and 5 provide a dialogue between two authors thought to be in concert, but who actually oppose one another when it comes to a political vision. Chapter 4, "Dreyfus on Devil's Island: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* and *Laïcité*" examines Captain Alfred Dreyfus' writings from his exile on Devil's Island (1895-1899). While much scholarship on the Jewish captain focuses on the stakes of the Dreyfus Affair, here I study the life and leadership of Dreyfus himself. I invoke Hannah Arendt's theory on what it means for a Jew to take a political stand to argue that, as a lifelong national pariah (from his birth in Alsace to his exile on Devil's Island), Dreyfus critiqued the nation's ideological development. Like Napoleon, he did so by *embodying* France's Enlightenment values. Unlike the Emperor, however, Dreyfus did not impose his values on a passive people, but rather modeled what political activism would look when originating in the people's movements. For him, secularism—or the French *laïcité*—became a cornerstone of French republicanism, but only when embodied by a united collectivity of citizens. In his writings, Dreyfus identifies the tension between top-down imposition of secularist practices and bottom-up espousal of secular society. In this way he also builds on Michel's commitment to the social revolution, though without the violence and radicalism of the anarchist. Dreyfus inches closer to creating a notion of French nationhood founded on widespread fraternity and free from tyrannical authority, while also—and paradoxically—calling forth the image of Napoleon I in exile.

The space of Devil's Island was instrumental in bolstering his influence on the political sphere for, like for Napoleon a century earlier, it allowed for the public to view Dreyfus as a symbolic martyr to the Republican cause. In this chapter then, I discuss a



selection of archival images of him in exile in the Caribbean to illustrate the importance of island geography in shaping the French public's view of him. Although Dreyfus's exilic experience hearkens back to Napoleon on Saint Helena (he too became a heroic martyr upon his banishment, was persecuted in a distant island prison, while his memoirs helped rehabilitate him and his writings endorsed a revision of the nation's republican doctrine), he chose to propagate a very different nationalist discourse. It is with this in mind that I invoke Michal Rothberg's idea of "multidirectional memory" at the close of this chapter. The dialogical rapprochement of two strikingly different, yet both representatively "French," exiled figures supports my reading of Dreyfus's memoirs as contributing to the development of popular sovereignty in the nineteenth-century imagination, and offers a fresh perspective on French multiculturalism.

Finally, Chapter 5, "Zola in England: Rejuvenating French Roots," discusses Émile Zola's involvement in the Dreyfus Affair, his ensuing exile from France, and his own view of French nationhood on the cusp of the twentieth century. I offer a close analysis of his thesis novel, *Fécondité* (1899), which was written during his fugitive year in England, but which has persistently been ignored in treatments of the author's combative efforts in the Dreyfus Affair. By taking into account the similarities in language between Zola's novel and his correspondence, as well as the commonalities between the novel's protagonist Mathieu and the author, I reveal how the father of Naturalism envisioned popular sovereignty as a battle to be won by force of bodily mass. I bring the theories of Eric Santner and Hannah Arendt to bear on Zola's novel to argue that Zola effectively made nationhood a corporeal experience (transmitted by birth and intricately tied to the national soil). Zola's exilic novel thus anticipates the bio-political regimes that would redefine citizenship in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Seeking to remain an integral part of a nation that ousted him, Zola developed a concept

of global “Frenchness” that both recalls those of Hugo and Michel and looks forward to a new epoch in which steadfast national belonging would ultimately engender bio-political acts of aggression. Both Zola’s and Dreyfus’s national visions thus link back to Napoleon’s definition of corporeal nationhood described in Chapter 1, demonstrating in what ways French national identities transformed and remained the same over the course of the century.

*Ways of Being “French”: 1789*

For all these writers, the French Revolution served as a foundational event in the construction of a particularly “French” identity. Its slogan of absolutist and universalist values continues to define French culture, behavior, and community, however much the event itself continues to be interpreted, reinterpreted, and revised. In the nineteenth century, the Revolution offered a set of key words that helped construct the national collective memory, and thus ultimately the social organization of that national identity. As a site of memory, it shaped French history, identity, and nationhood. But, for these exiles, it also functioned, in the Freudian sense, as a site of mourning, loss, and rupture. These writers were cast out of France precisely because the nation was, in their view, failing to live up to the Revolution’s lofty aims—that is, universal freedom and brotherhood. They mourned the loss of this idea of France as much as they mourned the loss of their “home”—the physical space and their personal attachments to it. In fixating on the loss of the France of 1789, these writers began to identify with the Revolution, to embody its values, in order to recreate France in its image. In a sense, each exile was re-experiencing the rupture with France’s past and the ensuing identity crisis that the Revolution had epitomized. At times they sought to re-build a stable core of French identity through their interpretation of the Revolutionary period, and at times they

enjoyed the creative freedom such radical de-stabilization afforded. Through their eyes, we confront the essential paradoxes of the French Revolution: the need for a strong central authority to ensure popular sovereignty; the use of mass murder to establish widespread freedoms; the importance of a military identity in a nation dedicated to democracy; the reconciliation of the cult of individual reason with the sense of belonging to a unified community; and the attachment to a strong national identity to promote an era of universality. At times nostalgic and reactionary, at times modern and forward-thinking, these writers' perspectives help shape a particular memory of the Revolution that would ultimately draw the contours of a shared political identity. Their visions parallel the development of the modern nation, paving the way for inquiry into the nature of French identity and subjectivity even as it continues to develop today.

In "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" (1882) Ernest Renan writes, "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation" (37). These writers clearly have not forgotten the Revolution, but they remember it in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways, re-writing it, re-interpreting it, and re-membering it in order to instruct future generations. Napoleon I ensured that the Revolution's goal of popular sovereignty would be associated with him, even though by crowning himself emperor he effectively squashed that very objective. Hugo evoked the period as one of simultaneous progress and destruction, highlighting the importance of the horror of 1793 in effecting the republican ideals of 1789. Michel situated 1789 in a series of global revolutions and advocated a global history in which the French Revolution furthered sovereignty on every continent. Dreyfus focused on the Revolution's emancipatory and Enlightenment principles, while Zola imagined popular sovereignty as a biological imperative. By framing their individual visions of Frenchness as products of the Revolution's messages, each exile fashioned, to borrow Renan's definition, the "soul" of

the nation. Regardless of how each viewed or valued the Revolution's legacy, they all agreed that this common past formed the basis of a united collectivity of citizens. It was heroic, sacrificial, glorious, shared, and sentimental. Faced with the loss and absence of "home," these exiles came to regard the Revolution as the context in which they belonged or, as Renan puts it, "*la maison qu'on a bâtie et qu'on transmet.*"<sup>3</sup>

I have deployed the term "imagined community" following Benedict Anderson's definition of nation, but I do so admittedly despite Anderson's own elaboration of this term. Anderson writes that the nation is "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). The national community thought of as "French" in these texts, like Anderson's "imagined community" was a veritable invention, or creation, allowing each writer to add his or her own "style," (Anderson 6) or interpretation, to help construct this at once personal and collective community of citizens. While for Anderson the nation is both limited and sovereign— "No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind" (7)—these authors take issue with the first of these qualifications. Indeed, as a specific place with specific borders, the nation is confined to be a territorial entity separate from "mankind," "humanity" or the "global community." However, as a community—and, even more, an imagined community—the nation for these exiles extended beyond the mountains, seas, and valleys otherwise constraining it. In fact, I will show that it was the need to create such a limitless community that drove these exiles to re-invent a national community in which they were included despite their residence abroad. The Revolution and its teachings thus not only

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<sup>3</sup> I invoke Renan to explore nineteenth-century experiences of nation-building, however this concept of the nation-as-edifice has wider-reaching implications, namely for those whose ancestors did not "build" the nation, whose monuments do not exist in the national territory, or who do not share in the common "foundation" of the nation—its past. Meanwhile, the nation-as-house also implies that there are doors to the national ethos that are more or less hospitable, can be opened or closed, and thus confine the nation to certain boundaries (or "walls")—even if Renan would not have those boundaries be territorial, ethnic, linguistic, or dynastic. While I will return to this definition of the nation and its difficulties, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully explore all its nuances when applied to current definitions and experiences of nationhood.

served as a site of memory and belonging, but also provided a set of rules for defining the national (and sometimes international) community beyond the homeland.

*Five Key Figures: Interpretations and Reinterpretations*

Nineteenth-century exiles are numerous, despite the fact that few works to date group any together in a cohesive study. The regime changes that accompanied Napoleon's rise to power in the first decade of the century, the Restoration that followed, the Emperor's nephew Napoleon III's coup d'état in 1852, and the period of the Commune in 1870-1871, all resulted in thousands of political exiles. The plight of the *émigré* like Chateaubriand or Talleyrand characterized the revolutionary period, and may be considered by some the first instances of political exile in the modern period. As Aprile suggests, however, this type of royalist exile had very little in common with the republican proscriptions in the nineteenth century, particularly as the *émigrés* lacked a powerful political message (*Émigration* 21; *Siècle* 34). Germaine de Staël was perhaps the most famous exile ousted by Napoleon, and her memoir *Dix Années d'Exil* (1818) is a useful elucidation of exilic experience. Meanwhile, *proscrits* cast out of France along with Victor Hugo numbered in the hundreds (Charles Ribeyrolles, Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin, Edgar Quinet, and Victor Schoelcher, among others), and thousands of Communards were deported overseas alongside Louise Michel (Nathalie Lemel, Henri Rochefort, Charles Malato, and Jules Vallès, to name but a few). These names, alongside those I have chosen to focus on, represent only a few nineteenth-century French exiles, and each would reward close study for his/her exilic experience, exilic writings, and influence on French identity. At the same time, some pre-Revolutionary connections between exile, writing, and Frenchness do exist: the poetry of Charles d'Orléans (1394-1466) or Joachim du Bellay (1522-1560), for example, explore feelings of nationhood

from the perspectives of a prisoner in England (the former) or the nostalgic traveler (the latter). Without ignoring these important moments in the history of exilic literature, this dissertation aims to trace a particularly coherent narrative about the legacy of the French Revolution and its influence on the development of French national identity. The five figures studied here offer a unique perspective on the history of exile and reveal how the phenomenon of exile shapes national imaginings.

Any study of the 1789 Revolution's legacy must begin with Napoleon I. More than any other figure, the Emperor sought to incarnate the Revolution and propagate its most enduring values: *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. Presented as the "savior" of France and its revolutionary heritage only upon his martyrdom in exile, Napoleon's memoirs develop many of the exilic tropes future exiles would appropriate. Victor Hugo in particular draws inspiration from Napoleon I's life and death on Saint Helena. Though exiled for his opposition to Napoleon III, Hugo's writings maintain a certain respect and admiration for the elder Napoleon. In fact, he follows in the Emperor's footsteps by writing a new political history from exile and re-thinking the role of Revolution in the development of French nationhood during the Second Empire. Louise Michel's exile allows for an examination of how the Paris Commune, two decades later, once again prompted a reappraisal of French nationhood as the Empire collapsed and the Third Republic emerged. Aside from being one of the most representative figures of the Commune's anarchist agenda, Michel follows Hugo in much the same way as Hugo follows from Napoleon. Having met Hugo as a girl, Michel quickly found in him her creative inspiration. And yet, she does not reiterate Hugo's political leanings but re-works them, taking the unique circumstances of her time and exile into account. Her texts demonstrate how her attention to the "other" informs her ideas of nationhood, belonging, and humanity. For her, national boundaries do in fact cease to exist in the

utopian future, even as French revolutionary values continue to shape human interactions. Finally, to round out the century, Émile Zola most obviously lends himself to evaluating popular culture in the French *fin-de-siècle*. However, it is only by reading Zola's exile following Captain Alfred Dreyfus's and in the context of the Dreyfus Affair that we can appreciate the novelist's contribution to ideas of French nationhood and identity.

Together then, the exilic works of these five figures constitute a singular narrative of the development of French nationhood. Writing as pariahs on the political and geographical margins of the French nation, they look back nostalgically to the past era of the Revolution, just as they look "back" to the distant space of their *patrie*. These combined retrospective glances prompt each author to examine their nation as both a part of the "self"—the nation of their birth, of their foundational principles, of their families and home—and as a distinct "other," fundamentally at odds with the values that precipitated their exile in the first place: what Said calls the "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home" (137). The ways they sought to alter the national political landscape in order to hasten their return, and the "return" of their unique interpretation of the teachings of the Revolution, also function as a recipe for how to approach the "other." The narrative they tell about how to be French is as much a lesson on nationhood as it is on how to reject, accept, teach, learn from, embrace, unite with, annihilate, or live alongside the non-French. According to their time, their politics, and their own exilic experience, each author in this dissertation offers a distinct answer to these questions. But together, they demonstrate how France, known as the land of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and *laïcité*, only became so through the interactions between nationhood and other-hood in the century following the Revolution.

## CHAPTER 1

## Napoleon on Saint Helena: A Hero of the Revolution is Born

“Il revint hanter mon intelligence, non plus comme mon Empereur et mon maître absolu, mais comme un spectre que la mort a presque entièrement changé. Car je voyais en lui un être tout différent de celui que le monde avait connu. Cette idéologie qu’il avait tant maudite, il devait désormais la servir, puisqu’il n’était plus qu’une idée. En outre, ses compagnons revenaient l’un après l’autre et témoignaient de sa conversion aux idées qu’il avait foulées aux pieds tant qu’il avait été le maître. Il avait fini par être conquis lui-même par ces notions de liberté et de justice. [...] Alors, nous revendiquions la gloire non comme l’appui, mais comme l’ornement de la liberté. [...] Voilà comment j’accommodais ce qui m’avait paru inconciliable, mon culte pour Napoléon avec ma soif de liberté. Ce n’est pas nous qui allions à Napoléon, c’est Napoléon qui revenait à nous !”

-Edgar Quinet, *Œuvres Complètes : Histoire de mes idées*, 1858

*Napoleon: Hero and Exile*

Despite its Italian origins, the mere name “Napoleon Bonaparte” (1769-1821) calls to mind the very idea of France and its cultural heritage. “Je suis la patrie,” the Emperor proclaims in the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* (470), embracing the public’s identification of him with the nation. His public burial at *Les Invalides* in 1840, under the monarchical reign of Louis-Philippe, was strong evidence that any divisiveness incurred by Napoleon’s despotism no longer threatened national security; on the contrary, less than twenty years after his death, the Emperor would take his place among the nation’s most glorious monuments bolstering France’s prestige. Indeed, the Napoleonic Empire (1804-1814) gave rise to many aspects of French political and social life that continue to exist and define French culture: a highly centralized administration, the secular *lycée* system, the opportunity for meritocratic advancement regardless of social class, and, above all, the uniform application of the law to all citizens (with the important exception of women, who were not granted any political rights under



Napoleon). In a word, Napoleon unified a nation still reeling from civil war, terror, and complete government overhaul. And, the ideology that engendered his lasting institutional changes came directly from the French Revolution and its republican ideals of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*. While critics debate whether Napoleon was ultimately tyrant or liberator, dictator or savior, for or against the Revolution, there remains general consensus that this French legend can be credited with ensuring the survival of many of 1789's defining values (Petiteau 219). David P. Jordan goes so far as to argue that the present-day interpretation of the French Revolution as an overall success rests on Napoleon's imperial, expansionist shoulders. Jordan argues in *Napoleon and the Revolution* (2012) that Napoleon's military conquests saved newly republican France from domestic instability by focusing efforts on exporting, and constantly reviving, the Revolution's teachings. In contrast, he continues, the more recent revolutions of Russia, Cuba, or China led to global isolation and intense internal suppression that ultimately engendered authoritarian regimes rather than democracy. In this analysis, Napoleon's own appraisal of his legacy rings true: he embodied the nation, as it was defined by republican, revolutionary values. My thesis in this chapter takes issue with Jordan's final analysis opposing French republicanism with authoritarianism, and I will argue throughout this dissertation that the French Revolution too gave rise to authoritarian thinking about how to define the national community. Napoleon characterized, incarnated, and disseminated those specifically "French" values, particularly in *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* (first pub. 1823), thereby paving the way for the development of French nationhood in his time and after. His emphasis on embodying the national values and character maintained a corporeal paradigm of nationhood that encourages a politics of exclusion, and would persist in the writings of subsequent exiles throughout the nineteenth century.

The popularity of Napoleon's rehabilitated reputation (dubbed "la légende rose" by Natalie Petiteau, 9) can be attributed to the widely disseminated texts recounting his time in exile and death on Saint Helena (1815-1821). While multiple texts by the so-called "Mémorialistes" were published and read, including the initial anonymous *Manuscrit venu de Saint-Hélène d'une manière inconnue* (1817), and the more popular *Napoléon dans l'exil* (1822) by Napoleon's doctor on Saint Helena (Barry O'Meara), the most famous of these by far is *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* by Emmanuel de Las Cases. First published in 1823, the *Mémorial* underwent five editions in total (1823, 1824, 1835, 1840, 1842), including a final edition in 1842 illustrated by Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet. Each edition testifies to the political vicissitudes of the period following Napoleon's régime, in that Las Cases made changes and suppressions in order to avoid censors or, alternatively, to impact current politics (Schmidt 38).<sup>4</sup> Jean Tulard writes, "*Le Mémorial* fut probablement le plus grand succès de librairie du XIXe siècle" (*Napoléon* 448), and Sudhir Hazareesingh calls it "one of the landmarks of nineteenth-century French literature" (164). Stendhal read it carefully, using it to inform his own *Mémoires sur Napoléon* (1837) and famously outfitting the protagonist of *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830), Julien Sorel, with a copy to guide the boy's spirit and ambition. While Las Cases is the only author listed on its title page, a significant portion of the text was dictated by Napoleon, and entire passages are composed in the first person. It is unclear how much Las Cases edited, interpreted, or otherwise mutilated Napoleon's *récits*; moreover, it is certain that Napoleon at times blurs the facts to assert his perspective on

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<sup>4</sup> For this chapter, I opted to use the 1830-32 edition published by Éditions du Seuil in 1968, with a preface by Jean Tulard. As the *avertissement* notes, this edition preserves the tone and content of the first edition while also re-establishing official names and titles considered incendiary at the time of the first publication during the Restoration. Most importantly, however, this edition was the least expensive to publish and therefore the most readily available to the general population.

the histories he recounts.<sup>5</sup> Still, the fact remains that this formational text rallied entire populations, both in France and abroad, to Napoleon's cause and shaped his popular legacy.<sup>6</sup>

Although scholars disagree on whether this text is the source of Napoleon's popularity, J. Lucas-Dubreton sums up nicely that on which they agree: even if "*Le Mémorial* ne crée pas [la légende], il la fixe" (398). Lucas-Dubreton, for instance, traces the source of the Emperor's revolutionary legacy to the return of the soldiers after Waterloo, while Tulard (1986) highlights Napoleon's own propaganda during the Italian campaign as the beginning of his newfound popularity. Robert Gildea likewise underscores the importance of visual art in creating the *légende rose*, namely the paintings of the general as a messiah by Antoine-Jean Gros during the Egyptian Campaign. These important historical discoveries demonstrate how Napoleon's military legacy indeed preceded his exile, yet they fail to fully account for the Emperor's reputation as the embodiment of the French Revolution. As a matter of fact, most scholars—including Tulard and Lucas-Dubreton—agree that Napoleon's exile and the *Mémorial* mark a turning point in rehabilitating the Emperor's national reputation (Petiteau 12; Hazareesingh 164; Tulard *Napoléon* 447; Lucas-Dubreton 247). This liberal, republican legacy can be traced, as Hazareesingh illustrates, to 1815, during the period of the Hundred Days and the introduction of the *Acte Additionnel*, which immediately preceded his exile to Saint Helena. This supplemental constitution included

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Tulard in particular refutes several of Napoleon's accounts of the events in *Napoléon ou le mythe du sauveur* (1986), while André Maurois discusses Las Cases's own blurring of the facts and lack of objectivity in his preface to the Pléiade edition of the text (xx).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Scott wrote *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* in 1827 and William Hazlitt took inspiration from his compatriot in composing *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* in 1828-1830. On the Continent, a few examples of writers acclaiming Napoleon following his death include Heinrich Heine in Germany, Andre Towiansky and Adam Mickiewicz in Poland, and Mikhail Lermontov in Russia (see Petiteau, ch. 2, for a survey of Napoleon and romanticism in Europe; Bowman, ch. 5, for a discussion of Napoleon's Christic legacy across Europe; and, for a thorough analysis of Napoleon's literary legacy, Chassé).

some liberal reforms, such as freedom of the press, which helped Napoleon find new allies in the liberal camp, most notably Benjamin Constant.<sup>7</sup> It is this image of a just, republican Napoleon that I am interested in here; it is the one that shaped popular opinion of the Emperor throughout the nineteenth century, and the one that Napoleon elaborates on in *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* in order to create the Napoleonic myth. The two tomes of the *Mémorial* never cease to glorify the Emperor as a savior of the Revolution, the people, and the nation, driving home the image of Napoleon as the father of modern-day France. Martyn Lyons sums up, “Napoleon was, as he is often described, the founder of the modern state. His régime was also the fulfillment of the bourgeois Revolution of 1789-99” (295). It is for this reason that no survey of the development of French nationhood would be complete without studying Napoleon’s vast influence, and the diary that turned myth into history.

The remainder of this chapter will thus focus on Napoleon’s journal from exile, *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*. For, while scholars generally agree that Napoleon’s exile is a turning point in the creation of the legend, often missing from such studies of Napoleon’s national symbolism is a more detailed analysis of how this diary molds his reputation through its exilic language and images. The *Mémorial*, more than any other text, not only exposes Napoleon’s relationship with the Revolution and republicanism; it also constructs an image of Napoleon as a Christ-like martyr, sacrificing his very life for the good of the *patrie* on a harsh, isolated, and distant island prison with no hope of return. In a word, it nearly seamlessly fuses the character of “hero” with that of “exile.” This newly-created “Napoleonic exile” became an important part of the Napoleonic myth, an aspect of his persona that, unlike his imperial status or military achievements, could be emulated by the banished and proscribed throughout the century. Later on, exiles from

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the effects of the *Acte Additionnel* on Napoleon’s revolutionary legacy, see also Lyons 289-291.

Victor Hugo to Alfred Dreyfus would take up their pens and paint similarly heroic self-portraits in exile on islands, evoking Napoleon, the Revolution, republican values, and the French nation. As a result, they too would come to be remembered as Napoleonic exiles/heroes—suffering and sacrificing for their beliefs in a just, republican France.

*The Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène: Napoleon's Voice From Exile*

On board the *Bellerophon* stopped over at Plymouth, just after learning that his exilic destination would be Saint Helena (and not America as he had presumed), Napoleon asks Las Cases, “mais que pourrons-nous faire dans ce lieu perdu?” To which Las Cases responds, “Sire, nous vivrons du passé...” (*Mémorial* 82). The Emperor quickly responds, “Eh bien! dit-il, nous écrirons nos *Mémoires*” (ibid). *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* thus set as its primary aim to solidify Napoleon's memory in his own words: to remember the past and set the record straight. Hazareesingh asserts, “its immediate success rested upon its one overriding characteristic: its restoration of Napoleon's voice” (165). Before moving on to an analysis of the most defining political features of the *Mémorial*, a word on the text's form and its relation to epistolarity will introduce what I consider to be the text's fundamental ideology.

The *Mémorial* is written as a scribe's diary, with each entry preceded by a date and headed with short phrases summarizing its content. The first words of each entry are often, “L'Empereur...” a phrase that commonly appears as the first words or within the first two lines.<sup>8</sup> It thus reads like a diary written in the third person, giving a seemingly faithful account of everything from the weather and accommodations to how Napoleon is feeling that day, what he is reading, his various excursions, and, of course, what he says.

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<sup>8</sup> Four consecutive entries begin, for example, “A six heures du matin, l'Empereur est monté à cheval” (418); “L'Empereur m'a fait appeler sur les dix heures; il venait de rentrer” (419); “Aujourd'hui, de fort bon matin, l'Empereur est sorti pour monter à cheval” (421); “Le temp a été extrêmement mauvais. L'Empereur avait été assez mal toute la nuit” (421).

Meanwhile, Las Cases occasionally intersperses the Emperor's dictations with supporting historical documents, "proving" certain accounts of events and demonstrating consensus where one might question Napoleon's conclusions. We hear the Emperor's voice through Las Cases's incredible attention to slight changes in his mood, health, or tone, as well as through many first-person narratives. These accounts are recollections of past military feats, musings, even regrets, on what he could have done differently, and justifications for why he made certain decisions—foremost among them, crowning himself Emperor. Told from this perspective, the leader's actions and decisions always resonate as logical, appropriate, and necessary. Napoleon points to the circumstances presented to him at the moment he became ruler of the French—foreign invasion, civil war at home—and argues that he had no choice but to become a "Washington couronné" (274) in order to lead France to victory. He asks dozens of rhetorical questions with increasing exasperation, demonstrating how thoughtfully he'd weighed all options before it became clear he had no other choice. At once explaining his dictatorial reign and arguing that the French should have trusted him to rule again after his return from Elba in 1815, he exclaims,

Et ne valait-il pas mieux encore courir les dangers de m'avoir pour maître, que de s'exposer à subir le joug de l'étranger ? N'était-il pas plus aisé de se défaire d'un despote, d'un tyran, que de secouer les chaînes de toutes les nations réunies ? Et puis d'où leur venait cette défiance sur ma personne ? Parce qu'ils m'avaient déjà vu concentrer en moi tous les efforts et les diriger d'une main vigoureuse. Mais n'apprennent-ils pas aujourd'hui à leurs dépens combien c'était nécessaire ? Eh bien ! le péril fut toujours le même, la lutte terrible et la crise imminente. Dans cet état de choses, la dictature n'était-elle pas nécessaire, indispensable ? (460)

Time and again, Napoleon leads the reader to agree that the "nécessité du moment" (309) dictated exceptional actions be taken in order to ensure the country's prosperity. In these moments we "hear" Napoleon's frustration, his desire to do the right thing for France, and his assurance that he did exactly what needed to be done. He no longer appears as a greater-than-life dictator seizing control unjustly, but as an everyday man, a

father figure, looking out for his people even at the expense of his own life. Although Las Cases is just one of Napoleon's many scribes on Saint Helena, he quickly gains daily, intimate access to the Emperor and becomes privy to his innermost thoughts and feelings. He is convincingly the best man to portray the "real" Napoleon to a public readership, and does so with enthusiasm, clarity, and apparent authenticity. The text's enormous appeal attests to its overall success in portraying the Emperor as such a moving, inspirational character.

In this the *Mémorial* is reminiscent of the epistolary novel, an emotion-driven genre employed with remarkable success throughout the eighteenth century (and originating in the seventeenth century with *Lettres Portugaises*, 1669). In fact, among Napoleon's readings on Saint Helena we find Rousseau's epistolary novel *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Lettres de Mme de Sévigné*, both of which leave strong impressions on the Emperor for their portrayals of sentiment and the morality of their time (*Mémorial* 282-3, 356-7). We may surmise that Napoleon was sensitive to this genre's capacity to influence its readership through emotionally laden depictions of historical, seemingly factual, events. While the *Mémorial* does not adhere to the epistolary genre's emphasis on "writing to the moment" (that is, present-tense and first person composition, exposing all the minute fluctuations in thought and feeling), it does share with its formal predecessor an attention to sentimentality meant to incite readers to reflect critically on the political and philosophical doctrines of their time.<sup>9</sup> Its stated, intended purpose was to depict the Emperor's character—in all his "sensibilité réelle" (369)—on which the readers could once and for all judge history. "L'objet essentiel de mes écrits," Las Cases writes, "est de faire connaître le caractère de l'Empereur" (417). In so doing the text counteracts the many anti-Napoleonic pamphlets and propaganda then

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<sup>9</sup> For a brief yet detailed analysis of the attributes of the epistolary form, see Rousset, 65-103.

in circulation and provides an alternative narrative of Napoleonic history. Admittedly with less talent than Sévigné or Rousseau, Las Cases nevertheless employs a personal form and tone to paint a portrait of Napoleon's life, actions and, above all, his person.

It seems fitting, then, that the *Mémorial* would borrow its politics from the Enlightenment as well; in addition to a sentimental, human depiction of Napoleon, the *Mémorial* simultaneously highlights the Emperor's republican, revolutionary doctrines. Las Cases tells us that Napoleon is guided by "la raison, la logique, on pourrait même dire le sentiment" (222) suggesting that, in Napoleon's case at least, clear-headed reason and instinctual feelings are one and the same. His decisions are always in the interest of the nation, and always seem to make common sense. Napoleon explains his political success thus: "Avant mon arrivée, toute la France était déjà pleine d'un même sentiment. Je débarque, et ma proclamation n'est pleine que de ce même sentiment: chacun y lit ce qu'il a dans le cœur...voilà toute la clef de ce mouvement électrique, sans exemple dans l'histoire. Il prit sa source uniquement dans la nature des choses" (411). Or again: "Et aussi voilà pourquoi, en dépit de tant de malheurs, je demeure si populaire parmi les Français. C'est une espèce d'instinct, d'arrière-justice de leur part" (461). Napoleon's innermost feelings correspond to those of the people he governs, and this feeling is an inherent understanding of reason and justice. Such a complete symbiosis with the people makes his reign part of the natural order of things. Las Cases underscores Napoleon's assessment: "La marche de Napoléon au rang suprême est au contraire toute simple, toute naturelle, toute innocente; elle est unique dans l'histoire... 'Je n'ai point usurpé la couronne, disait-il un jour au Conseil d'État, je l'ai relevée dans le ruisseau ; le peuple l'a mise sur ma tête, qu'on respecte ses actes !'" (157). This is what makes Napoleon Bonaparte so extraordinary, so fit to rule, and ultimately the people's choice rather than an imposing tyrant. Rousseau argues eloquently for this "natural" right to political and



personal choices in *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*: “Que le rang se règle par le mérite, et l’union des cœurs par leur choix, voilà le véritable ordre social” (135). Like the epistolary authors of the eighteenth century, the Las Cases/Napoleon team effectively fuses political motivations with personal sentiment and ambition. Robert Morrissey calls the *Mémorial* a poetical fusion of glory and authenticity (717). Along with other critics, he points out that the text’s intimacy serves to convey the Emperor’s humanity.<sup>10</sup> Even more, I propose, access to his voice marks the work with the stamp of authenticity that would—once and for all—explain and justify Napoleon’s most debated choices and actions as being part of the very nature of a good and just society.<sup>11</sup>

And yet, Napoleon’s ambiguous relationship with these very ideals of equality, justice, and choice is also embedded in the work’s form. For even if the *Mémorial* is inspired by the epistolary form, it remains a *journal intime*, and not even that of its primary subject, Napoleon, but of his previously unknown, and unimportant, scribe. In this it maintains a certain distance between reader and subject even while purporting to transport readers into the very mind and soul of the Emperor. It rejects the openness of the epistolary genre, its way of painting a “portrait en mouvement” (Rousset 69) to characterize the contradictions and fluctuations of this genre’s most common themes: love and passion. On the contrary, as already suggested, the *Mémorial* is presented as historical document: factual recollections of the past and a chronicle of present-day life on Saint Helena. Napoleon is presented as an unwavering character, always faithful to the Revolution’s teachings and always making decisions that honor, and ultimately save,

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<sup>10</sup> He writes that Napoleon is simultaneously an “everyday man” and “hero.” For a similar assessment of Napoleon’s character in *Le Mémorial*, see also Hazareesingh, 166-69. This dual-sided nature of the Emperor will be discussed in my next section.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, an important premise for Napoleon is that society is fundamentally good. Napoleon says in *Le Mémorial*: “Ce qu’il y a de certain, c’est que la masse de la société n’est point méchante; car si la très grande majorité voulait être criminelle, et méconnaître les lois, qui est-ce qui aurait la force de l’arrêter ou de la contraindre? Et c’est là précisément le triomphe de la civilisation, parce que cet heureux résultat sort de son sein, naît de sa propre nature” (272).

the French nation. The text's rhetoric does not ask its readers so much to empathize with the Emperor's difficult choices as to simply trust in his moral compass and intellectual superiority. In other words, France needed a savior, and he was the right man for the job. Just as Napoleon states time and again that he tamed that Revolution, so his companion in exile tames the Enlightenment's epistolary form; such an analogy helps illustrate how Napoleon's *Mémorial* not only inaugurates an important transition in the development of the Emperor's legacy, but also a new understanding of the French Revolution as a top-down, nearly authoritarian, disseminator of ideals rather than a people's fight for freedom from tyranny.

### *Napoleon Exiled*

Napoleon's experience in exile was crucial to his formation of the nation-state, both for the effects its harsh landscape had on the French imaginary and the opportunity such a liminal space afforded Napoleon in reconstructing a political self-portrait. He is often symbolized in the *Mémorial* as a modern Prometheus chained to his rock, thus ensuring that Saint Helena would be tied to his legacy as a martyr to the nation (*Mémorial* 190). Let me first address the importance of the island geography in fostering the Napoleonic myth by turning to images of the Emperor produced in the *Mémorial*. We will see how the island functions as a prison that romanticizes the Emperor's exile, and then as an ideological space on which he could project his politics. Finally, a survey of how the Emperor's exilic memory persisted in poetry, the press, and illustrations following his death on Saint Helena will demonstrate how exile and the island fostered a republican legacy that would go on to influence concepts of "Frenchness" throughout the century.

The first part of Napoleon's story of exile is betrayal. When Napoleon abdicated after Waterloo in 1815, he agreed to surrender to the English as a prisoner of war and be deported. Yet he believed he was headed to America and even hoped to be able to build a new Napoleonic colony there. He tirelessly asserts in the *Mémorial* that he felt betrayed by the British, that he had entrusted them with his fate and believed their democratic laws would necessitate a fair and just punishment. Instead, he learned while on board the *Bellerophon* that he was to be transferred to the *Northumberland*, which would transport him to an island prison in the middle of the South Atlantic. Jean Tulard writes of this moment, "Le destin de Napoléon était définitivement scellé. L' imagine-t-on planteur aux États-Unis ou prenant le thé avec de vieilles Anglaises? La légende qui allait l'entourer eût été brisée net. Il fallait le martyr" (*Napoléon* 444). Indeed, martyrdom on the island turned an otherwise beaten man into a glorious ruler, as Victor Hugo's words make evident; justifying his initial support of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the poet confides in his journal in October of 1848, "[La France] a besoin d'un homme qui la sauve et ne le trouvant pas autour d'elle dans la sombre tempête des événements, elle s'attache avec un suprême effort au glorieux rocher de Sainte-Hélène" (qtd. in Lucas-Dubreton 452). The Napoleonic exile thus commences with a journey to a distant, isolated, and insufferable island destination, which would henceforth fashion the memory of the Napoleonic martyr, savior of the nation.

The one thing Napoleon and his staff knew of Saint Helena was that it was far. Reacting to the betrayal, Las Cases condemns the English ministers for sending them to "un rocher à deux mille lieues de l'Europe, loin de la vue et de la communication des hommes" (94). They understand just how out of sight they will be. In fact, the closest major landmass to the island is 1,200 miles away (West Africa) and the closest island (Ascension Island) is just over 800 miles away. While most French citizens today know

that this is where Napoleon died in exile, few could tell you where in the world it is located. In the public imaginary, Saint Helena is in the middle of nowhere—a “lieu perdu” to return to Napoleon’s words quoted at the opening of the previous section (82). This is underscored by the *Northumberland*’s passengers’ reactions as they quit the English Channel and venture into the great expanse of sea en route to Saint Helena. Las Cases writes, in a rare entry that does not commence with the Emperor’s thoughts or feelings:

Le 10 [août 1815] nous fûmes tout à fait hors de la Manche et nous perdîmes la terre de vue. Alors commencèrent à s’accomplir nos nouvelles destinées! Ce moment vint remuer encore une fois le fond de mon cœur; certains objets y retrouvèrent tout leur empire: je mettais une satisfaction amère à me déchirer de mes propres mains! « O vous que j’aimais ! qui m’attachiez à la vie ! mes vrais amis, mes plus chères affections, je me suis montré digne de vous ! soyez-le de moi, ne m’oubliez jamais ! » (93-94).

Las Cases highlights his own martyrdom in this passage alongside the Emperor’s; what is particularly striking, however, is the Proustian moment he experiences upon losing sight of land. Confronted with only the horizon of the unknown and the monotony of the ocean, Las Cases plunges into memories of his past, now at odds with his future. He did not provoke this experience, but rather it is the view of unending ocean that opens up a new chapter in his life and puts an end to that which came before. The exilic journey out is always experienced looking backwards. The geographical distance provokes a temporal disconnect, severing exiles from their home physically and experientially. Las Cases understands that henceforth they would live not only in a prison, but in a veritable abyss beyond space and time.

And indeed, the choice to send the Emperor to Saint Helena was motivated by the island’s capacity for preventing escape, but also because, being so far off, the Emperor was more likely to be forgotten. The Prime Minister wrote, “À une telle distance et en un tel lieu, toute intrigue sera impossible, et à une aussi longue distance de l’Europe, il sera

très vite oublié” (qtd. in Chevallier 50). Recalling Renan’s definition of the nation as a communal forgetting, we can appreciate how important it was to the Emperor’s enemies to cast him out of sight and mind. It was thus equally important to his friends that he not be forgotten, and this is in fact partly what drove Las Cases to publish the *Mémorial* without the Emperor’s express approval (*Mémorial* 1545). The island also allowed for easier surveillance of the prisoner who had already escaped from exile once; despite the logistical difficulties of relocating Napoleon to a British territory, the government agreed that a remote island was an important feature (Chevallier 50). These same reasons would drive the decision to send Dreyfus to Devil’s Island eight decades later; yet, as with the Jewish Captain during the Third Republic and even Hugo during the Second Empire, the exilic island would only romanticize the prisoners’ exile in the public imaginary and ultimately add fuel to their supporters’ fight for justice.

The abyss of exilic imprisonment begins with the sea. Abrupt changes in the wind steered the *Northumberland* off course, causing them to lose sight of their accompanying boats and endure intense seasickness. On calm days *ennui* overtook them, tensions rose, and the journey felt endless, so that Las Cases equated the boat with just another kind of “prison” (186). Finally, seventy days later, Saint Helena appeared in the distance: “on cria: ‘Terre!’ [...] Rien ne peut montrer davantage les progrès de la navigation, que cette espèce de merveille, par laquelle on vient de si loin, attaquer et rencontrer, à heure fixe, un seul point dans l’espace” (189). Here, Las Cases once again underscores the island’s incredible isolation and distance from home—a single dot on a map, barely visible. Perhaps unintentionally, he again emphasizes the visual dimension of their journey, painting a picture for his readership. Rather than feeling joy at their arrival, Las Cases calls the anchor touching down “le premier anneau de la chaîne qui va clouer le moderne Prométhée sur son roc” (190) and the island Napoleon’s “prison

perpétuelle! Peut-être son tombeau!” (190).<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, this entry also avoids any mention of Napoleon’s own reaction to arriving at Saint Helena; when our scribe looks at Napoleon in this moment, he is unable to “surprendre la plus légère impression” (190), testifying to the ruler’s great stoicism in suffering exile—and even death—with bravery and poise. Perhaps to better communicate the gravity of their situation, then, Las Cases chooses to convey the devastation of their exilic crossing from his perspective alone. In this he asks his readers to at once admire Napoleon’s great stature and empathize with the real hardship he faces. Both are essential to the construction of the hero.

The descriptions of the island manifest a certain ambiguity, which conveys how this liminal space functions simultaneously as a space of suffering and a space of imagination. More often than not the island is referred to pejoratively as a “roc” (94, 190, 194, 199, 519, 1572, 1604, 1617, 1620) or a “rocher” (94, 200, 292, 1585, 1617), “nu et stérile” (194, 292). Its mountains are like “une constante répétition des grandes convulsions de la nature” (267), which also evoke a prison: “l’horizon est fermé par la chaîne crevassée de rochers nus qui forment le contour et la barrière de l’île” (290). Meanwhile, the sparse vegetation is “sauvage” (268, 292), “tourmenté” (292), or “en désordre, inculte et désert” (290). We discern adjectives that diametrically oppose their home, republican France, which is natural, expanding, civilized, and orderly, with the savageness of the island’s landscape. The republican ideology that conceives of France as the home of reason and civilization manifests itself in the geographical descriptions of the island. However, in this last passage, Las Cases admits that the view from their residence at Longwood includes a terrain “montrant de la verdure, un assez grand nombre d’habitations et toutes les traces de la culture; de ce côté, le tableau, il faut

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<sup>12</sup> Hugo will echo this sentiment in the dedication of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, writing: “A l’île de Guernesey, sévère et douce, mon asile actuel, mon tombeau probable.” Dreyfus too repeatedly labels Devil’s Island “mon tombeau” in his memoirs from exile.

l'avouer, est tout à fait romantique et même agréable" (290). From this description we imagine the exiles, like artists, surveying their location and taking inspiration from the scene that surrounds them.

Likewise, we are given repeated assurances of the insalubrity of the island, but also glimpses of the opposite. The Emperor suffers illness attributed to the location (322, 494); an entire entry entitled "Insalubrité de l'île" enumerates the climatic causes of the population's short life span (493-494); and, thirdly, Las Cases states unequivocally, when presented with the prospect of receiving new furnishings for the Emperor's house, "Le vice n'est point dans les meubles et dans la maison qui sont ici; il est dans le roc sur lequel elle repose, dans la latitude qu'elle occupe. Tant qu'on ne changera pas cette latitude, nous ne serons jamais bien" (644). The place itself is presented as evil and murderous—"un écueil maudit et redouté" (406)—and twice Napoleon deems death a more humane punishment (202, 562).<sup>13</sup> However, all this does not prevent both Las Cases and the Emperor from admitting that the climate could be worse—Las Cases writes that Saint Helena's relatively moderate climate "présente du reste peut-être plus d'ennui que d'insalubrité" (292), while Napoleon goes so far as to state that, "après tout, exil pour exil, Sainte-Hélène était peut-être encore la meilleure place" (405). How could Saint Helena, France's polar opposite geographically and ideologically, be the perfect exilic location? Upon reflection, Las Cases goes on to assert:

...il pourrait être telles chances qui fissent que Sainte-Hélène ne se serait pas trouvée le pire des exils: nous y demeurions à l'écart, quand la tempête rugissait pour les autres; nous nous y trouvions hors de l'atmosphère des passions, circonstance favorable aux chances possibles d'un meilleur avenir: c'était assurément un grand désir de voir en beau; je reculais l'horizon de toute l'étendue de l'imagination (405-06).

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<sup>13</sup> A similar "écueil maudit et redouté" appears in Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (the Douvres reef) and will be studied in the next chapter.

Saint Helena is indeed the “best place” for an exile, for it allows for suffering and reflection all at once. The distant island is depicted as a harsh no man’s land, contrary to the human constitution and even to nature itself. It is a prison—not of steel and bars—but of mountain “chains” surrounded by a great oceanic abyss. Yet its distance from home also affords the exile the opportunity to dream, not from behind bars and closed doors but out onto the great expanse that is the sea, the horizon, and the future. Napoleon’s exile on Saint Helena is a necessary step to constructing his tale of martyrdom but also to providing the circumstances that will allow him to imagine, and then write, his ideal French nation—the one nature intended, we will recall—and its definition of citizenship.

This romantic, mythical image of Napoleon is captured in the many illustrations depicting the Emperor on Saint Helena. Artists began producing renderings of the Emperor in exile while he was there and continued through the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> He is commonly shown along a rocky coastline, sometimes looking longingly out to sea, but often his gaze turned inward or downward. An anonymous engraving entitled “Napoléon sur le rocher de Sainte-Hélène” juxtaposes the grandeur of the Emperor, who is situated at the summit of a rocky cliff that towers above treacherous waters, with his human commonality, for he is dwarfed by the geological formation that occupies the entirety of the tableau (Chevallier 181). Oscar Rex, in his painting “C’est fini,” (circa 1900) shows Napoleon sitting on the rock, head down and hat off, underscoring the Emperor’s defeat even while romanticizing the image of him alone in exile. Indeed, the leader is often depicted a solitary figure in these images, lending an aura of melancholy and defeat that accompanies the greatness of a man who sought to conquer the world and does conquer each painting of which he, more than the island, remains the subject. Mastroianni’s

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<sup>14</sup> For a thorough selection of images, see Chevallier.



series of around thirty postcards, also dating from the early twentieth century and entitled “À Sainte-Hélène: le Rêve,” are sculpted images the artist created from his photographs of earlier images of Napoleon on Saint Helena. The title states outright that which the others seem to hint at—that, stranded on Saint Helena, Napoleon dreams, whether outward across the horizon or inward to his own person. He dreams of what he accomplished as Emperor, but also what he can still accomplish by dint of his exile. And, at the same time, back home others dream of him, memorialized and romanticized on his exilic island.

Indeed, the romantic image of Napoleon cultivated by the *Mémorial* was an important subject of poetry, novels, and histories across Europe during the two decades following his death.<sup>15</sup> It is precisely the conditions of his island exile—the isolation, solitude, wrongful punishment, melancholy, grandeur, and defeat—that rendered Napoleon such an excellent hero for Romantics, in particular Victor Hugo. Prior to Napoleon’s death in exile, Hugo lambasted the Emperor for usurping the monarchy and committing the crimes of war and tyranny (see “Buonaparte” in *Odes et Ballades*, 1822). A few years later, however, Hugo exalted the Emperor in poetic tributes to his glory and grandeur. Petiteau attributes this dramatic reversal to the monotony of the Restoration’s politics; this new regime lacking in opportunities for such glory and grandeur prompted the poet to re-consider his criticism of Napoleon (69). Another possible explanation for the Romantic attraction to Napoleon post-1822 is the advent of the *Mémorialistes* and the wide circulation of *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*. Petiteau hints at this by organizing her study chronologically and demonstrating the striking effect the *Mémorial* had on early nineteenth century history and literature. Meanwhile, Tulard and Le Gall

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<sup>15</sup> Natalie Petiteau includes a small survey of these writers, which include the German, Italian, and French poets Heinrich Heine, Alessandro Manzoni, and Casimir Delavigne, among many others (58-102).

both ascribe the Romantic writers' revived interest in Napoleon to his exile on Saint Helena.<sup>16</sup>

For example, in his poem "Lui" (*Les Orientales* 1829), Victor Hugo vaunts Napoleon's grandeur as a ruler, military commander, and prisoner, pointing in particular to the effect Saint Helena had on the Emperor's reputation. Describing Napoleon's exile, Hugo writes:

Qu'il est grand, là surtout ! quand, puissance brisée,  
Des porte-clefs anglais misérable risée,  
Au sacre du malheur il retrempe ses droits,  
Tient au bruit de ses pas deux mondes en haleine,  
Et, mourant de l'exil, gêné dans Sainte-Hélène,  
Manque d'air dans la cage où l'exposent les rois ! (vv. 25-30)

The poem's central antitheses are highlighted in this stanza: Napoleon is at once weak and strong, expiring and unstoppable, captive and captivating. He is the dreamer capable of creating a new society as well as the exile, the object of others' dreams cast away to Saint Helena. He towers above the world below, yet is also defeated by those very powers he sought to tame. Hugo's poem opens with "Toujours lui! Lui partout!" (v. 1), and here too we experience a Napoleon who, though imprisoned in exile, remains powerful and present a world away. We at once pity him caged up and dying and admire him for his greatness and bravery. In the poem, Napoleon will never die for he is the "roi des temps" (v. 66) and "l'homme ineffaçable" (v. 67). His memory outlives him across the globe, prompting Hugo to suggest:

Tu domines notre âge; ange ou démon, qu'importe?  
Ton aigle dans son vol, haletant, nous emporte. (vv. 79-80)

Amidst the repeated accolades of the Emperor's greatness and "hauteur," there is a sense of closeness to the people in these lines and an impression that such stature is meant to

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<sup>16</sup> Didier le Gall enumerates the many similarities between the Napoleonic hero and the Romantic hero (13), while Jean Tulard notes that "cette fin misérable et solitaire sur un rocher battu par les flots frappa l'imagination des Romantiques" (*Napoléon* 449).

raise civilizations to a new height, rather than overpower them through despotic rule.

Most importantly, the poem presents a fixed memory of Napoleon, particularly revealing for a poet who changed his mind about his subject. Here, Hugo is clear that Napoleon is, and always will be, great:

Toujours Napoléon, éblouissant et sombre,  
Sur le seuil du siècle est debout. (vv. 83-84)

Rather than severing Napoleon from his homeland, his exile to Saint Helena raises the Emperor's stature in the French imaginary.

Gérard de Nerval's acclaims of Napoleon likewise highlight both the Emperor's godly and earthly attributes at the moment of his death. In "La Mort de l'Exilé"

(*Napoléon et la France guerrière: Élégies Nationales*, 1826) Nerval opens:

Toi qui semblas un dieu, quoique fils de la Terre,  
Qui pourra de ta vie expliquer le mystère?  
Un matin, tu brillas comme un soleil nouveau,  
Mais le soir, las enfin de lasser la victoire,  
Trop chargé de grandeurs, de triomphes, de gloire,  
Tu roulas contre un roc avec tout ton fardeau. (vv. 1-6)

Here again we experience the rise and fall of a great man, and just as the glory of his successes defend his reputation against vilification, so his final defeat on Saint Helena serves only to further romanticize his memory. Like Hugo, Nerval rejects the either/or assessment of Napoleon's reign, concluding,

Qu'il tombât dans l'abîme, ou volât au soleil,  
Sur un rocher désert, dans la pourpre royale,  
Ou plus haut, ou plus bas, il était sans pareil! (vv. 222-224)

Napoleon's greatness extends in both directions as a result of his unparalleled successes and dramatic defeat. Both poets are more interested in the public's memory of Napoleon than in a critical assessment of the ruler's strengths and weaknesses. The final lines of the poem read:

Mais ses gloires, toujours aux nôtres enchaînées,  
Lui promettant un nom qui ne doit pas finir,

Monument éternel, enfant du souvenir,  
 Qui ne croulera pas sous le poids des années,  
 Mais grandira dans l'avenir! (vv. 231-235)

Napoleon belongs to the past but his memory ensures that glory and greatness will continue to characterize France ("notre" gloire). Nerval shows that even in death Napoleon's identity is entangled up with that of France so that one cannot be French without reconciling oneself with the Emperor's achievements, and sacrifices.

The *Mémorial* represents these legendary achievements and sacrifices as one and the same: Napoleon saved the nation, and in order to do so gave up his life. Napoleon thus emerges as a Christic-Messianic figure credited with "saving" the Revolution and restoring popular sovereignty.<sup>17</sup> His death on Saint Helena makes possible this tale of martyrdom that helped create the idea of the "Napoleonic hero" so crucial to his popular legacy. In the *Mémorial*, the words "martyr" and "messiah" appear repeatedly to describe the persecution he suffered on the island and from his guard Sir Hudson Lowe. The fact that, back home, the nation's republican values indeed live on in the memory of Napoleon and in the institutions he established further justify the text's claims. Like other texts vaunting the great national heroes going back to the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Mémorial* thus ventures from biography into hagiography, ensuring that Napoleon would take his place in the French imaginary as a sort of secular saint who saved the nation. Frank Bowman demonstrates that for certain Romantics Napoleon-as-Messiah was conflated with France-as-Christ so that the nation itself suffered defeat (namely at Waterloo) in order for a future utopia be born (186). In this analysis, Napoleon is the messiah ushering in a new era of peace and prosperity. This portrayal honors the *Mémorial's* depiction of Napoleon's sacrifice as an act of martyrdom for the salvation of

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<sup>17</sup> For a survey of European writers' (including Nerval's) development of the Christic-Napoleonic figure, see Bowman.

the nation, and his exile to Saint Helena is presented as the leader's supreme sacrifice for the sake of French unity (70-71, 78, 94, 299, 503-04).

While the *Mémorial's* descriptions of Napoleon's crossing, his exile on Saint Helena, and his confrontation with death first produced an image of him as a Christic martyr suffering for the salvation of others (the French), his actual death in exile prompted poets and journalists alike to continue to compare him to Christ and affix his memory to the island on which he perished. Heinrich Heine, in *Reisebilder I* (1826), calls Napoleon the "Christ temporel qui a souffert sous Hudson Lowe" (qtd. in Lucas-Dubreton 176, 356), while during the return of Napoleon's ashes *Le Siècle* compares the Emperor's agony on Saint Helena to that of Christ. Indeed, the fact the Emperor was buried far off and would not return to France for nearly twenty years encouraged his memory to be tied to his burial site; this site was marked by weeping willow trees on the island. A steel engraving by G. Larbalestrier entitled "La Tombe" (1815) depicts the fenced-in remains of Napoleon during a storm: bent-over weeping willow trees occupy the center of the tableau while, above, grand rays of sunlight beam forth from a single clearing in the sky, to land directly on the Emperor's tomb (Chevallier 179). We may be reminded of Roland's ascension to heaven following his death under the pine tree, as well as the hostility of the island climate from which only God and death can shelter the Emperor, or even the isolation he continues to undergo, even in death, distanced from his homeland. The controversial *retour des cendres*, first proposed in 1830, sparked numerous writers and politicians to speak out in favor of the return of the Emperor's ashes to French soil, among them Victor Hugo (see, for instance, "Ode à la Colonne," 1830). In the political magazine written in verse, *Némésis*, Auguste-Marseille Barthélemy and his compatriot Joseph Méry also voiced their support, recalling specifically the geographical context of the Emperor's exilic island:

Dites au *Marengo* de tourner sa poulaine  
 Vers le saule français qui pleure à Sainte-Hélène;  
 Sans carte, sans boussole et sans compas marin,  
 Il saura bien trouver son glorieux parrain (qtd. in Chassé 110).

The weeping willow on Saint-Helena (again, not unlike the pine tree under which Roland perished on the battlefield), had become a French symbol of a national hero dying in battle for his *patrie*. According to this poem, the ship does not need tools or direction to locate it, but only a strong sense of patriotism and national identity. The island imagery persisted following the controversial *retour des cendres*. Charlet's engraving entitled "Convoi de l'Empereur Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène" in the 1842 edition of the *Mémorial* depicts the funeral procession against a backdrop of ocean and rocks, while his engraving of Napoleon's tomb under the willow tree on Saint Helena demonstrates just how much this image haunted the French memory. In sum, the French Emperor's exile and death on Saint Helena assured that the island would take its place amidst the French cultural landscape, as prison and shelter, battleground and national territory. Napoleon paradoxically came to embody the idea of "France" only upon being cast out of the national territory; his experiences on a distant island prison served to romanticize his memory so that, following his martyrdom, he became a symbol of French republicanism, unity, and brotherhood. And, thanks in large part to the *Mémorial* and the images it bequeathed, the people's recollection of Napoleon's grandeur would be inextricably linked to the memory of the island.

### *Napoleon and the Revolution*

Throughout the *Mémorial*, Napoleon is simultaneously humanized and deified, at once depicted as a man of the people and a god-like savior worthy of obedience and gratitude. As we saw earlier, Napoleon suggests in the text that he feels intimately connected to the people's interests and seeks to bring about their collective

enlightenment, which he believes is not only the natural course of social and political progression but also the key to happiness and prosperity. He explains:

La plupart des sentiments sont des traditions; nous les éprouvons parce qu'il nous ont précédés: aussi la raison humaine, son développement, celui de nos facultés, voilà toute la clef sociale, tout le secret du législateur. Il n'y a que ceux qui veulent tromper les peuples, et gouverner à leur profit, qui peuvent vouloir les retenir dans l'ignorance ; car plus ils sont éclairés, plus il y aura de gens convaincus de la nécessité des lois, du besoin de les défendre, et plus la société sera assise, heureuse, prospère (*Mémorial* 272).

In this Napoleon emerges as a teacher, even a father, so that a top-down method of governing conveniently manifests itself as the nurturing of those republican qualities already cropping up in society. For him, ruling, like parenting, is a balance of nurture and nature, and he determines what qualities are inherently “good” and “natural”. In a conversation with an “Arab” during the Egyptian campaign, Napoleon blatantly states his paternal role, saying, “tous ceux que je gouverne sont mes enfants; la puissance ne m’a été donnée que pour garantir leur sûreté” (176). Napoleon’s leadership thus discursively couples guidance with governance, salvation with legislation.

Napoleon’s laws, and especially the Napoleonic Code ending feudalism and birth-based titles, display his steadfast belief in the Revolution’s ideal of popular sovereignty. It was Napoleon who allowed for the bestowal of honors on all members of society regardless of class (the Legion of Honor is perhaps the best known), an important step toward realizing a meritocratic and egalitarian society. These measures led him to call himself “le monarque vraiment national” who extinguished factions and became the people’s king (438-9). Such steps rightfully encouraged his contemporary supporters to view his reign as the continuation of the Revolution; during a riot in 1821 celebrating the anniversary of Napoleon’s return from Elba, one could perceive the cry of “Vive Napoléon!” right alongside that of “Vive la Révolution!” (Lucas-Dubreton 170).

Institutionally, then, Napoleon's identification with the "*patrie*" was grounded in his embodiment of those republican cornerstones born of the 1789 Revolution.

To those who would argue that he ended up an ambitious, ruthless dictator, he answers that history will demonstrate the necessity of his actions:

Et puis sur quoi pourrait-on m'attaquer qu'un historien ne puisse me défendre ? Serait-ce mes intentions ? mais il est en fond pour m'absoudre. Mon despotisme ? mais il démontrera que la dictature était de toute nécessité. Dira-t-on que j'ai gêné la liberté ? mais il prouvera que la licence, l'anarchie, les grands désordres étaient encore au seuil de la porte.... (607-08).<sup>18</sup>

The *Mémorial* is Napoleon's vehicle for explaining his actions—both those unequivocally republican and those seemingly authoritarian—as the result of enlightened decisions executed in the people's, and therefore the nation's, best interest. Indeed, Antoine Casanova, in *Napoléon et la pensée de son temps* (2000), traces the development of Napoleon's political and philosophical thinking while in exile, demonstrating that the Emperor's unique understanding of the Revolution and his role as its inheritor crystallized in his writings from Saint Helena. Napoleon did what he had to in order to maintain peace at home and establish a new republic in France, and he was confident that any historian seeking to relay the facts of the past would discover that he was ultimately, and in all respects, fundamentally good. In his discussion of how Napoleon casts History as the final judge of his actions and motivations in the *Mémorial*, Göran Blix argues that Napoleon creates an image of himself as a distinctly modern hero (in contrast to the tragic heroes of antiquity), whose fate will be sealed by the future, objective historian. In order to bequeath to the historian the facts of his story, Napoleon, along with Las Cases, focuses not on (sometimes flawed) actions or events, but primarily on his own character. In the end, the Emperor emerges as an ideal citizen who would be

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the anti-heroic counter-narrative was being propagated throughout Europe in numerous pamphlets during this same year. While Napoleon was the French Revolution's rightful savior for some, he remained the despotic "ogre de Corse" for many others (see Petiteau 27-33). Tulard, interestingly, calls this version of Napoleon, "l'Anti-Napoléon," suggesting that it is not only equally mythical, but also *not* Napoleon (Tulard 1965).



remembered above all for his moral integrity, so that “he simultaneously incarnates an equal and an idol” (Blix 126). Again the metaphor of “embodiment” is used to describe Napoleon’s legacy, demonstrating that the success of the *Mémorial* lies in the way it creates an idea out of a man. Napoleon *becomes* the Revolution, the people’s hero, and the nation’s savior all at once. By focusing on his character, the text assures that Napoleon the man would be immortalized as the ideological origin of France’s nationhood.

Meanwhile, this double portrayal of the Emperor, as man and hero, underlies all of the text’s commentary on Napoleon’s actions and decisions. Under Las Cases’s pen, Napoleon is equal to Caesar or Alexander, with the notable distinction that Napoleon was not at first a grand leader or of royal blood, but rather “un simple particulier...inconnu” (180). And yet, this everyday man “[a] osé concevoir de saisir à lui seul les destinées de trente millions d’hommes, de les sauver des défaites du dehors et des dissensions du dedans” (180); he finally “[a] arrêté court une nation ivre de tous les excès” and “[l’a] remplacée subitement dans les vrais sentiers de la raison et des principes” (181). As often as he is presented as a man of the people, he is equally described as the nation’s savior (377, 387, 464, 922), a Messiah (94, 100), and even a prophet (176). Moreover, we are told that his reputation is “immortal” (130) and are even given an account of a death experience from which he returned to life (681). As the savior of the (people’s) Revolution, Napoleon is considered both human and divine. We see in the *Mémorial* how these two sides of Napoleon’s regime—the human father figure and the divine political savior—go hand in hand to develop the ruler’s particular interpretation of the French Revolution and its republican legacy. It is at once a natural event in the course of human history and in need of human intervention—his—in order for its principles and teachings to come to fruition. In this way he poses essential

questions regarding the origin of the revolution: was it “natural”? Divinely-directed?

Arranged by men? If so, what kind of men? These questions will continue to be posed by exiles who look back to the Revolution as the nation’s foundational event; they will compare it to geological revolutions to argue for its extra-human potential and connection to the natural (Hugo and Michel), or see it as an expression of the will of the people (Dreyfus and Zola). These reinterpretations of the Revolution’s beginnings and proceedings persist beyond Napoleon, continuing to shape how 1789 would define France, its culture, and its values.

Yet, according to the *Mémorial*, Napoleon fulfilled the Revolution’s mission and effectively “ended” it. He worked to establish its mission of popular sovereignty through the passage of the Civil Code and the creation of improved state institutions. Meanwhile, he tamed the civil war and violence the Revolution wrought on the population. In this Napoleon represents the best of both sides of the Revolution—the guarantor of the rights it engendered and the eradicator of its excesses. In a word, he “civilized” the Revolution (*Mémorial* 154), ensuring that it would ultimately be successful. Upon reading newspapers from Europe reporting on the Continent’s various hostilities in the spring of 1816, Napoleon exclaims:

La contre-révolution, même en la laissant aller, doit inévitablement se noyer d’elle-même dans la révolution. Il suffit à présent de l’atmosphère des jeunes idées pour étouffer les vieux féodalistes; car rien ne saurait désormais détruire ou effacer les grands principes de notre Révolution; ces grandes et belles vérités doivent demeurer à jamais, tant nous les avons entrelacées de lustre, de monuments, de prodiges; nous en avons noyé les premières souillures dans des flots de gloire; elle sont désormais immortelles! [...] Elles seront la foi, la religion, la morale de tous les peuples: et cette ère mémorable se rattachera, quoi qu’on ait voulu dire, à ma personne; parce qu’après tout, j’ai fait briller le flambeau, consacré les principes, et qu’aujourd’hui la persécution achève de m’en rendre le Messie. Amis et ennemis, tous m’en diront le premier soldat, le grand représentant. Aussi, même quand je ne serai plus, je demeurerai encore pour les peuples l’étoile de leurs droits, mon nom sera le cri de guerre de leurs efforts, la devise de leurs espérances (510-11).

Napoleon seems to have accomplished a miracle: henceforth the principles of 1789 would be the true ruler of France, and of Europe. No longer subject to a single man—monarch, dictator, or emperor—the nation would now bow to principles. As we have seen, Napoleon was not entirely off the mark in this self-aggrandizing assessment; he did create lasting, republican institutions that even the return of the monarchy immediately following his deportation would not be able to dismantle. Scholars to this day associate Napoleon with the Revolution, often times crediting him with ensuring its survival and success. Yet, this passage illuminates an important distinction overlooked by contemporary critics and Napoleon alike: whereas they suggest Napoleon's legacy is to have restored sovereignty to the people, we see here that sovereignty is not located in the people, but rather in their "ideas"—that is, the principles of the revolution. We might suggest, as Napoleon does, that these principles effectively replace the dictator as both ruler of the French and the guiding light of imperial conquest abroad. They become the new "body" of the nation. And yet Napoleon, as their "grand représentant," remains an integral part of this new body—its veritable "head." And, just as one cannot sever the head from the body and expect to remain a healthy organism, one cannot eliminate Napoleon from the minds of the people and still conceive of "France"—especially the France born of the Revolution.

### *Napoleon Shapes French Nationhood*

In a close analysis of the discourse in the *Mémorial*, Didier le Gall (2003) parses out the meanings of specific words, including *patrie* and *nation*. In his analysis, *patrie* for Napoleon refers to the affective relationship a people has with the geographical space of the country (134). As the land of one's ancestors, the French *patrie* gives life—that is to say, birth—future generations of French citizens; it is their heritage, and therefore

demands allegiance (134-35). In a passage quoted at the start of this chapter, Napoleon identifies himself as the *patrie*; responding to Las Cases, who had just informed him of a public display of support on what was then known as the île de France colony (Mauritius), Napoleon states: “C’est tout simple [...] : cela prouve que les habitants de l’île de France sont demeurés Français; je suis la patrie, ils l’aiment; on l’a blessé en moi, ils s’en affligent” (470). Le Gall suggests that Napoleon here asserts himself as father of the Republic and expects a similarly filial devotion from his subjects (135). *Nation*, on the other hand, was a relatively new concept, the French Revolution having inaugurated the beginnings of the modern nation and the word “*nationalité*” being coined by Mme de Staël in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Napoleon must therefore construct the nation, and does so with himself as the head, and the people as its body (Le Gall 163). Again a fusion between the Emperor and the people exists, but instead of an affective relationship between father and children, this political relationship between the head of state and his subjects is an attempt to legitimize the Emperor’s reign (Le Gall 166). For Le Gall, this conception of the nation runs contrary to Napoleon’s self-proclaimed revolutionary heritage in that it rejects the very values the Revolution sought to propagate, that is to say sovereignty for the people (167-68). He rightly points out that in this construction Napoleon is the sole depository of the people’s so-called sovereignty, representing the nation in mind and body and serving as the vehicle leading France into a glorious future (168). While the Emperor is thus the guarantor of the people’s rights and sovereignty, he also presents what Le Gall calls “une dynamique fusionnelle entre le peuple et lui qui s’exprime à travers une légitimité *d’apparat*” (204, emphasis in original). Napoleon is at the head, but at the head of a united community of which he is also, and necessarily, an instrumental part.

In confounding himself with the nation while placing himself at the head of the body of citizenry, Napoleon creates a political dynamic in which the people's sovereignty is contingent on the body of the emperor, paradoxically recalling the monarchical reigns of the previous era. Just as Napoleon argues throughout the *Mémorial* that his legitimacy depends on his election by the people (three plebiscites of 1800, 1802, and 1804 confirmed his rule publicly), so the people's sovereignty rests on the Emperor's embodiment of the nation, both as its physical ruler and as the incarnation of the spirit of its laws. Quoting from a general's memoirs of the Napoleonic campaigns, Las Cases writes in the *Mémorial*:

...et quand la Révolution eut cherché à se consolider par les formes, la centralisation et l'unité de l'Empire, alors toutes les machinations des étrangers dirigées jusque-là contre elle, toutes les malveillances ennemies, furent dès cet instant reportées en entier sur la personne de l'Empereur, dont les destinées, jugeait-on, devaient entraîner désormais tout le système. (1046)

In an increasingly centralized and threatened administrative system, Napoleon became the body at the state's core, guaranteeing its survival. Early on he was conflated with the ideas both of France and of the Revolution, and his destiny was equated with that of the nation. Like the king of a family dynasty, he became as much a part of the State as a part of the people—either their leader or their tyrant, depending on their views, but also and equally the “head” of the “body” politic they constituted. In other words, Napoleon was a part of the people just as he was a representative of the nation's values and history, and therefore could not be cast away without the people feeling like a part of them—a part of France—was cast away along with him.

Lyons (1994) argues that this was a lasting effect of Bonapartism, a movement that outlasted Napoleon Bonaparte to be inherited by Louis Napoleon and even Charles de Gaulle; in his words, each leader made the same assumption that, as a result of the people's vote, he “was the living incarnation of popular sovereignty in action” and

“personally responsible for the French state” (111-12). Indeed, when Napoleon conquered peoples abroad, he spread the principle of the people’s sovereignty across the Continent, “liberating” new bodies and helping to construct new nations.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, his personal defeat at Waterloo was equally a sacrifice of the people’s bodies and the body of the nation that would subsequently be “dismembered” by the Allies following the Treaty of Paris. This understanding of national sovereignty seems also to be at the heart of Benjamin Constant’s political reversal during the Hundred Days, when the writer who previously abhorred the Emperor’s politics famously rallied to his side in a so-called act of patriotism aimed at defending France from internal strife and foreign invasion (Hazareesingh 162). Friends and enemies alike recognized that upholding Napoleon’s rule was necessary to preserving French sovereignty; the head could not be severed from the body.

This corporeal paradigm is what would allow Napoleon to continue to influence French nationhood even when deposed, deported, and exiled.<sup>20</sup> For his journey to Saint Helena was similarly reflected in the national body; as the people constructed an image of the Emperor as a martyr in exile on a distant island, the course of the nation steered toward increased unity backing Napoleon’s memory and identifying the ruler with French heritage. Bowman suggests that the Pole Hoëné Wronski’s representation of Napoleon’s authority as the incarnation of law represents a new interpretation of the king’s “two bodies.” In his discussion of this concept in *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957), Ernst Kantorowicz demonstrates that the

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<sup>19</sup> Although Napoleon did not advocate nation-building during his conquests (on the contrary, he sought to build an empire with himself at the head), on Saint Helena he claimed that he always defended national unities (*Mémorial* 397, 433; see also Le Gall 139 and Lyons 257).

<sup>20</sup> And, arguably, even from beyond the grave, for his nephew Louis-Napoleon would be elected President of the Second Republic by majority vote in 1848 primarily on the basis of his name (Furet writes of this election: “When it came to terminating the Revolution, the French, as they had fifty years before, from preference still thought of a Bonaparte” 142).

monarchical king of the Middle Ages was both mortal, natural man and unifying, political representative; as the early modern state emerged and society transitioned from primarily theocratic to increasingly law-centered, this second body translated into the concept of the “body politic.” Though the idea of the “body politic” is more heavily bound to the notion of state as collectivity (laws, judicial system, administrative procedures) rather than resting power solely on the king, it nonetheless maintains the corporeal metaphor in an emerging law-centered system of government. For Wronski, Napoleon, like the medieval kings, combined moral sovereignty and national sovereignty in his person to achieve both divine and human status (176). Indeed, Napoleon’s “embodiment” of the nation will lay the groundwork for future exiles to develop a similar paradigm of nationhood, one that insists on the corporeality of the nation’s leaders and citizens and thus links the modern republican nation to the absolute monarchies of France’s past.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Hugo, Michel, Dreyfus, and Zola continue to interrogate the nature of the French body politic, as they aim to ensure those who are excluded (the exiles) can, by dint of their beliefs in popular sovereignty and republican values, continue to be included. In all their cases, the Napoleonic legacy of exile was an instrumental influence shaping their own legacies and how they constructed them. Thanks to the *Mémorial* and the Emperor’s exilic experience, then, the idea of Napoleon-in-Exile would parallel the memory of Napoleon-the-Emperor as an icon of French literature, architecture, and history. In creating an exilic experience that continued to tie him to the meaning and development of France, Napoleon paved the way for future exiles in the nineteenth century to influence, from abroad, the course of the nation. Like him, these exiles would look back spatially to their homeland and temporally to 1789 to seek answers to the same questions embedded in the Revolution’s legacy: how to

reconcile sovereignty with governance, freedom with authority, and, ultimately, how to define the nation and its community.



## CHAPTER 2

## Hugo on Guernsey: The Good and the Evil in French Republicanism

“Quel malheur que ma chute!... J’avais refermé l’outre des vents; les baïonnettes ennemies l’ont déchirée. Je pouvais marcher paisiblement à la régénération universelle: elle ne s’exécutera désormais qu’au travers des tempêtes!”  
 --Napoléon Bonaparte, *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* (1823)

C’est à travers le mal qu’il faut sortir du mal.  
 –Victor Hugo, “Les Révolutions”<sup>21</sup>

*Hugo Exiled*

Victor Hugo (1802-1885) picked up where Napoleon left off in more ways than one: he too constructed a sense of French nationhood based on the experience of the 1789 Revolution, and he framed his exilic experience on an island as romantic, heroic, and ultimately endured for the sake of the French nation. From an early age, Hugo was inspired by Napoleon I’s magnanimity and legacy, and his own proscription in the second half of the century afforded him the opportunity to, once and for all, compare his own grandeur to the Emperor’s and emulate the Napoleonic glory he so admired (Garval 171-174). Exiled and arrived on the island of Jersey in the English Channel, Hugo compared its capital, St. Hélier, to Sainte-Hélène (Heilbrun 48), and in his photo shoots there he depicted himself, like Napoleon, alone atop a rock looking longingly across the ocean (Heilbrun 53, 87). This image of Hugo on the *rocher des proscrits* would persist in caricatures, portraits, and sculptures of the writer produced during his lifetime and after, and appeared both in the popular press (*La Vie parisienne* and *Le Masque*) and by more distinguished artists (i.e. Jean Boucher’s “Monument de Victor Hugo à Guernsey”) (Georgel 107-109). Michael Garval writes: “In the popular imagination, Hugo fulfilled the

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<sup>21</sup> From the collection *Toute la Lyre*, published posthumously first in 1888.

role, pioneered perhaps by Voltaire, but perfected by Napoleon Bonaparte, of France's great man, unjustly exiled" (184). Like his imperial predecessor, then, Hugo gazed out from his island prison to his *patrie* across the Channel and imagined a past France: not that of the Second Empire, which had betrayed the Revolution's principles and the nation's people, but that of 1789, when revolutionaries fought by all means necessary to establish popular sovereignty. While Napoleon used this image of an ideal future to justify his imperial crown, Hugo continued to look to the past for a blueprint of how to build a better society. He came to rely not only on the vision of 1789, but also on the events of 1793. For Hugo, 1789 could not be disentangled from the Terror, violence, and atrocities of 1793; the two were a unit, working together to create Republican France. To capture the necessity, even naturalism, of such violence in nation building, the author often deployed the image of the tempest to metaphorically describe what was, for him, a seemingly divine phenomenon. While Napoleon idealized history in order to shape his namesake, Hugo confronted the realities of revolution in order to imagine French nationhood as an amalgam of democracy and violence, good and evil, and, ultimately, self and other.

His life spanned nearly the entirety of the century, allowing him to bear witness to its every revolution. He composed tens of thousands of pages on politics, society, art, etc. His work provides a fine lens for examining nearly any aspect of the French nineteenth century, and even today his name is representative of French culture. This is his legacy, and allowed nineteenth-century writers and thinkers from both sides of the political spectrum to continue to look to his example when seeking stability amidst turmoil.<sup>22</sup> And yet, this celebrated writer spent nearly two decades of his productive

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<sup>22</sup> On the far left side, we can cite the anarchist Louise Michel, who found inspiration in Hugo and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, and on the right, we remember that

years (from 1851-1870) writing not in France, but of France from his home in exile, first on Jersey, then on Guernsey. During these years in the English Channel Islands, Hugo solidified his beliefs in the French republican values inaugurated by the 1789 Revolution; for him, as for many French patriots today, these quintessentially republican liberties defined the nation's stable core in the face of political turmoil, change, and instability—whether that instability arose from nineteenth-century revolutions or present-day terrorist tragedies. Like Napoleon, Hugo came to incarnate a particularly French identity as, in his writings, he blended his own legacy with that of the Revolution.

Hugo, at first a royalist supporting and serving king Louis-Philippe following the Restoration, only became the face of democratic republicanism in 1851 when Louis-Napoleon initiated the coup d'état of December 2nd, establishing the Second Empire and proclaiming himself Napoleon III.<sup>23</sup> Hugo, a leader of the resistance, immediately took refuge in Brussels, and in January of the following year found his name among the list of the proscribed expelled from France under Bonaparte's decree. Fearing a French invasion in Belgium, Hugo eventually allowed his family to convince him to relocate to English territory, and chose the Channel Islands where he could continue to speak French (Maurois 302). In August of 1852 Hugo settled at Marine Terrace, a house overlooking the sea on the island of Jersey, but only three years later he and his family were once again exiled, this time by the English crown, which had established an alliance with Napoleon III. He did not go far—only to the next island over, Guernsey—where he quickly purchased his new residence, Hauteville House, thereby ensuring his right to remain on the island regardless of future political turnovers (Maurois 329). Along with his wife, children, and mistress, Hugo remained in exile on Guernsey until the

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Hugo served as a model for the hero François Sturel in the right-wing nationalist Maurice Barrès's novel *Les Déracinés* (1897).

<sup>23</sup> For more details on Hugo's lifelong political engagement, see Melka.

declaration of the Third Republic in 1870, refusing to return to a nation ruled by an emperor, even when Napoleon III lifted the ban on his return in 1859.

During his nineteen years exiled from France, Hugo composed some of his most famous works of fiction, poetry, and reflections, all of which fuse the poetical with the political. Beginning with *Napoléon le Petit* (1852) and *Les Châtiments* (1853), Hugo proclaimed his assault on the new emperor. More personal themes were subsequently treated in *Les Contemplations* (1856) and *Chansons des rues et des bois* (1865), although in the former Hugo continued to write about his experience of exile and his views of the Revolution. In the first volume of *La Légende des Siècles* (1859) he likewise thought about the role of history, connecting the distant and biblical past to the atrocities of the present, and argued for a religious dimension to the course of history. Meanwhile, Hugo also composed personal, political reflections in his work *Williams Shakespeare* (1864), while his three major novels from this period, *Les Misérables* (1862), *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866), and *L'Homme qui Rit* (1869) continued to develop in fiction the themes of French history, religion, and politics.

The novels in particular demonstrate the importance of the exile in promoting Hugo's vision for humanity. Their heroes—Jean Valjean (*Les Misérables*), Gilliatt (*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*), and Gwynplaine (*L'Homme qui Rit*)—are all social pariahs, exiles, and “others,” whose love for humankind is suspicious because of their outsiderdom. Gauvain (*Quatrevingt-treize*, 1874) equally breaks out of his molded social role in order to do a good, however unexpected, deed and save his enemy. In addition to being outsiders, these heroes are martyrs to their cause. Gauvain loses his life because of his benevolent action, Jean Valjean dies a Christic death, and Gwynplaine sacrifices both the love of his life and the respect engendered by his newly elevated social standing in order to stand up for his beliefs in human equality. As Christ-like figures that lie on the

fringes of the society while working to change it, these heroes resemble Hugo in exile and give voice to his nationalist vision. Upon his return to France, Hugo did not abandon an interest in writing politically in multiple genres, as is evident from the poem *L'Année Terrible* (1872), the novel *Quatrevingt-treize* (1874), and his personal reflections *Actes et Paroles* (1875-76), to name only a few of his numerous works published post-exile. Meanwhile, it should be noted that Hugo's interest in combining politics and poetics did not emerge as a result of his exile, but is central even to his first novel written as a teenager, *Bug-Jargal* (1826), as well as his more successful early work *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné* (1829). As critics have rightfully shown, Hugo's fiction cannot be separated from his politics, philosophy, and vision for the future of France.<sup>24</sup>

Three recent studies of Hugo's political thought and writings—Jean-François Kahn's *Victor Hugo: Un Révolutionnaire* (2001), Henri Pena-Ruiz's *Un Poète en Politique* (2002), and Pierre Melka's *Victor Hugo: Un combat pour les opprimés* (2008)—point to the ways in which Hugo theorizes the French Revolution to ultimately advocate for the universal rights of man. For them, Hugo's politics are tied to his notion of human (or “universal”) progress, and so they tend to ignore what I argue is Hugo's nationalist thinking at its base. They pay little attention to Hugo's exilic experience, and how that experience—of sacrifice, outsiderdom, and geography—informs the writer's literature and politics.<sup>25</sup> This chapter seeks to remedy this common oversight of Hugo's life and oeuvre. Through close readings of a selection of Hugo's poetry, philosophical

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<sup>24</sup> See for example Brombert *Visionary* and Roman *Victor*.

<sup>25</sup> For one scholar who is interested in Hugo's exile, see Vanderwolk. Still, Vanderwolk's conclusions greatly resemble those of Kahn, Pena-Ruiz, and Melka in that he sees Hugo's political and historical contributions to be in the spirit of promoting universalism, while he too neglects to highlight the nuances of nationalism that I hope to show fundamentally inform Hugo's vision. I aim to build on Garval's discussion of Hugo's (French) “monumentality,” which he argues is constructed primarily in relation to the author's “symbolic geography of exile.” I agree with Garval's claims, and my literary analysis of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* supports the conclusions he draws from analyses of a selection of Hugo's writings, photographs, and the writer's decoration of Hauteville House.

works, and especially the novel *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, I analyze how exile supports and informs Hugo's political and national vision. Despite his reputation as one of France's greatest writers and thinkers, during his own lifetime Hugo was an outcast and martyr, much like his novels' protagonists. In exile, he sought to deploy his own experience of self-sacrifice to spearhead social change on a global scale, but maintained a French nationalist framework for his imagined community. He returned again and again to the French Revolution and Terror as the nation's original sacrifice for the sake of progress, and came to espouse an ideology that takes French history as a common human past and French republican values as an ideal global future.

### *Hugo, the French Revolution, and Nationalism*

While Hugo's utopian vision of global fraternity has universal appeal, his hopes for this community originate in a specifically French past, that of the Revolution, its ideals, and its message. For Hugo, the Revolution was not only a promise of freedom and equality, but also an experience of failure and tragedy. The Terror that immediately followed, as well as his own exile half a century later, illustrated how ephemeral these ideals turned out to be. In his exilic texts, Hugo repeatedly invokes the Revolution both as an origin of present injustices and as a model of future peace. This paradox haunts his writings and subverts the traditional binary of good/evil that cuts across the whole of his work.

Beginning with *Les Châtiments*, Hugo depicts France as a deeply wounded country; the nation is betrayed by its leader Napoleon III, cruel to its poor, and headed down a path of self-destruction. The France of freedom and democracy is described as hijacked by the illegitimate emperor ("le bandit"), while the people as a group fail to sustain any meaningful revolt. Though continuing to express hope in the future of the

*patrie*, Hugo stands in opposition to both its leader and the people who, despite an organized resistance, do not successfully rebel against the Second Empire or even openly support Hugo and the proscribed intellectuals. Although Hugo does not state it categorically, the people in 1852 fail to live up to his lofty visions of revolution and fraternity. In his poetry, he contrasts the weak-willed many to the few exiled and martyred figures who do stand up for justice in the face of adversity: Pauline Roland and other women deported in 1852, fellow Jersey exiles like Charles Ribeyrolles, the missionary Jean-Louis Bonnard, executed for his faith in Vietnam, and, more generally, all the “bannis...captifs, proscrits, [et] martyrs” who oppose Louis-Napoleon (“Non,” vv. 6-7).

The second poem in Book II, entitled “Au Peuple,” may best illustrate this tension between the mass included in the substantive “peuple” and those exceptional, specific individuals who, paradoxically, effect widespread social change. In this poem, Hugo admonishes the people for their sleep and tears, likened to death, while the refrain summons the rise of Lazarus, suggesting that the people’s salvation will emerge from the work of a lone individual.<sup>26</sup> In addressing these martyrs from his own space of exile, Hugo effectively joins the ranks of exiles, expatriates, and deported prisoners who, by their very exile and self-sacrifice, seek to establish future peace. In this poem, Hugo identifies with exiles around the world and invokes the people of international cities to shed the yoke of tyranny (vv. 30-39), thus imagining human salvation on a global, not national scale. Yet, he destines this poem first and foremost to “Paris sanglant” (v. 16), where “Quatrevingt-neuf porte un bâillon./La Révolution, terrible à qui la touche,/Est couchée à terre!” (vv. 20-22). The French Revolution acts as a metaphor for the freedom

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<sup>26</sup> This conclusion is reiterated in the title of Book VII, “Les Sauveurs se sauveront,” implying that in the end it is not the entirety of the French people who will restore the nation’s glory and democracy, but those individuals who emulate the great historical martyrs, among which Hugo includes himself.

and fraternity an international people could enjoy if, together, they embraced its message.

This French specificity continues to characterize an otherwise global community in Hugo's writings; for Hugo, humanity's shared values originate in the history of the French Republic. Furthermore, these republican teachings conjoin with Christian ones, heightening Hugo's commitment to a particular, and even intolerant, cultural perspective.<sup>27</sup> Earlier, in his political manifesto concluding *Le Rhin* (1842), Hugo had been more explicit about the combined leadership of France and Christianity in shaping a just society; there, he wrote that France's role abroad would be to lead nations in the effort to "construi[re] la société humaine," based on French republican principles, and that this "mission a [été] reçue d'en haut" (606). In exile, Hugo re-iterates this political idea poetically; for him, a peaceful human society is organized according to France's foundational values, and the nation's global mission is as much enacted by men as it is directed by God.

In another poem also entitled "Au Peuple" (Book VI, IX), Hugo's global community is fittingly compared to the ocean, and its inherent power likened to the ocean's swells and changes. This metaphor allows Hugo to find hope in the people's apparent dormancy: like the ocean, the mass awaits its moment to rise up and fight back (v. 26), and the people are spread across the globe, united in harmony and ready to take up arms (v. 5). The people of revolution and republicanism, this oceanic "peuple" is ambivalent and unpredictable. It wavers between passivity and violence, complacency and action, and good and evil. Again, despite the ostensible internationalism of Hugo's metaphor, he writes specifically to the French, inciting them to recognize their error, to rise up against the tyrant and, like an ocean, to wash away the injustice done to them.

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<sup>27</sup> It is also in the poem "Au Peuple" that Hugo's anti-Semitism can be gleaned: "Les Juifs triomphent, groupe avare/Et sans foi.../Lazare! Lazare! Lazare!/Lève-toi!" (vv. 71-74).



Hugo concludes his poem by pointing out the major difference between the people and the ocean: “O peuple; seulement, lui [l’océan], ne trompe jamais/Quand, l’œil fixe, et debout sur sa grève sacrée,/Et pensif, on attend l’heure de sa marée” (vv. 24-26). Despite its vicissitudes, the ocean is surprisingly stable, honest, and reliably active—it is, in the end, its patience and readiness to obey the rhythm of the tides that grants it its awe-inspiring power.

This antagonism between power and submission born of French revolutionary action is at the heart of Hugo’s oceanic poetics and republican politics, as will come to the fore further on in my analysis of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. Though scholars have pointed out that Hugo finds evil to be a necessary component in a universe tending toward human progress, they do not connect this belief with Hugo’s unwavering dedication to France and its Revolution.<sup>28</sup> Yet, toward the close of the collection, Hugo places France unequivocally at the center of his Manichean vision of “progress” in the poem “Patria” (VII, 7). Here, the angel of light is called “France, ou Vérité” while that of darkness is “France, ou Châtiment,” and the angel of God is named “France, ou Liberté!” (vv. 21-22, 36-37, 51-52). For Hugo, “France” is composed of multiple tendencies, which all work together to lay the groundwork for popular sovereignty. The Revolution is the ultimate model of how good and evil amalgamate to produce a free and democratic Republic. By looking back to the revolutionary period, Hugo can interpret his nation’s current conflicts with tyranny as a similar stepping-stone to establishing future peace—both within France’s borders and beyond. In so doing, Hugo’s work envisions a unified, global community based on the abstract ideals of liberty and fraternity that are specific to French history. While Hugo’s writings indeed develop the universal themes of human equality, liberty, suffering, and revolt, the way in which he evokes and defends his

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<sup>28</sup> For the importance of war and conflict in stimulating progress, see Lunn-Rockcliffe; for evil as a positive force, see Brombert “Effacement.”

political thought points to an inherent nationalism that would bolster French pride for generations to come.

Throughout his exile, the emblematic French writer straddled the line between national pariah and symbol of a common national identity. He was a political threat to Napoleon III's regime while also representing and defending the quintessentially French republican values of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*. His beliefs in France's revolutionary values fueled his anger and critique while also forming the basis of his idealistic vision of the future. In this Hugo's nationalism, rather than pointing to humanism, utopianism, and internationalism, more accurately reflects Ernest Renan's late nineteenth-century formulation of the nation in his essay *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* We will remember that, for Renan, the nation exists because of a shared past and an agreed upon course for the future. While Hugo's imagined future embraces "human," rather than merely "national" rights, such as the abolition of slavery in the Americas, the rights of women, and a European confederation where all people would be treated equally, these ideas emerge from a nationalist framework that ultimately reflects a particularly French way of conceiving the world as a place of equality and unity. It is this quality of Hugo's work and vision that allows him to continue to be immortalized as a representative of his time, his place, and his nation. By maintaining France as his sole point of reference for both past and future, Hugo establishes himself as a French nationalist whose humanitarian imagined community can nonetheless only include those who are willing to accept the French Revolution as their common past and its values as their ideal future.

#### Les Travailleurs de la Mer: *Geography, Exile, and Universality*

Hugo brings the island of Guernsey to the fore in his novel *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866, henceforth abbreviated as *TM*) on nearly every page. From the get-go, he

dedicates the novel to the island; then, he describes the island's history and sociology at length in the prologue "L'Archipel de la Manche" (a text that grew so extensively it was originally published separately); and, finally, he continues to treat the space as a character in the novel's numerous descriptions and digressions. Meanwhile, Hugo's exilic experience can also be traced in *TM*; in the protagonist Gilliat's story we discern a metaphor for the political conflict that sent the author into exile, the marginalization inherent to his and other outcasts' experience, as well as the more romantic notions of love, sacrifice, and generosity that fueled his decision to remain in exile. And, throughout the text, the island setting, with its surrounding ocean, dangerous reefs, and diverse population shapes the novel's politics. Scholars like Kathryn Grossman, Victor Brombert, Myriam Roman, William Paulson, and Richard Grant have discussed at length the fusion of politics and poetics in Hugo's oeuvre and, when analyzing *TM*, routinely investigate how Hugo develops the symbolic meanings of space and geography in this novel set in the English Channel. Their conclusions, while revelatory, nevertheless fail to fully explore how Hugo's geopolitics are informed by his exile on Guernsey. Greater attention to the relationship among characters, geography, and exile reveals how Hugo's novel espouses a nationalist perspective in developing his views on progress, the French Revolution, and even artistic genius. My analysis here builds on those of these scholars, whose work is essential for understanding Hugo's imagery and inspirations, while also seeking to offer a more focused geocritical analysis of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. In its attention to cartography, Hugo's novel depicts exile as an orchestrator of utopian progress. Yet, Hugo's vision of such "universal" progress proves to be rooted in his assessment of the French Revolution as a conflict between good and evil that ultimately engenders freedom. For Hugo, the exilic space breaks down those antinomies that otherwise characterize revolutionary progress, opening up new possibilities for

engendering human equality. My reading thus complicates the common political reading of the novel: whereas most scholars suggest that we read a one-to-one correspondence between hero/Hugo and antagonist/Emperor, I contend that the exilic characters and symbols are multi-sided and work to transcend Hugo's Manichaeism. I highlight where Hugo's own antitheses contradict one another and suggest the inherent interdependence between seemingly opposing forces. Like the environment they inhabit, the characters of *TM* are both agents and objects of greater forces, for both good and evil. As such they reflect Hugo's understanding the French Revolution and model the process by which he too, as an exile, must provoke revolutionary change back home. I conclude that Hugo's nationalism informs the structure of his novel; although he may vaunt universal and human rights, his writings are rooted in a particular idea of French identity that ultimately cannot transcend the national domain.

In "L'Archipel de la Manche," Hugo composes a panorama of the archipelago's history, geography, society, politics, economy, and culture, setting the stage for an understanding of the island as a space of refuge that embraces his definition of progress. Among the area's chief attributes are its hospitality, freedom, and tendency toward progress—an ideal place of refuge for the proscribed. These qualities issue directly from the island's geography: "au surplus, tous les archipels sont des pays libres. Mystérieux travail de la mer et du vent" (94). This text lays the groundwork for a fusion of character and environment that the novel will sustain. Hugo goes so far as to credit the sea for fashioning the Channel Islands' culture: the people "a l'âme de la mer" (102) which, we will continue to see, implies they are a civilization of freedom, equality, progress, and creativity. And yet, the wind and sea manifest a dark underbelly: hospitality quickly turns into danger when the sea cannot be controlled. The freedom imagined at sea is dependent on the greater forces directing the wind, storms, and tides (63), and even

progress is subject to the atrocities posed by civilization, such as war (62), spleen (96), and destruction of one's surroundings in the spirit of building and improvement (99). Hugo sums up these antagonistic forces nicely in a chapter entitled "Les Rochers:" "Un reste d'angoisse du chaos est dans la création. Les splendeurs ont des balafres. Une laideur, éblouissante parfois, se mêle aux choses les plus magnifiques et semble protester contre l'ordre. Il y a de la grimace dans le nuage. Il y a un grotesque céleste" (65).

This common Hugolian formulation, reminiscent of other misunderstood characters like Quasimodo and Gwynplaine, evokes a persistent theme in Hugo's novels and has come to define his Romanticism—the fusion of high and low, beauty and ugliness, the sublime and the grotesque. The descriptions of the ocean, rocks, islands, and characters in *TM* add another antithesis to this list that may not come as readily to those describing the outcast heroes of *Notre-Dame de Paris* or *L'Homme qui Rit*: namely, the interdependence of good and evil. While Grossman, for instance, sees Quasimodo as "the true hero of Hugo's novel," and discerns in him "the sign of unmitigated virtue" (*EN* 177), I would argue that he too carries a trace of necessary evil in order to effect good. The hunchback only rescues Esmeralda by killing numerous guards to save his beloved, after which he murders his protector out of rage. And, although Gwynplaine becomes the spokesman for just, egalitarian values on a national scale, he indirectly causes the death of his beloved, Déa, and, in the end, abandons the only family who needs and loves him. Hugo's admirable characters must sacrifice—either themselves or others—in order to supplant the old regime. Hugo seems to suggest that a certain propensity toward murder, evil, and chaos is unavoidable in the establishment of a just, good, and ordered society, a theory that can be traced back to his understanding of the French Revolution and its initial outcome, the Terror, which involved not only the

sacrifice of people through mass killings and purge but also the sacrifice of the Revolution's foundational values in the interest of building a new society.

This obsession with the dual nature of the French Revolution cuts across Hugo's imagery in *TM*, ultimately rooting the novel's—like his poetry's—ideology in a specifically French context of universality and human rights. Geographically in the text, France represents a space of reason and ideas, but at times also manifests a dark, criminal side. France is where Lethierry creates the idea for the *Durande*, and where he finds inspiration for both the name of his beloved ship and niece, *Déruchette*. The other great *génie* of *TM*, Gilliatt, seems also to come from France. And yet, the nation's utopian appeal is hampered by its dangerous, war-torn spaces (St. Malo with its shady dealings, Rantaine's despicable family dwelling), and the perpetual revolutionary conflict that expels large numbers of people across the globe. Among the exiled are the “good” characters, Lethierry (a reader of Voltaire with clear republican leanings), Gilliatt (the hero), and Gilliatt's mother (another solitary, misunderstood outcast), as well as the more “evil” Rantaine (who was, at first, simply a small child in search of a better life). France thus emerges as a place where grand ideas are born, but not realized. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Channel, England is depicted as a realist foil to France's idealism; where France fosters theory, England supports action. Though Lethierry concocts the idea for the *Durande* in France, he builds it on English soil. England is also where the remains of historical Guernsey are sent to build new monuments, where Ebenezer encounters his fortune, and where he and *Déruchette* will sail off to in search of happiness and financial security. English society is described as one of hierarchy, class, and tradition—that is to say stability, while France is characterized by political turmoil.

Meanwhile, the island of Guernsey, though properly English, inhabits a space apart. Geographically closer to France yet politically attached to England, the island

exhibits a unique blend of the two nations' languages and cultures and harbors inhabitants from both sides of the Channel. In her thorough yet brief study of *TM*, Myriam Roman analyzes the symbolism of various places mentioned throughout the novel, including North and South America, England, France, and of course Guernsey, concluding that the relationships among these locations supports an interpretation of the island of Guernsey as the geographical center of Hugo's utopian vision of progress ("Îles"). The island, in contradistinction to these other global locations, opens out onto the borderless space of the ocean while also giving sanctuary to people—notably exiles—of diverse nationalities and backgrounds. Yet, an island mentality still prevails within its defined triangular borders, creating a separate culture that values neither French reason nor English realism but magic and superstition. It thus becomes simultaneously a space of geographical inhospitality and political refuge, or, put another way, insularity and encounter, regionalism and diversity ("Îles" 231). The space of the island thus provides a unique opportunity for communication and exchange, actions at the heart of Hugo's understanding of progress, but only thanks to the non-native "exiles" (Lethierry, Gilliatt) who find themselves there ("Îles" 233, 237).

It is against this backdrop that we must consider the criminals, exiles, and outcasts on Guernsey, whether they hide out in abandoned houses, suspect their neighbors of witchcraft, or contribute to a growing economy. For, if France is a space from which one is ousted and England a space to which one returns, the island of Guernsey can be considered a stopover, a temporary refuge for criminals and heroes alike (Rantaine, Zuela, Gilliatt, Hugo). It is a space of free-thinking and diverse social exchanges. This refuge takes on various forms: for criminals it is refuge from the law, for exiles it is a safe haven from the dominant regime, and for outcasts it is shelter from moral judgment. The island thus constitutes a space where one can be freed from

persecution and oppression—that is, a space of liberation and even resistance. On Guernsey, one thinks openly, even magically, and breaks down barriers between powerful and oppressed or rich and poor. Children wander freely among rocks and reefs to encounter secret dwellings, outcasts are admired (Gilliatt, Lethierry), second chances are given (Rantaine), and respect can be earned even by those held most suspect (Gilliatt). It is easy to understand how this analysis extends to Hugo’s own exile in the Channel Islands. In exile, Hugo identified with a group of proscribed men throughout history, from Chateaubriand to Victor Schœlcher.<sup>29</sup> By inscribing himself in a network of exiles, and serving as a leader for many of those exiles in the English Channel, Hugo similarly conceived of his exile as a locus of communication and exchange. Garval argues that, in part due to his *tables tournantes* experiments (1853-55), Hugo regarded the island as “the monumental pulpit from which [he] held forth to the ages, the vital crossroads not only of current world affairs, but of the entire history of civilization” (180). Indeed, as we have seen, Hugo wrote his attacks on Napoleon III, his critique of France’s people, and imagined his nation’s utopian future from this exilic space. Moreover, he connected with the oppressed across the globe, famously writing on behalf of John Brown in the United States, for example. His decision to remain on Guernsey after his pardon constituted yet another act of resistance against Napoleon III and tyranny. The mere act of residing on the island was, for him and his characters, a political gesture against oppression.

It is thus the power of the exilic space that allows for universal progress, because this space offers a refuge from the typical antinomies governing divisive political thought: France/England, idealism/realism, self/other. In *Les Misérables* (1862), also composed during Hugo’s time on Guernsey, revolution, progress, and exile blend

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<sup>29</sup> See also Sinsoilliez for more information on the organization specifically of Jersey’s French exiles.



together in the chapter entitled “Les Morts ont raison et les vivants n’ont pas tort” (Part V, Book I, Ch. XX). Here, Hugo presents revolutionaries—martyrs—as acting outside the law in order to defend the human rights the law is supposedly meant to protect; they thus inevitably promote social and political progress even as—or, perhaps, because—they ostracize themselves from society. This is the same message at the heart of his essay “Ce que c’est que l’exil” in *Actes et Paroles* (1875), which repeatedly deploys this pithy summary of the same contention: “L’exil, c’est la nudité du droit” (2, 19). Expunged from the system of law but rooted in the meaning of it (“hors la loi, dans le droit,” Hugo writes in this essay, 19), the exile is uniquely situated to represent, or “incarnate,” justice (“Le droit incarné, c’est le citoyen,” 1). Hugo seems to argue that, in order to effect justice, one must both belong to a citizenry and reside outside of it, in a space apart. This is consistent with his emphasis on the exceptional martyr, whom he credits with saving the national people in *Les Châtiments*, as well as with his own self-aggrandizing assessment of his role in exile. But the Revolution and those who effectuate it are not solely the philanthropic builders of utopia throughout the globe. They are soldiers, fighting, sacrificing, and killing for their cause. Hugo must reconcile this product (utopia) with its process (war), and he does so by contextualizing the people’s fight as a fight for an ideal, their combat as a sacrifice for the values initiated by 1789, and their work as that of God’s. He writes of the revolutionaries on the barricades in *Les Misérables*, “ils acceptent [le combat] pour amener à ses splendides et suprêmes conséquences universelles le magnifique mouvement humain irrésistiblement commencé le 14 juillet 1789. Ces soldats sont des prêtres. La Révolution française est un geste de Dieu” (vol 2: 624). Not only do the ends justify the means, but the ends are also necessarily issued from the French Revolution’s claim to universality and, ultimately, directed by God. Hugo’s global

utopian society assumes a common French past, rooted not only in republican ideals but also in religious ones.

In *TM*, there is no mention of a specific tyrannical order to be fought or overturned, except for the all-powerful sea, which many critics thus read a metaphor for Louis-Napoleon's regime. Grossman, for example, reads Gilliatt's feat as an echo of Hugo's own stance against the emperor: the exile Gilliatt/Hugo represents the victory of republican values over the hypocrisy of Clubin/Napoleon III (*LN* 71). Roman too sustains this common political reading of the novel by superimposing Hugo onto Gilliatt and arguing that the Douvres reef represents the power of nature, a continual obstacle to Gilliatt's work, that is to say to Hugo's formulation of human progress ("Les Îles" 238). Finally, Grant sees the ocean as a symbol of chaos on which one must restore order—Lethierry through the construction and control of the *Durande*, and Gilliatt through his triumph over the destructive forces of the sea ("Epic"). Each of these critics agrees that Gilliatt's human success vis-à-vis his natural environment constitutes a victory of good over evil, progress over chaos, justice over tyranny. I see two problems with these evaluations: first, I suggest that the novel's characters do not fit into such neat dichotomies like good vs. evil or hero vs. villain; and second, the geographical and climatological manifestations (reef, tempest, island, ocean) that also drive the plot become characters in their own right. As characters, they too destabilize the tenuous balance between the opposing aspects of Hugo's antitheses. Gilliatt, though solitary, is not the sole hero of the novel, nor is he completely devoid of wrongdoings. Likewise, his antagonists (including the sea) are not purely villains, but also accomplish great feats of creativity and work that help advance the "good" work of Gilliatt.

Before turning to an analysis of Gilliatt's epic battle with the sea, it is important to understand how the sea evolves as another exilic space in the novel that fashions the

novel's characters. While the novel indeed describes the ocean as despotic (471) and chaotic (368), the chaos the wind and waters embody is not simply a symbol of instability but a pell-mell of diversity, contradiction, and interconnectedness, out of which Hugo's "génies" can help effect harmony, revolution, progress, and creation. A closer look at the term "homme-océan," often employed by scholars to describe Gilliatt as a man of artistic genius on par with Shakespeare, Aeschylus, and even Hugo himself (Grossman *LN* 86; Brombert *Visionary* 167), shows that such Hugolian categories are in fact replete with ambiguities. The "homme-océan" can be applied to other characters and spaces in the text—the villain Clubin, the evildoer Rantaine, or even, to a certain extent, the monstrous octopus, the winds that provoke the sea storm, and the oceanic processes that alternately attack and aid Gilliatt on the Douvres reef. Hugo defines the "homme-océan" in *William Shakespeare* (1864):

Il y a des hommes-océans en effet.

Ces ondes, ce flux et ce reflux, ce va-et-vient terrible, ce bruit de tous les souffles, ces noirceurs et ces transparences, ces végétations propres au gouffre, cette démagogie des nuées en plein ouragan [...] ces monstres entrevus, ces nuits de ténèbres coupées de rugissements, ces furies, ces frénésies, ces tourmentes, ces roches, ces naufrages, ces flottes qui se heurtent, ces tonnerres humains mêlés aux tonnerres divins, ce sang dans l'abîme ; puis ces grâces, ces douceurs, ces fêtes, ces gaies voiles blanches, ces bateaux de pêche, ces chants dans le fracas, ces ports splendides [...] ces colères et ces apaisements, ce tout dans un, cet inattendu dans l'immuable, ce vaste prodige de la monotonie inépuisablement variée, ce niveau après ce bouleversement, ces enfers et ces paradis de l'immensité éternellement émue, cet infini, cet insondable, tout cela peut être dans un esprit, et alors cet esprit s'appelle génie, et vous avez Eschyle, vous avez Isaïe, vous avez Juvénal, vous avez Dante, vous avez Michel-Ange, vous avez Shakespeare, et c'est la même chose de regarder ces âmes ou de regarder l'océan. (Part 1, Book 1, Ch. 2)

These lines, whose syntax and length are themselves oceanic, characterize "genius" as chaos, the absence of any single direction or motivation. Genius is found in great historical figures, but in order to comprehend its magnitude we must contemplate the endless tumult of nature, which contains the amalgamation of life and death, good and evil, human and divine—in a word, the infinite, the abyss, "ce tout dans un" that is as

much human as oceanic. Gilliatt's character is indeed comprised such extreme highs and lows; on the one hand, "ce n'était qu'un pauvre homme sachant lire et écrire" (136), yet, on the other hand, for Lethierry he quickly becomes the equivalent of "le bon Dieu" after his magnificent feat to salvage the wreckage of the *Durande* (554). Furthermore, it is impossible to separate Gilliatt from his geographical environment. He becomes, "à force de grimper dans les rochers, d'escalader les escarpements, d'aller et de venir dans l'archipel par tous les temps...un homme de mer surprenant" (*TM* 136). As will continue to become clear during his battle with the sea storm, Gilliatt greatly resembles the ocean's chaos and grandeur even as he fights against it. Like in the essay "L'Archipel de la Manche," the sea fashions both land and people, not obstructing progress but propelling it.

However, Gilliatt is not the only "homme de mer" depicted in *TM*. Lethierry too is thus described: "Le fond de sa nature, c'était le matelot. L'eau lui appartenait. [...] Mess Lethierry était guernesiais, c'est-à-dire normand, c'est-à-dire anglais, c'est-à-dire français. Il avait en lui cette patrie quadruple, immergée et comme noyée dans sa grande patrie, l'océan" (150). Like the island, the ocean exists outside national boundaries, emerging thus as another exilic space in the novel. As a bridge between lands it connects diverse peoples, and as a space apart it allows for one to break down established boundaries and subsequently rebuild creatively—in other words, it is the space where progress unfolds. Lethierry too belongs here; the ocean shapes who he is and what he stands for. Both Gilliatt and Lethierry incarnate the ocean's diversity, creativity, and universality; they belong nowhere and everywhere all at once, and dedicate their lives to harnessing the ocean's strength to create new tools in the interest of the common good (Lethierry builds the *Durande* which strengthens Guernsey's economy, and Gilliatt rescues the ship's motor then renounces his reward, his beloved Déruchette, when he

learns that she loves another). In her analysis, Roman emphasizes the solitary nature of the exile's work, and these characters are, of course, the "good" exiles that contribute to Guernsey's status as a site of human and political progress ("Îles" 234-5). However, I contend that these characters do not work alone. The ocean is part and parcel of their success; they enjoy a uniquely reciprocal relationship with the water that allows them to transcend the gap between (inner) self and (exterior, environmental) other, pointing to the importance of exilic space in fostering a fusion of man/nature, reason/chaos, and human/divine, rather than their opposition.

In the cases of Gilliatt and Lethierry, this amalgamation of character and environment works to produce positive, creative inventions that further progress on a human scale—industrial, economic progress in the case of Lethierry's building of the *Durande*, and human, spiritual progress in the case of Gilliatt's self-sacrifice for the good of love (Déruchette and Ebenezer) and justice (Lethierry's fortune being restored). Sieur Clubin is similarly a product of the sea, but his "homme-océan" characteristics cause grief and hardship for the novel's heroes. Intelligent and innovative, Clubin equally deploys the ocean's attributes and mysteries to further his villainous aims: he is an adept swimmer who feels at home in the water and has his ocean voyages to thank for his smarts and talents, yet he remains a liar and hypocrite at heart. Likewise, the other villain Rantaine would not have successfully robbed and betrayed Lethierry were it not for the sea. Rantaine uses the sea first to build his fortune by working for the ship owner, then to betray his very protector and escape across the world, and finally to send a message back exposing the crime Clubin committed against him. Again, we see that sea is both creative and destructive, for both are necessary to further progress in the novel. Meanwhile, the ocean also complicates nationality; while Gilliatt and Lethierry come to represent a particular Guernsey perspective, they each carry with them a French

background and, especially for Lethierry, are molded by French republican values and their travels abroad. Both antagonists also derive from French soil then, as adults, contribute to Guernsey's diversity as workers. They are all, like the Channel Islands themselves, "des morceaux de France tombés dans la mer et ramassés par l'Angleterre" ("L'Archipel de la Manche," 73). The ocean, with its various uses and qualities, cannot signify either a single origin or a unique destination. Like an exilic space, it is a place of passage, a space of universality. And yet, the exilic characters and islands it supports and shapes share a common French past. For Hugo, even the ocean's universality is built on a common French history.

According to Margaret Cohen's study *The Novel and the Sea* (2010), Hugo's grand innovation in *TM* is to show that the sea reflects human consciousness (197). While Cohen's analysis focuses on Gilliatt's confrontation with the sea, her argument could be extended to Hugo's other characters, good and evil alike. The sea represents not only the impressive success of Gilliatt's epic maneuvers to rescue the *Durande*, but also the possibility of downfall and destruction engendered by the novel's evil-minded foes. In this way the ocean functions as an integral part of each character. It challenges, fights, and sometimes destroys individuals, but offers the hope of triumph through collaborative work. Gilliatt is at once an agent at work against the waters and also an object in need, and receipt, of salvation. He emerges as a dynamic, creative, even divine hero, yet remains vulnerable, weak, and even punished. He is described as being both Job and Prometheus—a suffering victim and a strong rebel, poised at the threshold of both good and evil whose forces, in the end, prove greater than him. The ocean thus represents as much an "other" to combat as a heroic double with which Gilliatt must work and unite in order to achieve his altruistic goal. In a word, the ocean is like France, Hugo's homeland and nation with which he is in conflict. He does not wish to vanquish

this “enemy,” but transform it. It is not an antithesis, but a complicated amalgamation of self and other. Framed thus, the battles among the novel’s characters, geographical formations, and forces of nature are no longer steps toward mutual destruction, but rather collaborative creation in an attempt to effectuate Hugo’s ideal of universality.

#### The Role of the Exile: Gilliatt on *Les Rochers Douvres*

Of all the exilic characters, spaces, and tasks in *TM*, Gilliatt’s work on the Douvres reef most clearly calls to mind Hugo’s plight on Guernsey. Here, Gilliatt innovates against forces of nature in order to salvage the *Durande*, a work of human creation representing “progress.” A closer analysis of this scene will illustrate how Hugo’s exilic, nationalist ideology as it emerges especially in his geological and oceanic depictions. The title of Part II of *TM* describing Gilliatt’s encounter with the sea, “Gilliatt le Malin” already suggests two sides to Gilliatt: “malin” at once refers to his intelligence and creativity, and belongs to the etymological family “mal,” along with its synonym “maléfique,” connoting nefariousness, danger, and the occult. Gilliatt’s superior intellectual resources in his combat against the sea, storm, and reef stem from an inherent, perhaps divine, talent to create both good and evil. The reef provides him with the necessary environment for developing his gift, and proves to be the perfect enemy against his various innovations.

This space, described by the title of Part II, Chapter I, as “L’Endroit où il est malaisé d’arriver et difficile de repartir,” immediately evokes Hugo’s own space of exile. Here Hugo stages the main action of the novel—Gilliatt’s fight on the Douvres reef and the famous battle scene with the monstrous octopus. As the first word of this important part of the text, “l’endroit” emphasizes the importance of place and space in Hugo’s combative and creative imagery. Gilliatt’s voyage is likened to that of a fugitive on the

run; “il partit de la façon dont on s’évade...se jetant tête baissée dans une entreprise fort ressemblante à l’impossible, et risquant sa vie avec toutes les chances à peu près contre lui, il craignait la concurrence” (353). His lonely departure constitutes an act of war, just like Hugo’s decision to flee into exile to continue the fight against Louis-Napoleon through his own maleficent talent—writing. When Gilliatt happens upon the reef, it too is described as fashioned by some greater power: “On eût dit un dolmen titanique planté là, en plein océan, par une fantaisie magistrale, et bâti par des mains qui ont l’habitude de proportionner leurs constructions à l’abîme” (354). Meanwhile, the sight of the Douvres reef, two tall pillars with the *Durande* stranded across the middle, seems to assault Gilliatt: “Il y avait du défi dans l’attitude de ces rochers...Les deux rochers, tout ruisselants encore de la tempête de la veille, semblaient des combattants en sueur” (354). Hugo continues: “Les Douvres, élevant au-dessus des flots la *Durande* morte, avaient un air de triomphe. On eût dit deux bras monstrueux sortant du gouffre et montrant aux tempêtes ce cadavre de navire. C’était quelque chose comme l’assassin qui se vante” (355). Like the hero come to tame them, the Douvres are at once all-powerful agent and object created by another. They are equally forces of destruction and salvation, carrying the expired ship as a trophy won in battle. In this way they function much like Hugo’s novel, a tool created to destroy the Second Empire fashioned by a creator practiced in building, describing, and exposing the power of the abyss. Indeed, the structure of the Douvres holding up the *Durande* forms an “immense H majuscule” (355), a tribute to Hugo, the supreme creator of the novel itself. To reinforce this metaphor, during Gilliatt’s epic battle against the tempest, the wind-beaten *Durande* is compared to a “livre qui s’ouvre” (482). The reef becomes a place of possibility for good and evil, triumph and war, creation and destruction, much like the space of exile. It is set apart, a rock in the middle of the sea, awaiting an ambitious pioneer (Gilliatt, Hugo) who can



fashion it into a home, mine its resources, and create out of the abyss the means for ensuring future progress, even if that involves destruction along the way.

It is in this space—of exile, of creation, where good and evil confront one another—that Gilliatt must rescue the motor of the *Durande*. This ship becomes a multi-layered symbol, evoking technological and economic progress, the promise of Gilliatt's marriage and communion with Déruchette, and also a spatial representation of movement and connection. Ships in this context function as spaces of exchange; like floating "islands," they deliver and receive goods and messages. The *Durande* trades goods between Guernsey and St. Malo (177); messages travel via the Post Office in the middle of the sea (280); and the *Shealtiel* brings back the news of the *Durande*'s shipwreck (329). Meanwhile, ships also transport a diverse cast of characters, from criminals (Zuela's *Tamaulipas*, 227) to lovers (Ebenezer and Déruchette on the *Cashmere*, 594), and serve as both their escape routes (Rantaine escapes to South America on the *Tamaulipas*, 274) and routes home (Gilliatt's return with the *Durande*, 540). Like Guernsey, ships function as communal spaces, perhaps owned by a single man but controlled, directed, and cared for by a team of workers and passengers ("les travailleurs de la mer"). Scholars like Roman are quick to point out the contradiction in Hugo's title that the plural "workers" in *TM* are largely solitary figures who act alone (Gilliatt, Lethierry, Clubin) ("Îles" 235). But I would argue for a broader definition of "worker" in the context of the novel. The ships, for instance, are among the most persistent toilers of the sea from beginning to end: they cross territorial boundaries effortlessly, produce new plot and character developments, and inhabit (like other "exilic" spaces in the novel—the island, ocean, reef) what can be considered a "Thirdspace" separate from the nationalist contexts that characterize other spaces in *TM*. The rescue of the *Durande* in this context is more than the salvation of Lethierry's

creation; it is the reclamation of an exilic space, that is to say a space of sovereignty, creation, and resistance to tyrannical oppression.

Principally inspired by Henri Lefebvre's triple categorization of space in *Production de l'Espace* (1974), Edward Soja re-conceptualizes what he terms this "trialectics of spaciality" to account for more postmodern, critically aware experiences of space in his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Spaces* (1996). Lefebvre distinguishes these three categories as "espace perçu" (the materiality of space, or "real" space), "espace conçu" (ideas about space, or "imagined" space), and "espace vécu" (lived space, or the way space is practiced in both real and imagined ways). Soja proposes the concept of "Thirdspace" to describe an alternative interpretation to Lefebvre's "espace vécu;" Thirdspace is a metaphysical universe that contains all of history in a single point, as well as a space of creativity—and marginality—with the power to both encompass and transcend the accepted dualism between "espace perçu" and "espace conçu." Thirdspace resists the social construction of space (which, in a capitalist society, regulates and defines human behaviors) to allow for its own production of "an alternative postmodern geography of political choice and radical openness" (Soja 63). Soja shares with Lefebvre a Marxist view of the world, and Thirdspace is his "strategic location from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously" (68). He is mostly interested in what he calls "modernist cultural politics of difference and identity," that is to say a tradition of radicalism associated with "class, race, ethnicity, nationality, colonial status, sexuality, and gender" consciousness. But he also includes the post-Enlightenment espousal of universalist principles characteristic of mid-nineteenth century thought as an acceptable form of discourse sourced from the power of Thirdspace to create new possibilities and choices for identity formation (89). This is the kind of resistant, marginal, and exilic

discourse Hugo weaves into *TM* in his depictions of exilic spaces. Soja calls “thirding” the process of breaking down binaries in order to reconstruct something new and expansive (61). The various “islands” of Hugo’s novel point to the presence of “Thirdspace” in Hugo’s political thought; the exchange-site of Guernsey, the ships crossing national frontiers, the boundary-less ocean, or the Douvres reef itself as a site of productivity and creation aimed at reconciling antinomies (good vs. bad; nature vs. culture; human vs. monster), all contain elements of Thirdspace’s transcendence of binaries that ultimately allow for new expressions of counter-hegemonic discourse (in Hugo’s case, resistance to Napoleon III’s France).

Not unlike Soja, Hugo too imagined himself engaged in a “combat” with what he called a “triple anankè.” He writes in a short preamble to *TM*:

La religion, la société, la nature; telles sont les trois luttes de l’homme. [...] Un triple anankè pèse sur nous, l’anankè des dogmes, l’anankè des lois, l’anankè des choses. Dans *Notre-Dame de Paris*, l’auteur a dénoncé le premier; dans *Les Misérables*, il a signalé le second; dans ce livre, il indique le troisième. A ces trois fatalités qui enveloppent l’homme se mêle la fatalité intérieure, l’anankè suprême, le cœur humain.

It is possible to see this triple fatality in relation to Lefebvre’s tri-partite spatiality: the dogmas would be linked to “espace conçu” (imagined), laws to “espace perçu” (real), and things to “espace vécu” (represented). To be sure, Hugo’s notion of “fatality” is not a spatial one, but the fourth and final fatality is nonetheless described in spatial terms (both inside man and reigning over him from above). And, there is no doubt that spatiality is an important concept in Hugo’s oeuvre. We might consider that the addition of a fourth that transcends all the others—“le cœur humain”—is Hugo’s (mid-nineteenth century) revolutionary response to the oppression of fatality, his process of “thirding” what already exists to allow for new expressions. Gilliatt’s trajectory would seem to support this interpretation, for it is the character’s devotion to what he loves most that both fuels his creativity in overcoming the sea monster and drives his self-sacrificial

death in the end; in this way, we can read Gilliatt's death (fatality) as part of his resistance to a tyrannical structure, just as the author's own exile (sacrifice) was an attempt to undermine Napoleon III's regime.

The goal, then, in *TM*, Hugo states, is to address this third "anankè," that of "things," where creative, non-binary modes of thinking are possible, and necessary, to overcoming the fatal oppression of tyranny. The "things" to which man is subjected in *TM* include all of nature's manifestations—the ocean and its various parts (waves, foam, tides), winds, storms, fog, reefs, and rocks. These are the obstacles that Gilliatt, like the ships at sea, must face and overcome in order to succeed in his mission. However, as we have seen, man and nature are fused in Hugo's novel. Natural phenomena are regularly personified and endowed with agency—they become characters in their own right. And, like characters, they are complicated and multi-dimensional. The wind, for example, is "composite," "dynamique," "chimique," "magnétique," "électrique," and "aérien" (367). It works with different winds across the globe to regulate—or disrupt—the seas and climate. Likewise, the ocean "se compose de tout" (368), becoming what Hugo calls "ce chaos...le récipient universel, réservoir pour les fécondations, creuset pour les transformations. Il amasse, puis disperse; il accumule, puis ensemence; il dévore, puis crée...La diversité soluble se fond dans son unité. Il a tant d'éléments qu'il est l'identité. Une de ses gouttes, c'est tout lui" (368). Hugo's language here is infused with a scientific vocabulary characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century. In *Feux et signaux de brume: Zola* (1975), Michel Serres shows that the laws of thermodynamics dictating that all order must disseminate into disorder are often to be found in the literature of the nineteenth century; according to him, this is an essential component of work. In this context, we can perceive additional "travailleurs de la mer"—the winds, earth, and storms themselves, which work together on the seas to create the essential chaos and

cataclysms that originally created the archipelago in the Channel and continue to change the oceanic landscape (369-70).

In “La Mer et le Vent,” a philosophical essay composed in February of 1865 and originally part of *TM*, Hugo expounds on his admiration for nature’s processes. In his discussion, he employs a scientific vocabulary and lauds the discoveries that have allowed for a better comprehension of the forces of nature. Yet, according to him, a higher power continues to exert unparalleled influence over the terrestrial and human sphere; there are some concepts men simply cannot understand. The sea and wind are one such example. Within these forces, individual elements of the collective notion “work” come together in a common purpose of creation, and their toil is directed by some extra-human power. This act illustrates Hugo’s belief in the philosophy and theology of immanence, discussed by Gohin in the following terms: “il s’agit ici d’une relation à l’intérieur d’une totalité, ou plutôt d’un ensemble de corrélations qui constitue et caractérise cette totalité. Le phénomène immanent est l’immanence réciproque de tous les phénomènes” (“Une Écriture” 21).<sup>30</sup> In “La Mer et le Vent,” this theory applies equally to the work of nature and of men:

Ce qu’est cette adhérence, ce qu’est cette immanence, impossible de se le figurer. C’est tout à la fois l’amalgame qui engendre la solidarité et le moi qui crée les directions. Tout s’explique par le mot Rayonner. Les créatures entrecroisant leurs effluves, c’est la création. Nous sommes en même temps points d’arrivée et points de départ. Tout être est un centre du monde.

Il y a un travail d’ensemble composé de tous les travaux d’isolement entraînés, à l’insu même des travailleurs, vers un but commun par la grande âme centrale unique. (Ch. V)

Solitary work is communal work, for work achieves creation for the good of the community. In *TM*, we see that the dispersive elements of the toil of the sea result in greater unity (“C’est cette dispersion qui fait la solidarité des vents et l’unité de l’atmosphère,” 461). This is how Hugo explains that both chaos and order issue from

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<sup>30</sup> See also Gohin, “Sur l’emploi.”

work: for just as order disperses into chaos, God ensures that chaos engenders order.

Hugo concludes in this chapter, “cette guerre ne regarde pas les hommes” (370), recalling his belief in the extra-human dimension of progress; while it affects man’s world and his fate, it is propelled toward good by the divine.

Hugo stages his protagonist as one of the many workers contributing to and inseparable from the forces of wind and sea. The reef becomes a part of this network of “things” that confound man. This is where Gilliatt’s labor takes place, and he uses the reef for shelter, food, and resources to support his quest. A Robinson figure, Gilliatt in a sense colonizes the reef in order to fashion a useful workspace and a hospitable living space. When he has finished this initial phase, he can safely live on the reef and begin the process of excavating the *Durande*. And, lest we continue to imagine Gilliatt toiling alone against the elements, Hugo reminds us that,

Gilliatt rêveur amalgamait à son propre travail le prodigieux travail inutile de la mer. Comment, en effet, ne pas subir et sonder, quand on est là, le mystère de l’effrayante onde laborieuse? Comment ne pas méditer, dans la mesure de ce qu’on a de méditation possible, la vacillation du flot, l’acharnement de l’écume, l’usure imperceptible du rocher, l’époumonement insensé des quatre vents? Quelle terreur pour la pensée, le recommencement perpétuel, l’océan puits, les nuées Danaïdes, toute cette peine pour rien!

Pour rien, non. Mais, ô Inconnu, toi seul sais pourquoi (392-3).

While Gilliatt’s work is no less effective than that of the ocean, it is portrayed as more useful or, at least, more perceivably useful. Even if Hugo wishes to stake a claim here for the futility of the ocean’s various rhythms and movements, he realizes in the end that the scope of “l’Art de la Nature” (395), as he will dub it in the following chapter, is greater than man’s toil. Its purpose may thus be beyond man’s perception, recalling his discussion in “La Mer et le Vent.” The toil of the sea is not wholly distinct from the toilers of the sea; interconnectedness brings war as well as harmony, as the stages of Gilliatt’s venture will continue to show, and both serve to unite man and nature in the same fate, or *anankè des choses*.

As Gilliatt's enemy in his efforts to rescue the *Durande*, but also his partner and co-worker in the endless toil of the sea, as well as his final resting place at the close of the novel, the ocean displays multifarious qualities that make it an agent of both good and evil, progress and demise, creativity and demolition. Its amorphous structure is perceived in the variety of metaphors Hugo employs to describe it: a feminine temptress luring its victims to repose on the Chaise Gild-Holm-'Ur ("En de certains lieux, à de certaines heures, regarder la mer est un poison. C'est comme, quelquefois, regarder une femme," 143), a "guet-apens" (215), "hypocrite" (355), "bête...pleine de griffes" (360), "geôlière," (430), "despote" (471), "dragon" (476), and "léviathan" (477). Indeed, Gilliatt must fight and conquer this multi-dimensional monster in order to escape its terrifying grip. However, the sea does not act alone at the apex of the battle; together with the clouds, waves, wind, and fog, the sea rallies an entire storm of warriors with the seeming sole intent of eradicating Gilliatt. It is in fact thanks to this heterogeneity of elements coming together at sea that Gilliatt can emerge victorious in the war. The "formation océanique" (395) is described as a disarray of structures, objects, and things: "nulle logique, un vaste équilibre. C'est plus que de la solidité, c'est de l'éternité. En même temps, c'est le désordre. [...] Tout s'y entraide et s'y contrarie. C'est un combat de lignes d'où résulte un édifice. On y reconnaît la collaboration de ces deux querelles, l'océan et l'ouragan" (395-96). Gilliatt's enemy appears to be at war with itself, and the hero's ability to break down its various components and use them against one another will ultimately ensure his survival.

The chaos of the storm effectively shatters the sea's previous unity, as winds, clouds, waves, and swells seem to battle each other for access to the reef. Gilliatt begins his defense by creating a fortress on the reef and constructing barricades against the obliterating tempest. His innovative maneuvers against the storm always seek to create

order out of the storm's chaos; while the sea attacks from all directions, assembles pell-mell waves and swells, and simultaneously releases a cacophony of thunder and lightening on the solitary soldier, Gilliatt focuses intently on constructing his barricades, ignoring the approaching storm, and zeroing in on the challenging work before him. His work equals that of the storm—both forces reach their climax at the same time (“L’orage atteignait son paroxysme. [...] [Gilliatt] aussi était à son paroxysme,” 483-484), and separate, individual developments of the storm actually aid Gilliatt (“Gilliatt de la catastrophe avait tiré le salut. La nuée, en somme, l’avait aidé,” 485). The sea is a much more than a simple metaphor for Louis-Napoleon. Composed of a confusion of agents, alternatively working harmoniously together to produce new formations and battling each other to unleash discord, in *TM* the sea at once creates and destroys, for better and for worse.

For Hugo, the ubiquitous chaos engendered by the storm constitutes “le Mal,” in contrast to the unity of “le Bien” otherwise inherent in the sea (426). He writes:

Le prodige nocturne universel ne s’accomplit pas sans frottements, et tous les frottements d’une telle machine sont des contusions à la vie. Les frottements de la machine, c’est là ce que nous nommons le Mal. Nous sentons dans cette obscurité le mal, démenti latent à l’ordre divin, blasphème implicite du fait rebelle à l’idéal. Le mal complique d’on ne sait quelle tératologie à mille têtes le vaste ensemble cosmique. Le mal est présent à tout pour protester. Il est ouragan, et il tourmente la marche d’un navire, il est chaos, et il entrave l’éclosion d’un monde. Le Bien a l’unité, le Mal a l’ubiquité. Le mal déconcerte la vie, qui est une logique. Il fait dévorer la mouche par l’oiseau et la planète par la comète. Le mal est une rature à la création. (*TM* 426)

In this passage, one cannot entirely discern good from evil. Evil is always present:

threatening, devouring, and obscuring. The neat antitheses for which Hugo’s romanticism is known dissolve here into a single notion of obscurity, which over the course of this chapter, aptly entitled “Sub Umbra,” metamorphose into variations on the semantic field of night, shadow, God, and death (“ombre,” “silence,” “énigme,” “l’inconnu,” “la mort,” “énormité,” “éternité” all serve to describe the weight of obscurity



on Gilliatt as he confronts his maritime environment, 428-29). In the midst of this metaphysical contemplation, Hugo writes, “L’irréductible est là” (428). The parts of this great mass cannot be parceled out, and the only remedy left is to “croire de force” (428) in a higher power, that is to have faith that out of this eternal cycle something good will be born. This is exactly what Gilliatt accomplishes: prior to the onset of the storm, he ingeniously devises and executes a plan that utilizes both the forces of nature (gravity, the tide) and his own inventions (pulleys, contraptions, a wall against the rising sea) to navigate his paunch under the *Durande* and lower the ship’s motor while his boat ascends on the rising tide to meet it. At this point, Gilliatt manages to “vaincre” and “domestiquer” (439) the ocean in order to make it serve his own needs. During the storm, he must don a warrior pose to defend himself against his tyrannical assailant through the steadfast construction of barricades and breakwaters. Then, after the storm, Gilliatt’s tenacity is once again tried by another sea monster, the famous octopus at the bottom of the ocean. These epic battles—a continuous re-beginning, dotted with numerous peripeteias—against the sea’s multiple attacks and weapons constitute Gilliatt’s most essential and most innovative work in the novel, and ultimately permit him to return home having successfully completed his quest.

This cycle of accumulation and dispersion fostered by the ocean, its “recommencement perpétuel,” links Hugo’s geographical imagery to a political interpretation of what might be considered the novel’s “other” protagonist, the sea. Like Gilliatt’s labor, the sea’s “work” is never-ending, always “beginning again” in an eternal cycle of revolution. Its might is both creative and destructive, and must be harnessed by both men and God. In this context the sea can be likened to the French Revolution itself, thrusting humanity forward nearly in spite of itself, needing to be reigned in, tamed, and completed so that an era of peace may ensue (and Hugo may return home). In the text,

Gilliatt and the sea are as much partners as opponents in the feat to rescue the *Durande*. Gilliatt uses the forces of the sea to execute his plan even as the sea acts as the ship's jailor, guarding against Gilliatt's intrusion. Meanwhile, the sea is composed of numerous elements that at once work harmoniously together to create unity out of chaos and plummet the newcomer Gilliatt into a tempest of danger and cruelty. Out of this chaos Gilliatt must continuously rebuild a sense of order so that he can proceed with his work and survival. He does this thanks to his outsiderdom, his creative thinking that allows him to harness the forces of work and nature to achieve his own goal. In this way Gilliatt comes to represent Hugo in exile: he is the solitary worker on a rock in the middle of the ocean, battling for salvation amidst a maelstrom of political/social/environmental upheaval that threatens to forever alter the (national) landscape. If Gilliatt is successful, it is not because he is uniquely a force of good against evil or even because he is a particularly ingenious improviser in a moment of frenzy, but because he seeks to restore order on the confounding antitheses that spring up around him. Although the confrontation of opposing forces is natural ("Le phénomène du vent, c'est l'oscillation de deux océans l'un sur l'autre; l'océan d'air, superposé à l'océan d'eau," 462; or, "Le courant polaire heurte le courant tropical" to produce the storm's winds, 463) and the storm must be battled for the sake of salvaging the ship and human life, its causes are a part of the order of the world and are therefore to be contemplated, admired, and respected as beyond human control. It is the *anankè des choses* as well as the vastness of the universe expounded in "La Mer et le Vent" or "Magnitudo Parvi." In other words, the storm is not pure chaos any more than man's logic of progress constitutes undeniable order. Both produce destructive storms (natural and political) that ultimately work to create new structures (geographical formations, environmental phenomena, political regimes, art, etc.).

Gilliatt, on the fringes of this metaphorical storm, understands its grandeur vis-à-vis his own existence, and his reaction is to focus on his work (“Gilliatt semblait n’y pas faire attention. Il avait la tête baissée sur son travail,” 473). Whereas previously he contemplated, like Hugo the poet, the magnanimity of the sea, now he combats its powerful effects. Gilliatt knows that his enemy is not the cause of the storm (nature) but its consequences (the destruction of the *Durande* and of himself). And, when the winds change and his barricade can no longer hold up, Gilliatt accepts his fate and even welcomes it (“Telle était l’éventualité. Gilliatt l’acceptait et, terrible, la voulait,” 474). Finally, as the storm gains in intensity and Gilliatt’s barricades falter under the pressure, he continues to innovate and to work to save himself and the *Durande*’s motor (“Contre le délire des forces, l’adresse seule peut lutter. L’adresse était le triomphe de Gilliatt,” 484). Successful, Gilliatt mocks his enemy in a final act of defiance (“Cette chose faite, il prit d’une flaque de pluie un peu d’eau dans le creux de sa main, but, et dit à la nuée: ‘Cruche!’” 485). Gilliatt thus emerges as a hero thanks to his creative genius, outsiderdom, and ability to work both with and against his enemy. One final brief comparison with the antagonist Clubin, who suffers a similar trial and fate, will serve to highlight the essential characteristics that make Gilliatt a hero in *TM*.

Clubin also finds himself stranded on the Douvres, but by mistake—“*malgré toute son attention*” (320, my emphasis). Hugo describes him as “l’architecte laborieux de sa catastrophe” (321), in direct contradiction to Gilliatt, whose “labeur” is the key to his survival. Alone, Clubin, repeatedly labeled the “hypocrite,” decides to “attendre” in an “espérance horrible,” maintaining “confiance” (322) that rescue will appear over the horizon. He awaits salvation instead of inventing it, the opposite of Gilliatt. Their respective deaths once again point to their distinguishing characteristics: while both are engulfed by the sea, Gilliatt chooses to unite peacefully and gracefully with his former

adversary while Clubin is taken by surprise and devoured against his will by an unknown and hidden enemy, the sea octopus. Gilliatt's ability to contemplate, understand, and work ensures his success while Clubin's passivity and ignorance lead to his inevitable demise by the same forces Gilliatt manages to vanquish. Grossman suggests that, just as Gilliatt resembles Hugo-the-creator fighting and mocking the new political regime, Clubin resembles Louis-Napoleon, the latter also referred to as a hypocrite and adversary (*LN*, 71; "Pleine Mer" 124). However, I would like to argue that both of the novel's characters find themselves up against the same enemy—not each other, but the sea—and that it is the way they approach this "enemy" that distinguishes them. With this in mind, the political reading of *TM* shifts attention away from one specific fight between two men (poet vs. emperor) and onto the grander, metaphysical antagonism among forces governing universal phenomena—good and evil, creativity and destruction, progress and demise. These are the same seemingly irreconcilable dichotomies that Hugo has suggested characterize the French Revolution, implying that 1789 and 1793 have their place in such global, "universal" history. Successful combat in this arena is characterized not by the man on stage but by the processes he deploys in battle—work, knowledge, contemplation, and respect of his adversary. Hugo approaches his pursuit of understanding the political phenomena around him in the same way Gilliatt seeks to understand the environmental phenomena on the Douvres reef, and this undertaking leads him not on a mission to annihilate the wrongdoing around him but to exploit it to create something novel, good, and progressive.

### *Conclusion: Hugo's France*

To sum up, Hugo cannot always discern the meaning behind the sea's endless repetitions, but he has faith in the motivations of a higher power at the helm of nature's

complex manifestations. We see this conclusion in his writings on the French Revolution, especially in Pierre Albouy's discussion of "Toute la Lyre," in which Hugo justifies the atrocities of the revolution, and therefore God's hand in them, as serving the nobler cause of progress (on the Revolution, Hugo's writes: "c'est voir Dieu que voir les grandes lois du sort" and "l'infini.../Laisse, sachant le but, choisissant le moyen,/Souvent, hélas! Le mal se faire avec du bien," qtd. in Albouy 398). *Quatrevingt-treize* (1874), Hugo's last novel, directly treats the antithetical nature of the French Revolution, exposing both its good and its bad to ultimately demonstrate that the atrocity of 1793 was necessary to further republican progress in the nineteenth century. In fact, Hugo locates the impetus for the events of '93 outside the realm of human control and motivation, reinforcing his interpretation that a greater plan was, and continues to be, in motion. In the text, the year '93 is compared to a storm ("93 est une année intense. L'orage est là dans toute sa colère et dans toute sa grandeur," 135), and the actors supposedly responsible are but waves jostled about on an ocean of history:

Être un membre de la Convention, c'était être une vague de l'Océan. [...] La force d'impulsion venait d'en haut. Il y avait dans la Convention une volonté qui était celle de tous et n'était celle de personne. Cette volonté était une idée, idée indomptable et démesurée qui soufflait dans l'ombre du haut du ciel. Nous appelons cela la Révolution. Quand cette idée passait, elle abattait l'un et soulevait l'autre; elle emportait celui-ci en écume et brisait celui-là aux écueils. Cette idée savait où elle allait, et poussait le gouffre devant elle. Imputer la révolution aux hommes, c'est imputer la marée aux flots. (207)

Hugo goes on in this chapter to write that the revolution is not the product of men's machinations but of God's ("Le rédacteur énorme et sinistre de ces grandes pages a un nom, Dieu, et un masque, Destin," 208), and the purpose is simply "parce que" (208). Like the sea storm in *TM*, the Revolution washes over humanity with its pell-mell of diverse forces all working together, making it impossible to distinguish the innocent from the guilty or the good from the evil. For Gohin, the Revolution according to Hugo is yet another event resulting from the immanence of the universe ("Écriture" 24; "Emploi"

32). Like individual drops of water that each contain the entirety of the ocean, “chaque homme en sa conscience porte l’unité du genre humain” in Hugo’s thought (“Écriture” 28). We can thus conclude that men are not solely responsible for such phenomena. Their nature can only be judged by their reaction to them: whether they encourage the advent of truth, justice, and equality or, alternatively, negate it. This political and humanitarian philosophy stems from Hugo’s understanding of the birth of the French nation in 1789 as part of the divinely directed, universal thrust of “progress.”

Hugo’s nationalist aesthetic thus emerges at the intersection of geography, politics, and religion. Whereas his grandiose vision for humanity seems to elide national boundaries, his political thought ultimately remains grounded in a nationalist, French framework. Like his protagonist Gilliatt, Hugo too nurtured his creative genius in an exilic space, and was prepared to make the ultimate self-sacrifice and die in exile. He dedicated the novel “au rocher d’hospitalité et de liberté...mon asile actuel, mon tombeau probable” (105), suggesting that he too imagined he would live out his days on the island. Yet, Garval suggests that the choice of Guernsey as an exilic refuge carried nationalist implications: by refusing to assimilate to another cultural center (such as London), Hugo maintained a public identity as “French,” and by keeping France literally in view from his home at Hauteville House on the coast, he kept a personal focus on his homeland as well (184). Meanwhile, the combined chaos/order of the sea recalls the paradoxes of the French Revolution, while Gilliatt’s work on the reef resembles Hugo’s interaction with his French homeland. Hugo and France are at once in conflict and in concert with each other, as the author seeks to negotiate boundaries, at times transcend them, and work to build an alternative national discourse. Throughout the text, the French Revolution remains a defining example of how positive values are established and disseminated even amidst a tempest of negative activity. Meanwhile, the Revolution (like Gilliatt’s

“work”) is as much directed by God as enacted by men. Gohin again sheds light on Hugo’s understanding of immanence and creation, writing that, for Hugo, “La création est simultanément un acte et un produit, la *poièsis* et le *poièma* de l’univers” (“Emploi” 32). For Hugo, the ultimate outcome of this divine/human mission can be gleaned in these various acts of creation, whether the work of art, nature’s manifestations, or the birth of the Republic. Furthermore, the creator is also the creation; he cannot be distinguished from his acts.

It is thus that we arrive at Gilliatt’s death, which can be read geocritically to show how the exile, by extracting himself from the system governing laws and nature, can effect change through his very sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> As Brombert has shown, Gilliatt’s suicide is a self-effacement so that Déruchette may enjoy fulfillment, and humankind—and kindness—may live on in her happy ending (“Effacement”). Hugo’s exilic novels in general are riddled with such final sacrifices: Jean Valjean abandons life to ensure Cosette’s happiness, Gwynplaine gives up fortune and status to return to Déa, and Gauvain gives himself up in the name of republican values. In mapping the final moments of *TM* in which Gilliatt traverses the eastern part of the island to ultimately disappear into the sea while Déruchette and her fiancé Ebenezer sail across the horizon towards England, two spatial planes emerge: the cyclical, repetitive nature of life on the horizontal plane and progress, possibility, and change on the vertical one.<sup>32</sup> The chapter is entitled “La Grande Tombe” and commences with a long meditation on the blooming

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<sup>31</sup> For another close reading of Gilliatt’s death as metamorphosis, see Montier. Montier emphasizes the formal, aesthetic, and optical dimensions of Gilliatt’s disappearance to suggest that the texts fuses three temporalities: the hero’s life and death, the movements of the sea, and the act of reading the novel (8).

<sup>32</sup> Montier too notes these two spatial planes, and contends that “les repères horizontaux sont plus difficiles à spécifier” (18). I concur, but whereas he locates horizontality in the water, mist, and sea, I suggest that the horizontality of the text is located on land. My argument is that cycles and repetition occur on the terrestrial plane, while change and progress can occur in the “Thirdspace” of the sea.

spring life which, rather than growing upwards as might be intuited, seems to spread across the land horizontally, tying all of nature's corners together in harmonic unison:

Sous toutes les rumeurs, de la forêt comme du village, de la vague comme de l'atmosphère, il y avait un roucoulement. [...] C'était un doux parlage de tous à la fois, huppés, mésanges, piquebois, chardonnerets, bouvreuils, moines et misses. Les lilas, les muguet, les daphnés, les glycines, faisaient dans les fourrés un bariolage exquis. Une très jolie lentille d'eau qu'il y a à Guernesey couvrait les mares d'une nappe d'émeraude. [...] Le beau et le joli faisaient bon voisinage; le superbe se complétait par le gracieux; le grand ne gênait pas le petit; aucune note de concert ne se perdait; les magnificences microscopiques étaient à leur plan dans la vaste beauté universelle; on distinguait tout comme dans une eau limpide. Partout une divine plénitude et un gonflement mystérieux faisaient deviner l'effort panique et sacré de la sève en travail. (589-90)

Nature's harmony sets the stage for life to begin anew, infused with a divine presence and in turn infusing earth, air, and water. Once again, the practice of creation is described as "work," connecting nature's seasonal miracles with Gilliat's recent feat. And, like the burgeoning foliage around him, Gilliat also crosses the landscape, drawing a line horizontally through the island as he makes his way from the deserted inlet of the Havelet to the outermost northern point of Guernsey and the Chaise Gild-Holm-'Ur. His trajectory is described in such spatial terms: "il traversa diagonalement son jardin," and "il se mit à suivre, allant toujours devant lui, la longue et étroite ligne de récifs" (591). Like the foliage and the spreading water, Gilliat elongates the island, encircling it with his presence. En route, Gilliat revisits once meaningful places that remind him of his first encounters with Déruchette, as he did upon his initial return to the island (543). If the environment molds the characters in *TM*, here we see that Gilliat too infuses the island with his life and character; it is his home. In this space, Gilliat is part of the cycle of life, the law of nature. In order to break out of this "recommencement perpétuel," Gilliat must escape: "hors la loi" but "dans le droit."

Upon reaching the promontory, images of depth and verticality begin to take shape and progress is favored. While Gilliat climbs the rock, the *Cashmere* transporting



Déruchette and Ebenezer also climbs northward, getting bigger as it approaches Gilliatt's lookout point. In fact, it is thanks to the height of Gilliatt's rock that the ship grows so visible, like a point on the horizon advancing toward the frame:

L'escarpement où les pluies avaient creusé la Chaise Gild-Holm-'Ur était si vertical, et il y avait là tant d'eau, que les navires pouvaient sans danger, par les temps calmes, faire chenal à quelques encâblures du rocher.

Le *Cashmere* arriva. Il surgit, il se dressa. Il semblait croître sur l'eau. Ce fut comme le grandissement d'une ombre. (593)

Gilliatt comes face-to-face with the *Cashmere* at the height of the sea, then both submerge into the waters, disappearing in opposite directions: "Le *Cashmere* laissa la pointe du Bû de la Rue derrière lui et s'enfonça dans le plissement profond des vagues. [...] Gilliatt avait de l'eau jusqu'aux genoux" (595). As the *Cashmere* "atteignait déjà presque la hauteur des Casquets," the water "atteignait presque les épaules de Gilliatt" (595). Both are subsumed by the all-powerful sea, which overtakes them and their destinies and transports them across future horizons. Their submersion, paradoxically described as an ascent, reminds us that this ending is guided from above by a higher power, not unlike Jean Valjean's death at the close of *Les Misérables*. With this vertical movement, change and progress can be perceived beyond the concluding pages of the novel: future love and unity for the happy couple, renewed fortune for Lethierry whose motor has been restored to him, and Gilliatt's personal amalgamation with the sea, his former enemy, in an attempt to effect positive change for others. Indeed, I would argue that this is the reason Gilliatt must return to the sea for his final sacrifice—as a transcendent space, it opens up possibilities for progress and radicalism that even Hugo might not have envisioned at the time. Gilliatt's sacrifice is not only to give up the object of his desire but also to bring together the human, environmental, and metaphysical in order to usher in a more hopeful, and progressive, future.

A brief look at Hugo's poem "Aux Proscrits" (1870) from the collection *Quatre*

*Vents de l'Esprit* will serve as a conclusion, illuminating how the various aspects of theology, nationalism, and poetry come together in Hugo's thought:

Chacun de nous contient le chêne République ;  
Chacun de nous contient le chêne Vérité ;  
L'oreille qui, pieuse, à nos malheurs s'applique,  
T'entend sourdre en nous, Liberté !

Tu nous jettes au vent, Dieu qui par nous commences !  
C'est bien. Nous disperser, ô Dieu, c'est nous bénir !  
Nous sommes la poignée obscure des semences  
Du sombre champ de l'avenir.

Et nous y germerons, n'en doutez pas, mes frères,  
Comme en ce sable, au bord des flots prompts à s'enfler,  
Croîtra, parmi les flux et les reflux contraires,  
Ce gland, sur qui Dieu va souffler !

For Hugo, individual exiles contain within them the seed for enacting large-scale change and, even more, have a duty to do just that across the globe. Likened to elements of nature that similarly disperse across the planet, uniting in a common harmony to give rise to essential events, the banished are God's agents on earth working for political freedom and republicanism. These French revolutionary values inform Hugo's notion of progress and advancement; nurtured on French territory, they must be disseminated throughout the world. More than a political strategy, these changes for Hugo are a divine imperative, ensuring the harmonious functioning of nature, humanity, and God. With this authoritative perspective on history and the future Hugo establishes France's place at the helm of world progress, as the creator of the Revolution and its most important values—*liberté, égalité, et fraternité*.

Hugo's success in turning his exile into yet another reason to celebrate him perhaps goes without saying, for no one today would argue against Hugo's representative "Frenchness" in the nineteenth century. Like Napoleon before him, Hugo too was regarded as the embodiment of France, evidenced by the use of his writings in grade

school civic lessons (Garval 193), the naming of a street after him during his lifetime (a privilege previously reserved only for kings), and the numerous events that, in Garval's words, "cast [him] in the role of the collective ancestor" of the Third Republic (196). This only became possible, however, upon his exile. Not only did exile allow Hugo to achieve his goal of Napoleonic glory (and, arguably, surpass it), it also contributed to new articulations of nationhood in the mid-century. In addition to the land of universalism and republican ideals, Hugo's France was God's project, destined to disseminate its ideals around the globe and advance human progress. Hugo had just barely returned to his homeland as a national hero when his admirer Louise Michel was cast off to another distant, island space of exile. Her writings reveal Hugo's profound influence on her experience of the exilic space, its people and flora, its geography and geology. Yet, her very exile is testimony that Hugo had already reached his apex, for after 1870 France had new battles to fight, and new outcasts to articulate its ever-evolving identity.

Fig. 1. "Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène," painting by François-Joseph Sandmann, 1820





Fig. 2. "Victo Hugo sur la grève d'Azette," photograph by Charles Hugo, 1852-1843



Fig. 3. "Victor Hugo sur le rocher des proscrits," photograph by Charles Hugo, 1853



## CHAPTER 3

## Louise Michel in New Caledonia: From Revolution to Evolution

Et ceux qui, comme moi, te savent incapable  
 De tout ce qui n'est pas héroïsme et vertu,  
 Qui savent que si l'on te disait : « D'où viens-tu ? »  
 Tu répondrais : « Je viens de la nuit où on souffre ;  
 Oui, je sors du devoir dont vous faites un gouffre !

--Victor Hugo, "Viro Major" (homage to Louise Michel), 1871

*La Grande Citoyenne*: Life, Revolution, and Death

Nicknamed *La Pétroleuse*, *La Vierge rouge* or, simply, *La Grande citoyenne*, the activist writer Louise Michel epitomized during her own time and today the steadfast political activist fighting tooth and nail for her idea of social progress. She was arrested for organizing and fighting as a *Communard* in 1870, and her subsequent exile to New Caledonia precipitated her conversion to anarchism. Her writings during and about exile reveal a particular, teleological notion of progress, consistent with her new political beliefs; whereas Hugo situated French history at both the source and the aim of a society tending toward progress, Michel purported that all of humanity was engaged together in the establishment of a peaceful utopia, and French civilization represented but one piece of the puzzle—and neither the first nor the last. Rather, for Michel, “primitive” cultures (like the Kanaks she encountered in New Caledonia) represented humanity’s past, upon which Western civilization (like the French) built new models of social organization. Continued advancement in science, technology, medicine, and social mores, would provoke additional revolutions against oppression and further thrust humanity along the path toward universal brotherhood. In the end, Michel imagined that the entire globe would live in a harmonious and peaceful world free of corruption, oppression, and war. Her time in exile in New Caledonia (1873-1880) not only allowed Michel the space and opportunity to dream of this ideal future for humanity, it also provided a martyrdom-like

experience that helped construct her legacy as an instrumental leader of national social and political change. In this she resembles Napoleon I and Victor Hugo, even though her vision of France's future and what she did with her exilic experience differ significantly from any other exile in this study.

Michel is perhaps best known for her work on the front line of the barricades in 1870, where she sought not only to rescue the Republic from unwanted tyranny but also to save its tiniest creatures; one oft-repeated story describes her racing through gunfire to rescue a helpless kitten. The titles of the following monographs give a good indication of her legacy: *Louise Michel: L'Indomptable* (1978), *Louise Michel: La Passion* (1987), and *Louise Michel* in the series "Rebel Lives" (2004). More than the other writers considered in this dissertation, she dedicated her life to helping the oppressed through social outreach, writing, teaching, and, above all, revolution. She was born at the château de Vroncourt in the Haute-Marne, where she was raised and educated in the Enlightenment teachings by the Demahis owners, even though she was the bastard child of their servant, Marianne, and (probably) their son, Laurent. She was loved and nurtured by her mother and her grandparents, Laurent having left the castle shortly after her birth. Writing of her happy childhood she states, "tout s'est confondu dans un seul chant, dans un seul rêve, dans un seul amour: la Révolution" (*Mémoires* 242). For Michel, the Revolution was an obligation to be fulfilled, a calling. Indeed, the notion of "destiny" reoccurs in her writings, for she felt that her life had a sense of purpose. In "À ma grand'mère" (1861), a tribute to her grandmother Charlotte Demahis upon her death, Michel concludes:

Mais pour moi je m'en vais sans crainte dans l'espace,  
Où? Je l'ignore encore, je cherche le chemin.  
Si dans le grand désert nul voyageur ne passe,  
Qu'importe! J'irai seule à la voix du destin (qtd. in Dittmar, 48).



Even when apparently guideless, Michel felt accompanied by the voice of destiny. Critics distinguish between this earlier, more spiritual Michel and her later, secularist and anarchist writings, and here we might concur that, at least as a child, Michel felt the presence of a higher power scripting her life. Though she would indeed turn her back on organized religion, I would submit that this sense of duty continued to inform her choices; throughout her life, she maintained an unwavering faith, if not in God, at least in the future of humankind.

Growing up, Michel quickly realized that her destiny was indeed to better society. She became a schoolteacher and opened two of her own schools before heading to Paris as a *sous-maîtresse*. There, she experienced hunger and poverty, witnessed the pains prostitution brought on women, and aided orphans suffering the most destitute poverty. She also met fellow revolutionaries and began to dedicate herself professionally to women's equality and social justice; she taught her ideas in night classes at the free professional school and wrote copiously—letters, poems, essays, fiction, and articles that became progressively more militant. She met Théophile Ferré, the man she is said to have loved despite their clearly platonic relationship, and his sister Marie Ferré, and, like them, became a revolutionary *Blanquiste*. She regularly participated in numerous revolutionary meetings, including the first organization of the Rights of Women on the rue Thévenot. In 1870, during the Siege of Paris, Michel took her place on the forefront of revolutionary action, organizing the Montmartre Vigilance Committee (and attending both the men's and the women's committees) that represented the social revolution each night on the streets. She dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the cause, personally carrying a petition to the Hôtel de Ville demanding the release of the *Blanquiste* prisoners, organizing an ambulance service and caring for the wounded, and always protesting and leading armed demonstrations throughout Paris. Her work during this

time resulted in her arrest, twice. From the beginning, Michel's fight for the revolution was both an event affecting others and an individual identity and motivation. Michel *was* the revolution; much like Napoleon I, she embodied its very meaning. Only for Michel "revolution" was in the future, not the past.

The idea of "revolution" in her view offered a distinct set of values, quite different from her imperial predecessor. Michel viewed revolutions as necessary and natural phenomena steering the course of civilization. The French Revolution of 1789 was only one in a series of revolutions, each hastening humanity further along the course to its ultimate destiny, utopia. She writes in her *Mémoires* (1886):

Ce n'est pas le drapeau vermeil faisant une aurore sous le soleil qu'on poursuit, c'est tout réveil de liberté, ancien et nouveau, ce sont les anciennes communes de France, c'est 1793. C'est Juin, c'est 1871, c'est surtout la prochaine Révolution qui s'avance sous cette aurore. Et nous, c'est cela que nous défendons. (411)

The revolution was evidence of the people's awakening; its very spirit signified the coming of an age of peace for, in Michel's view, freedom and equality were qualities of an enlightened future. To be in favor of "liberté, égalité, et fraternité," then, was to support the working people's revolutionary actions, over and over again.

Prior to the Commune and her conversion to anarchism, Michel's understanding of revolution was as much spiritual as political. Though her religious faith waned in later years, these early writings reveal an unchanging aspect of Michel's thought: how revolution would engender utopia. In 1861, Michel published her first brochure with la Rochette at her own expense, *Lueurs dans l'ombre, plus d'idiots, plus de fous*, ostensibly an extract of a larger piece entitled *Lueurs dans l'ombre* that has yet to be fully reconstituted (Fau-Vincenti 9). As a Parisian schoolteacher, she did not have very much money, but she certainly had a great interest in educating children, and it is perhaps as a result of her own work with children with developmental and behavioral issues that she chose in her first publication to address contemporary debates on madness (ibid 10). She

does indeed situate her own thoughts in relation to the current scientific and psychological theories of the day, including phrenology and magnetism, as well as to the ongoing debates on the role of prisons and asylums in society. She dedicated this pamphlet to both her mother and her friend Adèle Esquiros (wife of Alphonse Esquiros), and her language suggests that she was hoping to reach teachers, scientists, and other experts of the human mind as much as the Parisian public. In the text, she offers solutions for the non-criminally institutionalized, describing how they can be “cured” and ultimately rejoin society as equal members. As in all her writings, in this first text she concerns herself with the marginalized and ostracized, thinking through ways to remedy their situation on the fringes by integrating them into a healthy society. For her, this meant addressing their maladies, as well as society’s understanding of them. She appeals to the good side of human nature by dismissing various philosophical theories on the existence of God (including those of Leibniz, Cudworth, Descartes, and Malebranche) to rather zero in on what she considers the fundamental ties that bind all humans together: the interlacing connections among each individual’s body and soul. In her view, by healing and rejuvenating all those formerly marginalized bodies and souls—by awakening all these “lueurs de Dieu”—humanity can grow stronger, happier, and more peaceful. The methods she outlines anticipate the therapeutic potential of talk therapy and music therapy to heal the mind, but focus mostly on the importance of educating the “fou” and the “idiot.” She suggests that by appealing to their already acquired faculties one can guide them on how to tame and improve their reason and intelligence. She cites contemporary scientific theories in her work (phrenology, magnetism), but stresses that the teacher must employ the right method according to each patient’s particular needs. Above all, she contends, faith, will, and love of humanity will guide the expert in bringing out the light in each individual.

In this text that combines spiritual, humanistic, and medicinal elements, we can perceive Michel's early view of the importance of revolutions in provoking humanity's improvement. The "lueurs de Dieu" are not only a metaphor for society's most alienated, but also for their teachers, for society's healers, and for revolutions themselves. Revolutions in this context have the capacity to heal and transform society, to create an enlightened, new world. Michel describes the revolution brewing beneath the surface, in a sort of combination of Hugo's insistence on the Revolution's divine origin and Zola's metaphor comparing the revolution to seeds bursting forth from the earth in *Germinal*. She writes:

Écoutez, écoutez encore, et vous entendrez d'autres pas, vous verrez d'autres bannières et d'autres étoiles ; car nous sommes au temps où l'infini, penché sur les cratères ardents, prépare les révolutions dans ses creusets mystérieux.

Ces pas qu'entend à peine votre oreille, c'est la cohorte des visions, volée de colombes qui passent dans les ténèbres.

Ces couleurs qui de loin vous semblent pâles, c'est l'immense azur.

Ces lumières que vous entrevoyez, ce sont ces lueurs de Dieu.

Car ce que vous écoutez, c'est l'inconnu, ce que vous regardez, c'est le mystère, et ces voix qui s'appellent dans l'espace, ce sont celles des songeurs penchés sur tous les gouffres de la mort et de la vie, ce sont les Prométhées qui vont ravir le feu du ciel.

Et leur pas ne tremble point, leur cœur ne faiblit pas, nulle clarté n'éblouit leurs yeux ; car ils sont revêtus de la splendeur même de Dieu, du triple rayonnement de la toute puissance : foi, espérance, amour. (36-37)

Compared to her exilic counterparts, Michel more overtly anthropomorphizes revolutions, imagining them as the deepest, most intimate, parts of the people who enact them. In the first paragraph we learn that they originate, like geological movements, from some greater power ("l'infini"), who concocts them like stew in crucibles and craters; in other words, they are nourishment for the people. Revolutions literally feed the body and the soul. At the same time, they are likened to geological movements that have the power to materially alter the social/geographical landscape, much like Hugo's revolutions. Though her revolutions here are plural, they are also grouped together as

“l’inconnu” and “le mystère.” This refers not to God, but rather to the future. Though God has a role in this text—He emanates light—the true mystery is what will follow in revolutions’ wake.

I concur with Édith Thomas, Michel’s biographer, that this text is representative of the author’s spiritual phase (49). Yet, there remains a focus on the power of the human in this passage, despite Michel’s references to the divine. Revolutions are likened to people; the rumblings are the voices of “songeurs” who risk life and death to fight for freedom from oppression. They are sustained by God’s resplendence and “toute puissance,” which is, the text tells us, the equivalent of three equally human qualities: faith, love and hope. By comparing God’s power to human actions, Michel imagines the people carrying out the will of God. This fusion of the (plural) men and the (singular) God appears in the last paragraph of this passage, where Michel writes the revolutionaries, the “Prometheuses,” as a singular entity for half a line: “leur pas...leur cœur... car ils sont...” They have many voices and many bodies, but only one heart, and this common spirit is what guides them in shaping the new society. This movement from plural to singular also appears in the previous lines: “ces pas” converge into a singular “cohorte,” and “ces couleurs” likewise merge to form “l’immense azur.” For Michel, this kind of unification of disparate elements, coalescing around a singular set of principles, was essential to the success of revolutions. Indeed, she imagined that revolutions (plural) would ultimately generate a harmonious society (singular). The set of principles she extols was not confined by the organizing principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but also embraced the human qualities of love and compassion.

Throughout *Lueurs dans l’ombre*, Michel locates such human characteristics as compassion and intelligence in the soul which, she writes, is a gift bestowed on the people by God: “C’est que l’âme humaine, souffle de Dieu, est une puissance qui agit sur

une autre âme en raison directe de sa force, de son intelligence, de sa charité, et aussi en raison directe du carré de sa volonté” (38). Notably, this God-given attribute is also that which allows people to influence other people, and therein lies its political and social power. Michel goes on to describe how, with the help of modern science combined with human strength, intelligence, and charity, people can ultimately educate the dumb and heal the insane (38-40). She then sums up, “La réussite est dans la foi, dans l’amour de l’humanité. En avant! Et ne craignons rien. Les ténèbres sont profondes, la route pleine d’écueils ; le but semble parfois fuir devant nous ; en avant! Ce que nous voulons, c’est l’impossible. La conquête sera belle” (40). Conquest, for this activist, was to render the notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity, considered political rights, inherent qualities of every man, women, and child. The result would be not a new body politic, but a new human body or, perhaps more accurately, a new human soul. In her vision, society would not be simply the peaceful co-habitation of a multiplicity of people, but rather a unified collectivity composed of like-minded people who all love and hope together. Michel imagined how one soul nurturing another could influence common values and ultimately, in her dream for humanity, ameliorate all of society. For her, political activism was also a form of human compassion.

During her time, Michel was both admired and ostracized. Though she first published under a male pseudonym, hoping to have wider appeal, she does not seem to have been marginalized for being a female writer. On the contrary, great writers like Hugo and Verlaine made homage to her in poetry (Hugo’s “Viro Major” is quoted at the opening of this chapter, Verlaine composed “Ballade en l’honneur de Louise Michel” in 1888), the influential Clemenceau defended her during the Commune and, by the time of her death, thousands of people would attend her public burial in Paris all in the name of the “social revolution.” In his biography of her, Pierre Durand sums up: “Son attitude

intransigante, son courage indomptable, la fierté révolutionnaire qui l'anime emportent, sinon l'adhésion de tous, du moins l'admiration générale" (17). Still, one can be admired and condemned. Michel's own tenacity led some to believe in her insanity; the nineteenth century's celebrated criminologist Cesare Lombroso's analysis of the Communards (including Michel) in *Les Anarchistes* (1894) suggested that she was afflicted by both a tendency toward criminality and an excessive altruism that ultimately rendered her mad (Fau-Vincenti 29). While she was never officially deemed insane during her lifetime, the threat was posed after she destroyed her prison cell in Vienna toward the end of her life. Despite her radicalism, few today question the soundness of her reason; rather, critics today as in the past praise and admire her dedication to humanist thought, her seemingly boundless generosity, and the greatness of her heroic acts.

Indeed, her humanism was not only a way of thinking, it was a way of being that she modeled and incarnated throughout her life. Durand argues that, despite her proclaimed allegiance to the anarchist party during the second half of her life, Michel resisted confining her beliefs to those of the political organization; rather, she lived by her own set of rules that more often than not represented an idea, not a party (114). This relationship with society, I submit, found an apt metaphor in the protective relationship a mother has with her child. In her well-known song "La Marseillaise Noire" (1865), Michel envisioned a global organization of government modeled on maternal sentiment. She writes:

La république universelle  
S'élève dans les cieux ardents  
Couvrant les peuples de son aile  
Comme une mère ses enfants  
L'aurore du siècle géant  
Debout peuple sois fort et grand  
Debout pourquoi dormir encore... (*A Travers* 81)

Here, she describes a militant uprising against slavery and the ultimate triumph of a republic comprised entirely of equal citizens. As an anarchist later on, Michel would completely eliminate organized leadership from her ideal society, but she continued to imagine an organizing allegiance among the people. Rather than proposing the establishment of such a bond through democratic election or, as with a king, blood lines, Michel constructed a political vision in which the people's strength, independence, and safety emerged from the maternal love bestowed upon it by the universal republic.

According to Charles Stivale, this maternal characterization of the Republic belongs to Michel's pre-exilic, pre-anarchist phase, and genders the tension already present in her poetry between limitless freedom (the maternal) and organized government (characterized as "*patrie*" and therefore paternal) (46). Later in her life, he argues, the maternal aspects of Michel's anarchist thought would translate into a "fusion of nurturing with combat" and more fully reject the paternal "law" inherent in the Republic (54). While this explains Michel's shift in emphasis from "Republic" to "Revolution" in her writings, the consistency of the maternal image in her pre- and post-anarchist texts supports a second interpretation: I suggest we read the maternal relationship as a metaphor for both Michel's ideal society and the process by which that society is realized. In an elegy for and entitled "Marie Ferré" (1882), Michel compares the Revolution to a mother: "O Révolution! mère qui nous dévore/Et que nous adorons, suprême égalité!" (*Mémoires* 374). Equality, revolution, and the mother repeatedly coalesce in Michel's imagination, so that the particularity of the mother-child interaction becomes the model for both the process (the social revolution) and the product (the universal republic) that characterize her utopia.

Michel most likely draws on her own cherished relationship with her mother Marianne, to whom she was impressively devoted. She managed to regularly visit and



care for Marianne despite prison sentences, hiding from law enforcement, and violent uprisings. And it was when Marianne was captured and imprisoned in 1871 that Michel turned herself in; this trade resulted in her exile to New Caledonia. Though she did not have any children herself, Michel's tight bond with her mother lasted the duration of her life and ostensibly informed her imagined community. The maternal was a useful metaphor for imagining a society of mutual aid and compassion and, as a simply human experience, it allowed Michel to break down the common barriers of religion, class, and nationality. In exile, Michel drew on the image of the mother to further theorize how interactions with the "other" could ultimately transform social relationships. Her embodiment of the revolution was inspired by a sense of the power of the maternal, which may indeed be one reason her followers would later chant the nickname, "la mère Michel."

Whole-hearted devotion to a cause necessarily requires self-sacrifice, perhaps of the kind a mother makes for her child (which I will discuss in my analysis of Michel's Kanak legends), and certainly of the kind Michel constantly made for others. In addition to sacrificing her own life for her mother's in 1871, Michel gave away her money and possessions throughout her life: she offered clothing to fellow exiles in New Caledonia (Thomas 170) and, after exile, donated her meager conference earnings to revolutionary presses and workers' organizations (ibid 226). When she returned to France in 1880 she continued to fight for the oppressed and spearhead the anarchist movement. In 1883 she was accused of having incited the burglary of three bakeries during a workers' demonstration in Paris. Although she denied that she gave any signal to her comrades to commit theft, at her trial Michel stated, "On dit que j'ai fanatisé tous mes amis, mais alors frappez-moi seule. Il y a longtemps que j'ai fait le sacrifice de ma personne... Je ne vois plus que la Révolution; c'est elle que je servirai toujours" (qtd. in Thomas 250).

Indeed, in all her battles she never once seemed to fear death or punishment and, at her 1871 trial, she denied nothing and even stated outright her preference for death over imprisonment or deportation. Then, when imprisoned, she repeatedly refused pardons as long as her comrades remained locked up. She refused to return to France until a full amnesty had been offered to all Communards, and she violently destroyed her cell in a Vienna prison in 1890 upon learning that she was the only one of dozens of anarchists being granted release. This last act resulted in a psychiatric evaluation and her subsequent decision to self-exile to London, in order to avoid being locked up in an asylum. She was always inclined to see others as less fortunate than herself, and so even when confronted with a would-be assassin in 1888 Michel pled for his innocence. The man in question, Pierre Lucas, had lodged a bullet in her head at a conference she was giving in Le Havre. Yet, according to Michel, he was not a criminal so much as a victim of an unjust society, who was in reality suffering much more than her (Thomas 318). All of these acts contributed to the reputation of Michel as a person of generosity and selflessness, earning her the designation of “une sainte” among the French administration in 1874, an appropriate label for one still serving penitence in New Caledonia (qtd. in Thomas 170).

Michel’s “sainthood” not only demonstrates her call to martyrdom, but it also provides further evidence of how she embodied her belief in the new world. On several occasions Thomas describes Michel as an actress playing a role. She writes: “Louise donne souvent l’impression de jouer son personnage. Et c’est d’ailleurs parce que le personnage, qu’elle a choisi d’être, correspond à sa personne qu’elle le tint si parfaitement jusqu’au bout” (91). Because she was willing to go “jusqu’au bout,” to accept and even request death, to turn suffering into self-nourishment, and to remain committed to a greater ideal despite economic hardship, physical danger, and deep

emotional loss, Michel gained a reputation that has continued to shape how she is remembered and studied. She insisted on being an outcast but, in ways we can compare to the other exiles in this study, she was eventually granted “insider” status by virtue of her political/social commitments.

At Hugo’s national funeral, Michel observed disappointedly that “le maître” was then being universally celebrated, despite having been the object of condemnation only a short time earlier (*Mémoires* 344). And yet, glimpses of a similar outcome would appear even during Michel’s lifetime; in 1897 she experienced one such reversal of her reputation during a gathering in Brussels: “Il y a une dizaine d’années, à Bruxelles, le peuple proférait des cris de colère sur mon passage. Cette fois, c’était le contraire,” she noted in an interview (qtd. in Thomas 397). When she published the first tome of her *Mémoires* in 1886, the editor Roy clarified in his preface, “il y a deux Louise Michel: celle de la légende et celle de la réalité, qui n’ont l’une et l’autre aucun point de ressemblance.” Reading a bit further we again perceive similarities between the Red Virgin and the Emperor of Elba:

Pour bien des gens [...] Louise Michel est une sorte d’épouvantail, une impitoyable virago, une ogresse, un monstre à figure humaine [...]  
Voilà la légende.  
Combien différente est la réalité:  
Ceux qui l’approchent pour la première fois sont tout stupéfaits de se trouver en face d’une femme à l’abord sympathique, à la voix douce, aux yeux pétillants d’intelligence et respirant la bonté.

Like Napoleon I, Michel’s reputation during her lifetime wavered between that of an ogre and that of a martyr. And, as with Emmanuel de Las Cases for Napoleon, the editor of Michel’s *Mémoires* contributed as much as the exile herself to the construction of this rose-colored legacy. Henceforth Michel would find attached to her name not “ogre” or “monster” but “soeur de charité” and “martyre.” While Michel certainly remained criminalized, marginalized, and exiled throughout her lifetime (although she found

comrades supporting her in Brussels, she was nonetheless expelled from the country following that 1897 meeting), she ensured that her legacy would be that of a martyr, savior, and “saint” who continues to deserve recognition, admiration, and praise. To complete the irony, at Michel’s burial on January 22, 1905, over 100,000 people would follow the hearse to the Levallois-Perret cemetery, marching across Paris and chanting *L’Internationale*; “Depuis la mort de Victor Hugo, on n’avait rien vu de pareil,” writes Thomas (447).

“*La Canaque*”: Exile and Otherness

Michel’s legacy is indelibly marked by her work during the Commune and the deportation sentence she served as a result. She arrived in New Caledonia in December of 1873 and, like Hugo, she would be the one to decide when to return to France—not upon a remittance of her individual sentence, but only once all the Communards had received amnesty in July of 1880. On her voyage to New Caledonia aboard *La Virginie*, Michel, through conversations with her shipmate Nathalie Lemel, came to embrace anarchy and believe that any form of organized government would give way to power struggles, exploitation, and oppression (Thomas 158). Henceforth, she advocated for the complete destruction of the present world so that the next generations could enjoy freedom, equality, and fraternity. In exile, Michel had the opportunity to test her theory that compassion for the “Other” would herald social revolution and progress. She actively engaged with the Kanak people and culture in order to learn from them, teach them, and develop mutually supportive relationships. She studied the flora and fauna of the Ducos peninsula, planting new seeds (which she had requested from her Auberive prison in France, already preparing for her adventure overseas, Thomas 151) and experimenting with vaccines to keep her plants alive; she supported the Kanak rebellion

of 1878 by teaching the rebels how to cut telephone wires and reporting on their progress to newspapers back home; and she learned and reflected on traditional Kanak stories and language, told to her mostly by Daoumi, the first Kanak she met and quickly befriended. As she explained in a letter to Hugo, “on ne fait pas six mille lieues pour ne rien voir et n’être utile à rien” (qtd. in Thomas 169). In 1879 she was allowed to move to the capital Noumea where she carried on her work as a schoolteacher, educating both European children and illiterate Kanak girls. There she met Daoumi’s brother, who continued to teach her Kanak legends. Throughout her time on the island of New Caledonia, Michel gave as much as (if not more than) she took, ever aware of the mark she could make on others.

Even more, as one of so few Westerners to take an interest in the Kanak culture, she felt it her responsibility to etch their oral culture into written history and disseminate her discoveries to her compatriots in Europe. And this not only to validate the Kanak legends as folklore worthy of Western study, but also to demonstrate how this encounter with the Other could ameliorate societies across the globe. As a symbol of the foreign in relation to the French, the Kanak people and their landscape allowed Michel to explore how mankind could overcome its inherent differences to form a truly collective and peaceful society. While her previous writings on revolution and the maternal laid the theoretical groundwork for imagining a future utopia, her exilic writings show how the “revolutionary” lessons of human kindness and maternal nurturing actually work in an encounter with the Other. Finding herself suddenly in a new space, at a new time, and among new company, Michel put her dream to practice and took her place in a long line of French authors from Montaigne to Lévi-Strauss exploring how an encounter with the Other can effect a transcultural evolution. While this encounter might resemble those previously explored in, for instance, Montaigne’s “Des Cannibales” (1580) or

Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721), the process by which social evolution occurs in Michel's work differs. In contradistinction to her pre-Revolutionary (and male) counterparts, Michel's "encounter" was modeled on a maternal relationship that, for her, was the key to social progress.

Michel's thought thus constitutes an overlooked piece of colonial history that today informs many scholars' discussions of current debates on French multiculturalism. Laurent Dubois, Étienne Balibar, and Nicolas Bancel are only a few postcolonial theorists who seek to explain twentieth- and twenty-first-century questions concerning French identity politics by historically situating the notions of "universalism" and "republicanism" in relation to these terms' usages during France's colonial expansion. While Michel certainly adhered to her contemporaries' paternalistic regards on the Kanak Other and sought to disseminate universalist ideals to those "less evolved" civilizations, she also contextualized French culture and civilization as similarly unperfected. She took a long historical view of what French civilization had become and envisioned a future society even more ideal. For her, the universalist notions of freedom and equality were neither French-specific nor currently existed. For her, these ideals would only arise out of a mutually beneficial encounter with the Other, and both parties would need to experience a personal and cultural evolution as a result of their coming together in the spirit of nurturing. While she succumbed to a typical colonial paradigm that evokes familial ties among peoples and imagines a biological evolution from "primitive" to "civilized" culture, she also challenged the conception that would break different cultures down into distinctly separate, and unrelated, categories (such as by race, religion, class, or geography). For her, humankind shared a common past and was meant to participate in a common future; the Kanak legends were as much a part of French history as the French Revolution was a part of the Kanak future.

While her approach to the Other was in part an attempt at self-knowledge, like the ethnographic encounters of Enlightenment thinkers (Montesquieu or Rousseau) or, more recently, of French anthropologists (Lévi-Strauss or Victor Segalen), it was also a model for how to create new articulations of human identity. Her goal was not only to acculturate the Other to a supposedly superior way of being, nor simply to arrive at a more relative view of the self thanks to a compassionate understanding of the Other (although these can be gleaned in her texts). In addition, she advocated for a *métissage* with the Other that would ultimately foster global peace. And she once again invokes the maternal relationship as her model. A closer analysis of her work will reveal how her experience of *métissage*, her concept of the maternal, and her descriptions of the New Caledonian geography work together to inform her utopian vision of this peaceful human community.

The exilic texts I will study here include Michel's two collections of Kanak legends, the first published while in exile, *Légendes et chansons de gestes canaques* (1875), and the second upon her return, *Légendes et chants de gestes canaques* (1885). While the second reprints some of the passages of the first, on the whole it remains a separate and distinct text. The first begins with a letter, "Aux Amis d'Europe" and goes on to re-tell thirteen Kanak legends, which treat such themes as war, creation, natural disasters, sorcerers, the arrival of white people, and cannibalism, and finally includes a war chant and a narrative about storytelling. It was published serially between October 6 and December 15, 1875 in the weekly newspaper *Petites Affiches de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, the colony's first civic newspaper (Bogliolo "Prés" 14). The second collection was published by Madame Kéva, who generally printed children's stories; in 1883 Michel had edited a collection for her press. It is not entirely clear why Michel re-published a collection of Kanak stories ten years later. She composed it while imprisoned in

Clermont for allegedly having prompted the burglary of three bakeries during a demonstration in Paris. Her mother's health was failing, and it has been suggested that Michel needed money to sustain both herself and her mother (Dauphiné 85, 87). The collection was already sent to press when Marianne passed in January of 1885. Its dedication appropriately reads "Souvenir à ma mère." It is comprised of twenty-two separate texts, including legends similar to those of the first collection, the introduction "Aux Amis d'Europe," one story by fellow Communard and *déporté* Charles Malato, and geographical descriptions such as "Échappée de vue" and "Le Cyclone." Michel also appends four drawings (created from memory in prison), musical annotations for four songs, and an extensive Kanak glossary, which is largely inaccurate (Dauphiné 88).<sup>33</sup> She re-writes passages from the first, such as "Aux Amis d'Europe" and "Le Génie Ondoué," but with immense modifications, perhaps due to the fact that she was unable to access all the notes and articles she had requested while in prison (ibid 88). Still, over half the texts are new, though many of the themes repeat. Bogliolo suggests that both works, together and like all of Michel's writings, must be read as "une œuvre mouvante, en constante réécriture, signe d'une pensée en train de s'élaborer dans la lutte ou le voyage, *work in progress*, qui colle à l'actualité et s'enrichit d'apports extérieurs" ("Prés" 17). Michel's writings reflect her always-changing lived experiences, making each *Légendes* collection its own, independent work.

The authenticity of these "legends" is questionable: Joannès Caton, a fellow exile on Ducos, wrote in his memoirs that Michel's legends were "sorties toutes entières de son imagination" (357), although he does go on to confirm some of her observations once he begins interacting with the local population. Moreover, Michel effectively translates already-translated Kanak stories: her interpreter, Daoumi, recounts them to

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<sup>33</sup> For a list of all the modifications and alterations between the first and second volumes, see Bogliolo's "Présentation" to his edition of the texts, pp. 15-16.



her in French and she then interprets them a second time when she writes (Bogliolo “Prés” 32). While scholars generally agree that the *Légendes* contain relatively little ethnographic merit, they tell us a great deal about their author (Bogliolo “Prés” 32; Dauphiné 88). Indeed, even if the stories themselves are mostly fictional, one thing seems clear: the publication of two editions of the Kanak legends, the first carrying the dedication “Aux Amis d’Europe” at the top of each installation, and the second produced in France a decade later, indicates that Michel was devoted to introducing her compatriots to the Kanak “Other.” She sought to make what was previously a New Caledonian, oral history accessible to civilizations around the globe.

From the beginning, the encounter with the Kanak Other is staged as a fusion. Michel’s dedicatory first section in the first collection (*Chansons*), entitled “Aux Amis d’Europe,” at once creates distance and rapprochement between the French and the Kanaks. The title marks the European as geographically and culturally separate from the author’s current experience while also embracing Europeans as friends and students of Kanak culture. Michel’s introduction explains why this is so crucial; for her, the Kanak culture *is* the European culture, because it is all of humanity’s past. The text opens: “Vous êtes là-bas au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle; nous sommes ici au temps des haches de pierre et nous avons des chansons de gestes pour littérature. Non pas la chanson de gestes du Moyen-Âge, mais celle des temps tout à fait primitifs ; avec des vocabulaires bornés et les œuvres à l’état d’enfance” (56). She repeatedly refers to the Kanaks as “children” and their culture as “childhood” (*Chansons* 56, 57; *Chants* 155, 156), stressing their innocence and simplicity in what can be understood as a paternalistic way completely in line with the dominant thinking of her time. However, I would like to argue that it is a particular understanding of a maternal relationship, one that results in a fusion with the Other, that ultimately informs Michel’s assessment of the Kanak people. She urges teachers and

scientists to study this system before it disappears, as they would study their own history to learn from it (*Chansons* 57, 58; *Chants* 157). In Michel's teleology, discovering the Kanak culture is a historical and scientific imperative, leading to a better understanding of European culture and a way of realizing a future, more perfect society. She asks rhetorically in the concluding section of *Chants*, "est-ce que les enfants ne deviennent pas des hommes ? il en est de même des peuples. [...] qui sait, en leur enseignant simplement, jusqu'où iraient ces peuplades ? Le saut de l'âge de pierre à nous, serait curieux à étudier ; bien des professeurs seraient heureux de s'en rendre compte" (156-57). Kanaks and Europeans are meant to be both students and teachers in this process. Michel does not envision an infantile subordination to a paternalistic order, but rather the educational and nurturing protection of a vulnerable people—the universal mother-republic embracing her children under her wing.

Michel thus posits a theory of humanity's progress in which each culture represents what I consider to be a slice of time in the universal clock. Rather than envisioning multiple peoples spread out around the world, each living out a parallel, but separate, experience of civilization, Michel imagines humanity as singular, and each people occupies a time period within their geographical space. Together, all peoples share one past, one present, and one future, but these epochs co-exist in the same way as civilizations. This understanding of historicity is directly related to her belief that humanity's advancement due to political revolution finds a model in the geological revolutions apparent in the earth's strata. Claude Rétat suggests that Michel's concept of "époque" is intricately tied to the geological, citing the term's geological connotation in the Littré: "nom des durées qui ont succédé chaque fois et respectivement aux grands changements que la terre a subis" (Rétat 5). Indeed, this aptly describes Michel's construal of the world's many civilizations throughout time and space. Rétat cites Buffon

as a possible source of Michel's inspiration, but it seems that the slightly more contemporary Cuvier also influenced Michel's thought on the relationship between history and geological strata. The purpose of relaying the Kanak legends, "ces récits et ces chants...qui bercent toute l'humanité à son premier âge" (*Chansons* 56), is thus to teach humanity about its ostensibly shared past so that it might continue to evolve, as a unity. She goes on, "Plus tard, quand les tribus seront éteintes ou mélangées, on regrettera peut-être de n'avoir pas pris sur le vif ces notions du passé; mais le saut ne sera-t-il pas plus grand entre ce que nous savons et ce que sauront nos neveux? Il faut bien l'espérer" (157). Looking backward to an ancient, communal past permits a view toward an ideal, equally communal, future. Michel suggests that European civilization is more "evolved" than the primitive Kanaks, but in that very construction she also assumes that the Kanaks are part of a larger, human family, of which the French are also but one, still imperfect, part. The self/other fusion that occurs in her writings should not only be understood partly as a cultural valorization of the Other, but also as a directive to unite disparate civilizations.

For Michel, this self/other fusion is what allows humanity to construct its own future. Bogliolo has pointed out that, in her *Légendes et chants de gestes canaques*, Michel stages an encounter with the Other in part through the text's polyphony; in valorizing Kanak language, stories, and orality, Michel's text prompts a *métissage* of self/other, resulting in unity, perfection, and progress ("Métissage" 29). Our brief look here at the opening and concluding sections of her Kanak legends texts certainly supports Bogliolo's thesis. Consistent with Michel's belief in revolution, this encounter does not happen gradually and peacefully, but, to borrow Bogliolo's words, is the result of a dramatic shock or rupture (ibid 28). Bogliolo rightly points to the cyclonic imagery of Michel's texts to underscore how she experiences exile as an abrupt uprooting (ibid

28). I suggest we take this metaphor even further and recall Michel's and Hugo's rapprochement of the storm and revolution. This image, which appears in both writers' discussions of their exilic islands, locates one source of political revolution in geological transformations. With this in mind, Michel's definition of *métissage* becomes not only cultural, but also geographical and even temporal, two more key dimensions of the exilic experience.

In her *Mémoires*, Michel, like Hugo, employs the term "revolution" to discuss both the political and the geological. In a passage reminiscent of Hugo's account of the formation of Guernsey in "L'Archipel de la Manche," Michel briefly relates how the New Caledonian island emerged as the result of geological disturbances in Asia. As she tells it, New Caledonia, like its neighbors New Zealand and Australia, broke off from Asia following a "geological revolution;" by way of a particular rock's layers, Michel concludes "que les terres de la Nouvelle-Calédonie ont subi les révolutions géologiques qui ont fait émerger des sommets nouveaux ou conservé en partie ceux du continent qu'elles disloquaient" (348). It was on this rock that Michel inscribed about a dozen lines from Hugo's poem, "Les Sauveurs se sauveront," discussed in Chapter 2. In her words, she etched these verses "pour les cyclones," beginning with "Paris sanglant" and ending with, "Lazare! Lazare! Lazare! Lève-toi!" (*Mémoires* 346). For her, the cyclones, just like the revolution of 1789, were a call to incite further revolutions. Even more, this comparison orders political revolutions as similarly "natural" phenomena. She, like Hugo, felt an affinity for the notion of "destiny," and environmental ruptures offered a useful metaphor for understanding political upheavals as part of a similarly pre-designed plan. Michel takes this metaphor even further, however. She goes on to describe how the island's flora and fauna provide further evidence that New Caledonia was once attached to Australia, which was once a part of Asia. Noticing that characteristics of one species

appear in a separate species on an island hundreds of miles away, Michel concludes that a geological rupture caused them to evolve differently in distinct geographical spaces, though they descend from the same source. Like the various formations of the rock itself, then, the multiple fauna Michel studies are, in a way, unified. What at first appears a cross-cultural encounter is actually the distillation of difference, or multiplicity, into unity, or singularity. In his discussion of Michel's post-exilic novels, Rétat points out that Michel's belief in the inevitability of such natural, geological "revolutions" fueled her faith in a similar, Darwinian view of human evolution, and thus led her to depict her present world as equally primitive and animalistic yet capable of metamorphosis (7, 10). For Rétat, though Michel's novels posit animality as a unifying trait of all men—a "fauve ancestral" that was a common conception during the *fin-de-siècle* (discussed in more detail later)—she does not proffer a clear solution for how humanity can move beyond its current dog-eat-dog ways of social organization to realize a harmonious life (18). I submit that it is precisely this encounter with the Other that brings Michel closer to a proposed solution for humankind's woes (war, poverty, etc.). For Michel, the Other is not the nineteenth-century Kanak in New Caledonia, but the Kanak inside of each French man and woman. Recognizing the "fauve ancestral" as one element at the core of *all* people, not simply the voracious, primitive, or otherwise "less human," is a first step for her toward evolution.

As Rétat discusses, Michel's notion of a primal animal lodged in each person's consciousness is bound up with her reliance on the geological metaphor of political revolution. For Michel the peoples' revolutions cannot be separated from the occurrences of disruptive, natural phenomena; the two are part of the same process of razing society. In an unfinished *opéra fantastique*, for example, Michel imagines a dystopian future caused by a "révolution géologique," which ultimately paves the way for

social revolution (*Mémoires* 95). In her thought, social overhaul would be brought about by a geographical and temporal shift; in other words, the new epoch would necessarily take place within a revised geography. Later on, she refers to the “type ancestral,” a sort of primal animal (“une bête”), that lives in each person and similarly survives numerous “transformations et révolutions” throughout the centuries (ibid 244). As she learned in New Caledonia, as the geographical landscape changes, so do the species it nurtures, and vice-versa. These are the metaphors that drive reflections such as this one: “La race que nous ne verrons pas et qui sera transformée et développée par les événements, méritera, peut-être, des paroles plus élevées. Fauves encore nous-mêmes, nous cherchons à faire, cependant, la place nette pour ceux qui vont venir. La Révolution sera la floraison de l’humanité comme l’amour est la floraison du cœur” (ibid 393). Here too, she suggests that her own contemporaries are just as “animalistic” as the supposedly “primitive” Kanak culture. Not in the self-reflective way of *Lettres Persanes*, which continues to separate “French” from “Persian,” or “self” from “other”; rather, for Michel, humanity is singular, connected by the earth and history, geology and biology.

In *L’Ère Nouvelle, Pensée Dernière, souvenirs de Calédonie* (1887), she sums up her ideal imagined community in similar terms: “La bête humaine qui, au fond des âges, avait monté de la famille à la tribu, à la horde, à la nation, monte, monte encore, monte toujours ; et la famille devient race entière” (ch. 1). Rétat notes that Michel’s understanding that humans had evolved from animals drove her to believe with certainty that they were destined to continue to evolve and that this “ère nouvelle” was therefore imminent (5). Atavistic thought also informs Zola’s *La Bête Humaine* (1890), along with *fin-de-siècle* theories on heredity, criminality, and *dégénérescence* more generally. Dorian Bell sheds light on how nineteenth-century evolutionary theories, in particular (for my purposes) Lombroso’s theory that criminality, or savage animality, originates in

the pre-historic past and is then inscribed in man's genetic material, influenced Zola's notion of the *fêlure* (43). Michel likewise connects man's current "primitive" state with the primal savagery of the past, while also locating that past in the Kanak culture. Bell goes on to suggest that this theory, along with Freud's notion of the death drive, stems from the even older theory of recapitulation, which posits that each organism repeats behaviors from the past, including those of childhood, one's ancestors, and the "primitive self" (44-46). Michel too announces a belief in this atavistic notion that the entire species is inscribed on each body, but rather than see this as a flaw or death impulse in modern man, she suggests that it is what can rescue humanity from self-destruction. Only, of course, if man accepts his connection with the animal inside ("la bête humaine") as well as the one outside (the actual "primitive" man, the Kanak). Her thought remains rooted in a conception of humanity as a family—singular and connected—and in this she again recalls Zola; in *Fécondité* (1899), Zola will envision an entire nation built on the Froment family's proliferation (this is my focus in Chapter 5). Whereas Zola sees this ideal French family annihilating other, opposing viewpoints, Michel imagines continuity between civilizations, nations, and families. The trajectory of human connections she foresees begins with cultural similarities unifying tribes, evolves into political allegiances that define nations, and, finally, culminates in the recognition of genetic ties that inextricably bind the human family. Her ideal future society is this singular family composed of the multitude of histories, epochs, and cultures that make up human phylogeny. While Bogliolo argues that Michel describes this revolution as rupture as the result of her exile to New Caledonia, I suggest that she goes on to theorize this rupture as continuity (revolution as cyclical) in an attempt to move beyond the us/them dialectic that typically characterizes the Western encounter with the colonial

Other. Michel's attempt at *métissage* with the Kanak in exile informs her belief that they are already culturally, biologically, and historically linked.

To sum up, while the core of humanity may not radically change, for Michel a combination of “revolutionary” political, social, biological, and geological events steers the course of human evolution. We can recall, following Raymond Williams's discussion of the Keywords “evolution” and “revolution,” that these terms are in fact related. Until Darwin, “evolution” was associated with its etymological meaning of “unrolling,” and thus presumed that whatever was being “unrolled” already existed to be discovered—much like Ernst Haeckel's recapitulation theory (1866) contending that human phylogeny was already present on each embryo (see Bell 44). Evolution in this sense was simply the development—unrolling—of a system already inherent to (in this case) the species. By contrast, revolution, with its sense of turning and *overturning*, meant the institution of a new system, through sudden rupture and violent change (Williams 122). Michel's insistence on the geographical and the temporal elements of revolution/evolution further develops the tension between these two terms that arose in the late nineteenth century (Williams 273). For her, “revolution” was both an overturning of the established system to create a new order, as well as a natural process supporting human development. In other words, revolution was a means of achieving evolution. By comparing political revolution to the “natural” (r)evolutions of time and geology, Michel suggests that overthrowing the governmental system is also in the realm of the “natural,” allowing humanity to continue its pre-designed growth. Revolution, commonly thought of as sudden rupture in contrast with evolution's insistence on steady development, in this context was just as natural, imperative, and unstoppable as human evolution. The fusion of revolution/evolution mirrors the fusion of self/other that appears in Michel's Kanak stories; the cultural coming together of European and Kanak



was also the coming together of two different spaces and two different eras, providing the circumstances for such revolutionary evolution. At the close of his article, Bogliolo gestures to the significance of the island as a place where such fusions can occur: multiple cultures are brought together there, providing a paradigmatic space for inter- and trans-cultural exchanges (“Métissage” 31). These various “encounters”—cultural, temporal, and geographical—also characterize the exilic experience, suggesting that exile was indeed what allowed Michel to formulate her ideas in this way. For, it is only when all three dimensions unite—culture, time, and space—that the Michélien (r)evolution can take place.

#### *Les Légendes: Flora, Fauna, and the Maternal*

Close analyses of a selection of texts from *Chants*--especially “Échappée de vue,” “Océan,” and “Comment le Takata Bohendiou fit la pluie au lieu du beau temps”—demonstrate how Michel writes the distillation of difference through a rhizomatic imagery of the island’s flora and fauna. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia II: A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), the rhizome (in contrast to the tree) offers an image of “deterritorialization,” “assemblage,” “map,” or “alliance” that, for them, is the stuff of a productive, anti-cultural “multiplicity” (Intro). They urge readers to resist the tree-model with its root structure, insistence on centrality and unity, and tendency toward model, mimicry, and “tracing.” Rather, they advocate for cultural productions (especially in music and mathematics, though writing is also a privileged genre for these writers) that explore by “proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing” (25). The rhizome is circular and infinite; it fills space entirely by always “becoming,” always fashioning more connections, and always resisting the temptation to return to a single foundational

center characteristic of classical philosophy. This metaphor of the rhizome often appears in island literature addressing questions of multi-cultural, and simply “multiple,” identities (*Traversée de la Mangrove* by Maryse Condé (1989) is one obvious example), as well as in works that seek to move beyond Manichean dichotomies, symbolic signifiers, or other sorts of root systems (Deleuze and Guattari cite a few such texts as well as Eastern philosophy’s creed of immanence, as opposed to the West’s general espousal of transcendence). This of course recalls our discussion in Chapter 2 of Hugo’s exilic spaces, which also provided the circumstances for thinking beyond the antinomy. In many ways, and contrary to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, Michel’s Kanak legends remain rooted in a singular philosophy of genealogy, as already discussed, which holds that all of humanity indeed descends from a seed—perhaps the center of the human tree. Yet, Michel’s utopian vision is of a multiplicity that does not remain stagnant, but continues to evolve with science, technology, society, etc. She posits foundational principles (unity), but also evolution, growth, and the unknown (multiplicity). In this particular text we see Michel more clearly taking a step away from Hugolian dualisms by writing more “rhizomatically”—that is, by drawing connections, circling back on her descriptions, peppering her texts with diverse languages, and neither beginning nor ending in a classical, plot-driven way. Granted, we saw clearly how Michel locates epochs and civilizations in a distinct hierarchy, proceeding teleologically from a pre-scientific society of primitives to a utopian organization of humanity, and envisioning not many but a single multiplicity of people all working together toward a common goal (peace). In exile, however, inspired by the New Caledonian landscape, I contend that Michel begins to experience the “rhizome.” In Deleuze and Guattari’s words, she advances—albeit hesitatingly—in the spirit of their directive to “increase your territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight to the point where it becomes an abstract

machine covering the entire plane of consistency” (11). She will amalgamate the multiplicities before her into a utopian vision of foundational (and therefore anti-rhizomatic) notion of the “universal,” but she does so by way of a small rhizomatic detour wherein she imagines the interlacing, and interdependent, branches of an open-ended island landscape as a model for how to build her admittedly singular utopian society (the very idea of a “model” to be replicated, of course, is contrary to Deleuze and Guattari’s description of rhizomatic expressions). In what follows, I hope to show that Michel locates the source of her universalist, foundational principles, sprung from her *métissage* with the Other, in an understanding of the maternal as another model for how to foster such rhizomatic connections. Though she does not arrive at a truly “deterritorialized” or “smooth” space of centric-free expression, as Deleuze and Guattari would intend, she does add a new line of connection to our understanding of how to break down the self/other dichotomy: that of maternal sentiment which, for her, helps produce (at least one) new multiplicity—that of her (always-changing, always-becoming) utopian society.

By far the longest section of either collection of Kanak legends, “Échappée de vue” also differs in content from the other stories: rather than relating a Kanak legend, it is a personal reflection in which the author explores the botany of the island philosophically. It does not appear in the first compilation published in New Caledonia, *Légendes et chansons*, and indeed it contains all the depth and maturity of one reflecting back on a past experience. Still, it is written in the present and the description of the land is so detailed we must consider that Michel began its composition while still in exile. The extreme attention to floral detail may be what Dauphiné pejoratively describes as nothing but “un inventaire minutieux des plantes” (88). And in fact, Dauphiné’s otherwise unspecific commentary on Michel’s oeuvre appears in the same context as a citation from “Échappée de vue.” I suggest that we read this passage as a political

metaphor for how the island and the exilic experience might ultimately serve as a model for how to build a better society through intercultural exchange, science, and nature.

Michel opens with a list of Kanak vocabulary next to their French translations, plunging her readers directly into the “otherness” of a foreign land. At the same time, however, she relates the Kanak language to French sonority, noting for example that the Kanak word “néto” contains the same sounds as its French translation, “tonnerre.” She introduces the vocabulary list with the phrase “j’ai appris,” a verb she repeats at the list’s close. In this she insists again on her connection with the otherwise foreign language, showing how what originates as “other” becomes a part of the “self” through learning and recognition of commonalities. She goes on to explain that this language called “bichelamar” was similarly born of the encounter among diverse dialects brought together in New Caledonia; it has origins in the tribal dialects from Melanesia and the Antilles, contains Latin phonemes from Spanish, Italian, and French, and includes words borrowed from Greek, Arab, English, and Chinese. For her, *bichelamar* is thus a sort of “universal language” that could form the basis for global communication (95). In gleaning all these diverse influences, Michel perceives both the past and the future in the Kanak people:

N’est-il pas étrange que le *Thoth* égyptien, le *Teutatès* gaulois, le *Théos* grec, le *Tabbé* (magicien) samoyède, le *Takata*, médecin sorcier canaque, *Théo*, le tonnerre canaque, *Théama*, chef suprême des tribus, n’aient une même origine ? Trouverions-nous un vieux peuple au lieu d’un nouveau ? (98)

*Bichelamar* is an example of how “foreign” dialects can be absorbed into a single language, breaking down the very distinction between “self” and “other.” To drive home the point, the remainder of her text is interspersed with Kanak phrases and French translations. By the end of the passage the Francophone reader has learned a bit of Kanak vocabulary. And again, this *mélange* is intended to instruct her readers as much about the past as about the future. Imagining that these languages share a common

origin supports Michel's proposition that humanity was once unified, and that it can be again. By studying and experiencing the roots of humanity in the Kanak culture, Michel seeks to locate those qualities that are "human," and therefore common to all people.

The New Caledonian geography presents another opportunity for the author to experience, and learn from, the foreign. The landscape offers a series of labyrinthine geographical and floral contortions; but, hiding in the midst of these botanical mines, Michel perceives beauty, history, and knowledge. The mountains are "des sommets tourmentés, arrachés, tordus, les uns s'élevant en pics, les autres se creusant en cratères. Les lignes de faîtes sont affolées, les croupes prennent toutes les formes du rêve. [...] Et toujours des sommets derrière des sommets perdus dans les nuages" (99). Towering high above yet also plunging deep below, the repetition of these peaks and valleys creates an impregnable surface that appears at once violently rooted in the earth and also fused with an otherworldly stratosphere. It fills the space yet also escapes the eye. The lexical field of entanglement persists in descriptions of the flora: the "enchevêtrement de forêt vierge" (100), "lianes qui enlacent les arbres" (100), and "arabesques de feuillage et de fleurs variant de formes à l'infini" (101) give a good sense of the tone of this passage. Michel learns that only by delving beneath that which appears impenetrable can the peninsula's treasures be uncovered, can the unknown become known:

Les richesses calédoniennes seraient les mines, les bois précieux, contre lesquelles ni sauterelles, ni cyclones ne peuvent rien, et peut-être les vers à soie du ricin, peut-être des essences d'arbres et bien d'autre choses, qu'on pourrait essayer sur ce sol où vit la légende. (100)

The history and stories of New Caledonia live beneath this surface of flora, hidden from plain sight and protected from the elements. Indeed, closer looks reveal that the land itself is pregnant with unseen life. We discover that "autour d'un cap de rocher imitant un fort, s'est réfugiée la sauvage végétation dans le silence sauvage" (100), or again, "à l'ombre des lianes qui enlacent les arbres...Là, s'abritent du jour des roussettes,

enveloppées de leurs ailes comme d'un manteau espagnol" (100). *La liane*, or creeper, goes on to serve as a particularly rich metaphor for perceiving harmony in diversity.

She introduces this lengthy discussion of the New Caledonian creepers with a comparison: "Toutes les fleurs que vous connaissez ont leurs analogues dans celles des lianes ; vous y trouverez la fleur du pommier avec la feuille du lierre" (101). Again, we imagine the beauty of the vine to be found beneath—or rather, as in the case of a labyrinth, within—its hearty exterior, but even more we learn that the vine is the companion of the flower; they complement, support, and create one another. Michel goes on to catalog the exact nature of the flowers that correspond to each creeper, poetically describes their shapes, colors, and textures, and notes which ones are often confused for others. This "painstaking inventory of plants," to borrow from Dauphiné, poetically paints a harmonious tableau of colors and life forms that lean on each other and support one another. The flowers and leaves are described as "belonging to" the creepers; one could not exist without the other. Another lengthy paragraph lists dozens of colorful and extravagant plants—olives, acacias, tomatoes, potatoes, rose-bays, carnations, and forget-me-nots all find their place in Michel's illustration. No single plant or color or fruit dominates; rather, they all exist side by side. It is difficult to determine whether the New Caledonian landscape is bathed in complete chaos or perfect harmony; Michel resists distinguishing one from the other.

In addition to the flora, Michel lists the fauna found before her, moving back and forth from types of flowers and trees to the insects swarming along their surfaces. The chaos offers no rhyme or reason, indeed, "dans les fentes des rochers, des tribus de fourmis rouges dominant, mais il y a de tout, des araignées, des mille-pieds, des vers qui ne peuvent être là que pour être mangés" (102). Michel observes the forest teeming with life and death and lists its endless array of growth: "Des chênes nains viennent ou s'en

vont ; la terre est aux ricins, aux lianes, aux bruyères, aux fougères, aux arbres vernis, et surtout à un arbuste au bois blanchâtre et creux, aux branches garnies d'houppes rudes, dont la fleur d'héliotrope est charmante, et dont les baies en forme de mûres ont un goût de cassis parfumé" (102). But in this list, the preposition "aux" again signals not only a description of the earth but also the relationships among the flora; the land both contains a wealth of plants and belongs to these plants, is dominated by them. Diversity is found within a single plant, too: fittingly, Michel informs the reader that the mangrove tree's fruits and colors vary according to its species (103). Even the large tree at the center of the forest radiates its leaves out to the sides, completing the rhizomatic imagery of Michel's exilic space: "Vers le milieu de la forêt ouest, un grand arbre à l'écorce lisse, aux feuilles de cerisier, épaisses et presque noires, aux branches légères, les étend horizontalement sur un grand espace" (102). Michel's botanical depictions elicit an understanding of the multicultural, non-hierarchical nature of peaceful co-existence, like the mangrove tree itself.

It is at this point that Michel introduces the various peoples who have contributed to the New Caledonian landscape, breaking down barriers among disparate heritages in the same manner as among plants. We learn that deported prisoners planted the banana trees and that she herself is responsible for the survival of the remaining papaya trees, which she vaccinated. She further aligns herself with the island's flora, comparing "vos fruits d'Europe" to "nos pommes d'acajou" (102) and pointing out, in a somewhat abrasive tone, "voici de petits scorpions inoffensifs, pour l'homme, comme tous les animaux de la nouvelle Calédonie" (103). Just as outsiders can plant and care for new seeds, they have the power to destroy that which is already there. Michel warns against such violence and models how to relate to the foreign through understanding and nurturing.

The imagery of living entities hidden and nurtured by their protective coating (the flowers and their creepers, the insects and their rocks) recalls the fetus in its mother's womb, and Michel's lexicon reinforces this reading. Throughout this passage, we encounter verbs like "enlacer," "s'abriter," "envelopper," and "contenir;" the space within seems veritably dependent on its exterior cushion. Even when a certain plant appears to dominate its neighbors, Michel is quick to explain: "La feuille de vigne domine ; elle appartient encore à une sorte de liane aux fruits jaunes, allongés, contenant des graines guillochées, enveloppées d'un peu de chair vermeille" (101). That which "dominates" also "belongs" to something greater, namely the species that is working to propagate itself and cultivate the next generation. In this Michel's maternal/botanical depictions also reflect her understanding of the connection among past, present, and future. Each flower boasts its presence among others, but is tied to its (past) roots and contains the seed of its (future) offspring. We saw in her *Mémoires* how the Revolution is depicted as the blossoming of a flower ("La Révolution sera la floraison de l'humanité comme l'amour est la floraison du cœur," 393). This reoccurring, maternal/floral imagery stands as a Michelian model for how to achieve the geographical, cultural, and temporal unity she so intensely sought. The flora's rhizomatic structure, perceived more specifically as a metaphor for a maternal bond uniting all people, demonstrates how each entity can support, and grows alongside, the others.

This reading becomes all the more plausible when we consider the dedications of each collection of Kanak stories. An initial analysis might see the first collection, dedicated "Aux Amis d'Europe," as a somewhat radical attempt to introduce the "Other" to her European compatriots, whereas the second collection, dedicated "Souvenir à ma mère," establishes a more personal, intimate tone. However, both collections address the same topic using the same genre. Both describe in detail the Kanak people, their



customs, language, and history, with the goal of making them available and accessible to the Francophone reader. Both convey the same message about understanding the Other in order to advance all of humanity toward peace and unity. It is only natural, then, to read their respective dedications as part of Michel's same vision of "progress." Bogliolo suggests that the Kanak legends depict Michel's *métissage* with the Other taking precedence over her personal relationship with friends or family. He writes, "Le lieu d'exil est devenu lieu de rencontre et pour trouver la nostalgie de la patrie marâtre, de la mère ou des amis absents il faut lire ses *Mémoires*" ("Métissage 29). I see, rather, the "lieu de rencontre" and the fusion of self/other it produces as a specifically maternal encounter, very much related to Michel's own relationship with her mother and with her imagined community.<sup>34</sup> By celebrating the maternal aspect of the encounter with the Other, Michel underscores the inherent connectedness of all peoples, who find support and strength by coming together peacefully.

The text in *Chansons* entitled "Déluge canaque: Première légende" likewise points to the power of maternal bonds and sacrifice to spawn a new civilization. Here, a mother called *Païla la brune* finds herself alone with her two sons, one barely two years old and the other a newborn, during a hurricane. She carries her children to the top of a mountain in order to rescue them from the deluge that wipes out the entire tribe. Cradling and nursing them throughout the storm, Païla dies but her sons survive and go on to relocate, marry, and ultimately father a next generation. Païla and her sons reappear throughout the *Légendes* texts, further underscoring the importance of her sacrifice to the Kanaks (or, perhaps more likely, to Michel). Indeed, Païla's sacrifice renders her legendary, ensuring that she has a place in the tribe's origin myth. The

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<sup>34</sup> In fact, we might read all of *Chants* as a love letter to her mother, thus inserting Michel into a long line of writers who embraced the epistolary genre as a means toward enacting social justice (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 4)

destruction of Païla's tribe is not unlike that which Michel foresees following the social revolution. In order for the new society to be different, it must begin with a generation that never knew the previous oppression and exploitation. In other words, it must begin with children.<sup>35</sup> As we have seen, Michel also has a long history of sacrifice for the cause of humanity, and upon her mother's death she too realized just how much Marianne sacrificed in order to continue to mother her (*Mémoires* 353). For Michel, social progress cannot only be achieved through *métissage*; it also requires sacrifice, and Païla is an excellent example. Though she perishes, she remains a part of her children and therefore of the new society. She is a part of their personal history, their community's history, and, as a legend, of the community's collective imagination.

A discussion of Michel's utopian thought would not be complete without acknowledging the important role of science in her new world. In the short opening section of *Chants*, entitled "Océan," she writes:

Ô mer ! devant toi l'esprit s'apaise, souffrir même n'est plus rien, savoir est tout.

Mais saurons-nous jamais ? La science est une torche entre les mains des éclaireurs ; à mesure qu'on la porte en avant, l'ombre se fait en arrière.

Au fond de quel gouffre aller chercher la vérité ? (93)

Evidently, the Kanak stories and legends that are the subjects of her anthology offer one "gouffre" in which to seek truth. Yet just as importantly, modern science was also a powerful catalyst for fostering human evolution. We already glimpsed Michel's admiration of science and technology in her use of botanical vaccines. For her, science

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<sup>35</sup> Both Zola and Dreyfus will take up this same question of how to foster and maintain revolutionary change in subsequent generations. Dreyfus (like Michel) chooses to lead by example; he incarnates a new way of being in society and imagines future generations following in his footsteps. The end result would be a severing of the connection to their anti-Semitic history as each generation continues to embody republican egalitarianism. Zola, on the other hand, envisions future generations carrying on the battle waged by their elders and ancestors, thus paving the way for a brighter future by severing their connection not to their past, but to their enemy compatriots (see Chapter 4 and 5).

proved to be another way of understanding the unknown, improving humanity, and therefore bettering the world.

In the legend from the same collection entitled “Comment le Takata Bohendiou fit la pluie au lieu du beau temps,” Michel is more explicit about the role science plays in furthering humanity’s progress. She begins this legend by explaining, “Le takata est médecin, magnétiseur, astrologue, et même un peu astronome” (151). The *takata*, or soothsayer, is a sort of tribal scientist, armed with advanced knowledge for his time, which he can impart to his people. This legend recounts the tale of the *takata* Bohendiou, who predicted fair weather the day of an important battle. When a tempest arrived instead, the tribe remained sheltered while the enemy, camped in the forest, was forced to flee. Bohendiou responded to his followers: “le soleil des tribus s’était levé, puisque leurs ennemis étaient détruits” (152). The soothsayer’s words are inflected with a revolutionary overtone, suggesting that social (r)evolution is as much about the actions of warriors as it is about what the sciences of the time can teach. Michel concludes this story with a reflection on whether, with the help of dream-inducing plants, the soothsayer might also divine the future of humanity. She then proposes her own vision that, though long, merits full citation because of the wealth of imagery it provides:

Qui sait si dans les songes que donne la fleur du niaouli, le pauvre Canaque ne voit pas la terre à l’époque lointaine où la science y brillera, où l’humanité sera forte et grande, là comme ailleurs.

Notre Europe aura-t-elle sombré, et un continent nouveau sera-t-il rattaché par les coraux entre les milliers d’îles et d’atolls semés dans le grand océan ?

Quels hommes monteront les navires de l’air, les navires sous-marins et les flottes munies de parachutes et d’appareils qui rendront les naufrages impossibles ?

Quelles mains, à l’aide de l’électricité, se serviront, comme on sert d’un outil qu’on emporte, de la force des cyclones, des torrents, des ondes, de l’air, du son, de toutes les répandues dans la nature ?

Qui se promènera dans les grandes plaines, maintenant incultes et pierreuses ? sur les montagnes aujourd’hui arides, et qui seront alors verdoyantes de forêts plantées dans la pierre pulvérisée, remuée profondément avec la terre végétale.

Quels hommes seront là quand la science saura purifier l'air des germes infects, quand on les détruira dans les végétaux comme dans tout animal, par la vaccine, la sève étant du sang.

Moi aussi, ô mes amis, j'aime la fleur du niaouli, moi aussi je rêve longtemps en aspirant son parfum. (153)

In her utopian dream, science has elevated humanity's power, permitting it to master and employ nature to further its own life and realize its dreams. Michel did not foresee the deleterious repercussions of such human domination of the ecology. Rather, in her utopia, science is a positive force, nurturing a healthier, stronger world. Science is credited with bringing together humanity and the environment so that they may fully complement, and nurture, the other. Man, in taming the environment, also cares for it by ridding it of deadly infestations. Meanwhile, the environment provides humankind with an abundance of tools: for harnessing power, through the use of electricity; for new explorations, like underwater travel; and for metaphysical experiences, as with the dream-inducing paperback tree. The hypothetical tone of this passage, with its multiple question marks and interrogative phrases, grants the reader the power to decide the fate of humankind and its environment. In exile Michel discovers an uncharted territory spilling over with life and opportunity. Her response is to dream of a future utopia in which people co-exist peacefully in mutually beneficial, nurturing relationships, both with each other and with the environment. As suggested earlier, she indeed abandons a strict allegiance to "France" or the "Republic," privileging the wider-reaching space of the "environment" for her utopian landscape. Her models for how to accomplish this are thus threefold: the vast, rhizomatic New Caledonian ecology, the unique bond between mother and child, and the interlocking connections between modern science and nature. But what defines utopia is the uncertainty of its realization; so Michel here relies on the next generations—that is to say, her readers—to continue to spearhead the revolutionary movement that will culminate in true peace and harmony.

In “Échappée de vue,” we see this delicate balance of nature and culture coupled with an implicit challenge to future scientists to continue the work of improvement. Michel observes silkworms and cotton-producing vines and wonders how they could be used. She notes the medicinal uses of certain plants, and other plants used for food. She suggests there may be even more uses, not yet discovered, and muses of a certain kind of cotton that “la culture le perfectionnerait encore” (105). In her thinking, utopian perfection is attained through encounters: disparate cultures coming together, and science transforming nature. At the close of this section, her eye wanders over an indigenous bird who looks “curieux comme un enfant ou comme un Canaque... C’est un indigène. Une jeunesse âpre comme la mer se dégage de tout cela ; et les bardits de l’Armorique, l’aile toute mouillée par les flots, chantent autour des menhirs volcaniques les phases de l’épopée humaine” (105). Once again, Michel emphasizes the importance of encounter and fusion: animal (bird) meets human (Kanak), who together with nature (the sea, volcanoes) and culture (chants, menhirs) form the great story of humanity, uniting past and present, Europe and the Pacific. The child is both the “primitive,” historical Kanak and the future of humankind. His youthfulness is compared to the sea’s violence, framing his “primitiveness” as revolutionary possibility, whose realization would unify distant spaces, epochs, and cultures. Michel’s vision is at once youthful and eternal, looking back to ancient time and imagining a perfect future.

The final lines of this passage resonate as a kind of warning. Leaving behind her visionary metaphor, Michel concludes with a list of humankind’s current, deleterious actions: the destruction of the New Caledonian forest, the barriers of her prison walls, the debris left over from fallen trees, and the chaos of newly unsheltered insects (106). In the distance she hears the cattle sent off to the slaughterhouse (106). Suddenly all the life and beauty of the previous pages are darkened by this harsh reality in which death,

imprisonment, and destruction seem to prevail. Michel concludes the section: “Il fait bon songer là aux choses qui nous environnent ; au takata coupant au clair de lune l’*adouèque*, le rameau sacré (qui est bien le rameau de nos pères) ; au songe du passé et au songe de l’avenir” (106). Dreaming is an antidote to downfall; it allows her to comprehend that humanity is singular, and so call on her readers to come together rather than destroy one another. By countering her previous botanical depictions of peace and harmony with a realistic doom, Michel supplements her challenge to the next generation with a warning of what is to come if they do not heed her call.

In exile, Michel does not content herself with nostalgia, dreams, and preaching. From the vantage point of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, it is easy to see how she did not completely respect the Kanak civilization, imagining them as primitive children in need of her modern education. But still she dreamed of something even greater, and embodied that vision to its fullest; she interacted with and learned from her new environment, including the Kanaks, worked to improve their quality of life and her own, and communicated her reflections to future generations. In her exilic writings, Michel dons the dual role of teacher and student, and sees in her environment sites where similar exchanges among diverse living things occasion equality and peace. Her political vision acquires a maternal quality; she accepts the Other, undergoes a personal evolution as a result of her interactions, and dedicates herself to nurturing, and being nurtured by, these novel encounters.

### *Michel’s Revolution and the End of “Nationhood”*

Compared to Napoleon and Hugo before her or Zola and Dreyfus after, Michel was less interested in the French Revolution’s slogan of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*, because she was less interested in the French particularity behind its message. Though

she too embodied these republican principles, she chose not to look back nostalgically to France's Revolutionary past as a foundational event, but rather to consider it one cycle on a continuum of revolutions, each advancing humanity toward an era of global peace. Eric Hobsbawm has argued that the revolutionaries of the Commune were replicating the pattern established by the Revolution of 1789, suggesting that the Communards were still steeped in the structure and mentality of the "Great Revolution" (Hobsbawm 46-7). Indeed, Michel's understanding of multiple revolutions would support this view. But, if her work during the Commune did follow from an understanding of 1789 as the original revolution, in exile her experience with the indigenous Kanaks led her to further theorize the evolution of humanity beyond the French Revolution's specificity. Refusing to uphold the Revolution as a key foundational event in the history of the French nation, Michel chose rather to honor such "primitive" civilizations as the Kanaks with laying the groundwork for human progress. To return to Renan's definition of the nation, we might say that Michel envisioned the "house" of humanity to be built on the combined efforts of civilizations, which together form human collective memory. These civilizations were spread around the globe, and their encounters with one another, along with their scientific and technological discoveries, would propel them into a new age of collective enlightenment. While the Kanaks were "children" compared to their Western counterparts, for her, France's contemporary government was equally barbaric compared to her ideal imagined community, where no government at all would be necessary to ensure common peace. While Napoleon appropriated the Revolution's teachings to demonstrate his nationalism, and Hugo imagined an international community founded on the Revolution's universalist values, Michel thus considered humanity's future to hinge on the coming together of diverse peoples in a collective,

global revolt against barbarism (read government, tyranny, capitalism, etc.), thereby eradicating national boundaries entirely.

The clearest depiction of her utopian vision is in *L'Ère Nouvelle, Pensée Dernière, souvenirs de Calédonie* (1887). Here she imagines a Marxism-inspired, capital-free society where all people enjoy equal access to art, science, study, and rest. This text concludes with two short reflections: “Pensée Dernière” and a poem, “Souvenirs de Calédonie (Chant des Captifs).” The final poem adds substantially little to the political theory of the preceding texts, but by including a reference to her exile in New Caledonia Michel gestures to its role in the development of her theory. In “Pensée Dernière,” Michel deploys the image of the spiral (represented by “waves”) to describe both the circularity and the open-endedness of time, science, and civilizations. We might consider this in relation to Barthes’s notion of the spiral which, interestingly, he calls “un cercle déporté à l’infini,” (“Réquichot,” *La Spirale*), recalling yet again the significance of the exilic condition—that is, being thrust out of one’s own time and space—in fostering alternative conceptions of time and history.<sup>36</sup> For Barthes, the spiral is recurrence and difference: “les choses reviennent, mais à un autre nouveau: il y a retour dans la différence, non ressassement dans l’identité” (ibid). For Michel, we have seen, the past is inscribed on an ever changing, evolving present/future, thanks in large part to the

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<sup>36</sup> We can also compare Michel’s spiral to Lévi-Strauss’ description of the “instant” that arises when the spiral forms of two ammonites come together and create the “miracle” of diverse life, contracting time and space. Himself an exile during World War II, Lévi-Strauss subsequently theorized the role of the ethnographer in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), where he wrote: “Que le miracle se produise, comme il arrive parfois; que, de part et d’autre de la secrète fêlure, surgissent côte à côte deux vertes plantes d’espèces différentes, dont chacune a choisi le sol le plus propice; et qu’au même moment se devinent dans la roche deux ammonites aux involutions inégalement compliquées, attestant à leur manière un écart de quelques dizaines de millénaires : soudain l’espace et le temps se confondent ; la diversité vivante de l’instant juxtapose et perpétue les âges” (59). For Lévi-Strauss, this synthesis of time and space, evolution and involution, ultimately allows for transcendence of commonly-held antinomies like self/other, subject/object, or primitive/modern. We can see how this relates to Michel’s rhizomatic and maternal imagery in New Caledonia which, interestingly, was also inspired by the flora and fauna she encountered there.



*métissage* of disparate things coalescing into new identities. Much like the spiral, which can contract time and space, Michel's understanding of temporality and revolution embraces distant cultures and epochs in one movement of History.<sup>37</sup> For her, the triumvirate of time, science, and civilization defines the state of humanity throughout the globe: civilizations lacking scientific advancements represent past ages, while those on the cusp of technological innovation herald the coming a future age when, she imagines, mechanical "work" would improve human lives.<sup>38</sup> As we saw, her exilic experience in the South Pacific informed this understanding of humanity's timeline. The means by which the "wave" of time would gain the momentum to usher in a new wave was through revolution. For this reason she engaged in a constant struggle to realize this future, and her struggle for freedom included New Caledonia and the Kanaks. Just as she experienced the Kanak transition from "stone age" reasoning to enlightened positivism with the arrival of the Europeans, she imagined a similar transition taking place in Europe, from capitalism to anarchy. She supported any and all rebellion against unjust authority, including the Kanak rebellion of 1878 led by Ataï, even though most deportees sided with France. For Michel, freedom was a human right, not bound by nationhood or political doctrine. The albeit Western-conceived social revolution was the key to progress, but progress was necessarily global, occurring around the world like ocean tides washing up on one shore only to scatter to another one, advancing all of humanity with each revolutionary effort.

Michel's analysis of the Kanak people certainly reflects the thinking of her time, when the *mission civilisatrice* was a common practice aimed at "civilizing" an otherwise primitive culture, but clearly with important differences. For her, the French were

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<sup>37</sup> For more on spirals and time, space, and geopolitics, see Israel *Spiral*, esp. ch. 5.

<sup>38</sup> In her optimism, Michel did not predict that as machines replaced workers many would actually suffer from the loss of employment rather than enjoy leisure time.

equally in need of a “civilization” process. This remained her focus after her return to Europe. In her post-exilic novels *La Misère* (1882) and *Les Microbes humains* (1886), for example, Michel depicted even more dramatically than Hugo or Sue the Parisians of the *bas-fonds* as mere victims of an unjust society. As in “Lueurs dans l’ombre,” Michel here sought to better understand criminals and the poor in an attempt to improve society’s lot. She believed that people were naturally good, and that society was responsible for the destitution that drove them to commit bad acts. For Michel, violent (or “evil,” to refer to Hugo’s thinking on the subject), revolution thus served as the catalyst for positive change because it brought disparate people together. It is at the moment of such an encounter—the past meeting its future at the moment the revolution, or wave, reaches its threshold—that we glimpse her innovations in nationhood. At these times she left behind allegiance to any political doctrine, leader, or nation and posited a fusion of self and other that would engender a whole new future. Michel’s attempt at *métissage* with the Kanak people was thus a step toward enacting the revolution. In this way Michel’s revolutionary values differ from common treatments of the Revolution, including Napoleon’s and Hugo’s, which consider a certain sacrifice of life necessary to upholding France’s most important values. For Michel, the only life one could legitimately sacrifice was one’s own. Her concern for the Other characterized her life and legacy, and offers an alternative understanding of what it means to be a “revolutionary” in France.

By bringing cultures together without valorizing one over the other but rather positing their fusion, Michel provides a model for realizing a global community founded on the universal principles of liberty, fraternity, and equality. Yet for her, these values, though propagated by the French Revolution, were not solely or even originally French. Rather, they were human values, emerging from compassionate human interactions

inspired by a sense of the maternal. She demonstrates where and how the French failed to uphold these “universal” values, implicitly pleading a case for the French to surrender their authority on universality. In her texts, true universality will only be born of the encounter among diverse viewpoints whose common aim is the happiness of all. This consideration that the pursuit of happiness is a human (rather than national) right marks a turning point in the theorization of nationhood, and will be a more focused subject of the two chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER 4

Dreyfus on Devil's Island: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* and *Laïcité*

Enfin, qu'est-ce que je demande nuit et jour? Justice, justice!  
Sommes-nous au XIXème siècle ou faut-il retourner de quelques  
siècles en arrière? Est-il possible que l'innocence soit méconnue  
dans un siècle de lumière et de vérité? Qu'on cherche; je ne  
demande aucune grâce, mais je demande la justice qu'on doit à  
tout être humain.

--Alfred Dreyfus, *Cinq Années de ma vie* (pub. 1901)

On ne reconnaîtrait plus bientôt la patrie française si, au lieu  
d'être des citoyens égaux devant ses lois, nous redevenions, en  
remontant à plus d'un siècle en arrière, un peuple voué aux  
préjugés de races, aux haines religieuses et à l'intolérance sectaire.  
Le condamné de 1894 n'est pas plus juif à nos yeux que tout autre,  
à sa place, ne serait catholique, protestant ou philosophe. Nous ne  
voyons en lui qu'un citoyen dont les droits sont les nôtres et nous  
repoussons, comme un recul inattendu des idées de liberté, les  
distinctions de sectes qu'on prétendrait établir en sa personne.

--*First Manifesto of the Ligue des droits de l'homme* (1898)

*The Dreyfus Affair*

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Dreyfus Affair launched the nation once again into crisis. Amidst appeals for justice and freedom, cries of "Death to the Jews!" also pierced the air as French men and women reconsidered what they wanted their nation to stand for. The role of religion in a society raging with anti-Semitism became a priority occupation. On one side, a nascent conservative nationalism gained currency through the efforts of a growing Catholic Right, whose views were best perceived in the Assumptionist newspaper *La Croix* as well as in Edouard Drumont's anti-Semitic press *La Libre Parole*. Equally anti-Dreyfusard but otherwise diverging political views came from influential figures like Paul Déroulède, Maurice Barrès, and Charles Maurras. Déroulède's *Ligue des Patriotes* unquestionably supported the French military in the spirit of *revanche* against Germany, and thus turned its back on Dreyfus. Barrès and Maurras likewise supported *revanche*, but their patriotism was founded on an ethnic definition of France that necessarily excluded the Jews. For Barrès, one could

only belong to “France” if one had geographical, cultural, and historical roots on French soil, and Maurras preached authoritarian government that likewise excluded “foreigners”—including, for him, Jews, freemasons, and Protestants. Though these thinkers diverged on many political issues, they shared a common belief that Jews did not, and could not, belong in France. On the other side, particularly well-known Dreyfusards like Georges Clemenceau, Bernard Lazare, and Joseph Reinach saw in Dreyfus’s case an opportunity to usher in, once and for all, the era of egalitarian republicanism. Although Dreyfusards also held clashing political opinions, they rallied together in a defense of freedom and equality, represented by the formation of the *Ligue des droits de l’homme* in 1898 to support Dreyfus and French universalism and create opposition to Déroulède’s nationalist organization.

In this respect defending Dreyfus became synonymous with championing human rights more globally and standing up against any force or institution that sought to limit popular freedoms. In France on the cusp of the twentieth century, one of the most powerful of these institutions was the Church. In accordance with their beliefs in republicanism and popular sovereignty, the Dreyfusards thus came to staunchly advocate for a legal separation between church and state. As a result of the Affair and their efforts, the law of Separation of Church and State was eventually enacted in 1905, and a century after the initial Revolution a fourth quintessentially “French” value was added to the national motto: *laïcité*. As is well known, the impact of French *laïcité* on the national community has only become more complex with world wars, immigration, and terrorism altering the demographic landscape of twentieth- and twenty-first-century France. Yet, a revision of its fundamental principles in France is highly unlikely, if not downright impossible. For, to question the value of *laïcité* would be paramount to revisiting the importance of *liberté*, *égalité*, or *fraternité*—so-called “universal” values

that are considered the natural rights of all peoples across the globe according to the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. French *laïcité*, more readily accepted as a national, rather than universal, mandate, seems to be all the more anchored in French culture. While its history predates the Dreyfus Affair, there is little debate that the Affair paved the way for the passage of the law of Separation of 1905, which officially put an end to Napoleon's Concordat of 1801.<sup>39</sup> Dreyfusards and Dreyfusistes were responsible for the evolving public opinion on the role of religion in society, and it is my contention that this group was not confined to only the best known of the Dreyfusard actors.

On the contrary, in this chapter I argue that Alfred Dreyfus himself played a significant role in influencing French identity by intentionally embodying *laïque* values—that is, by becoming a corporeal symbol of the French notion of *laïcité*. Like Napoleon Bonaparte at the century's start, Dreyfus represented what it meant to be French on the threshold of a new century, and, again like the Emperor, helped to author his own legacy. As such, he became a political actor before and during the Affair, and his experiences provide an example of how to implement *laïque* values in France, even today. As a result of his exile, Dreyfus came to be a symbol of a lasting idea of “Frenchness,” and the way he portrayed this symbolism in his writings shaped the way he would be remembered. Like the other exiles treated in this dissertation, Dreyfus is depicted as a martyr to the French nation; unlike the others, however, he emerges as a secular martyr, thereby offering a new vision of French nationhood based on the value of *laïcité*. Often considered a passive player in his own affair, Dreyfus emerges in my analysis rather as a strong political actor, in the sense put forth by Hannah Arendt and much to the contrary

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<sup>39</sup> For a history of *laïcité*, see Capéran *Histoire* and Bruley. One notable exception to the Separation law exists in the region of Alsace-Moselle, where Napoleon's Concordat remains in effect to this day.

of her own assessment of Dreyfus's role. Even more, Dreyfus's intentional embodiment of French *laïcité* mirrors Napoleon Bonaparte's embodiment of the revolutionary ideals of 1789 in the *Mémorial*, and I will suggest that it is as a result of this intercultural and diachronic dialogue between exiles that a new conception of French identity emerges from Dreyfus's writings. Dreyfus evokes the history of exile in the nineteenth century, and in so doing offers a paradigm for how French identity was, and can continue to be, defined and refined according to the needs of an increasingly multicultural society.

### *Alfred Dreyfus Before the "Affair"*

While a veritable "Himalaya of texts," to borrow Michael Burns's phrasing, is devoted to scholarship on the Dreyfus Affair, comparatively few studies focus on who Alfred Dreyfus was before, during, and after his arrest.<sup>40</sup> Hannah Arendt famously labeled Dreyfus a "parvenu" (*Origins* 91)—that is a rich, assimilated Jew with little to no interest in the political implications of his situation. For the most part, this characterization has remained unchallenged. Yet, Dreyfus's extensive writings throughout the Affair reveal not a passive victim of a judicial error, but rather an involved political actor framing his experiences in order to both exonerate his name and restore honor to his country. Ironically, it is in the Arendtian sense of the word that I understand "political actor," for Dreyfus's life exemplifies that of Arendt's "conscious pariah," that is one who resists, critiques, and ultimately transforms the pervading national ethos as a result of his experiences on the margins of society.<sup>41</sup> A brief look at the situation of French Jews in the nineteenth century will provide the background to understanding Dreyfus's political actions.

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<sup>40</sup> Two notable exceptions to this are Burns *FA* and Duclert.

<sup>41</sup> See Arendt "Jew."

Although Jews had officially been emancipated following the 1789 Revolution, throughout the nineteenth century they faced the potential and actual repeal of their rights. Anti-Semitism was rampant in schools and courtrooms, attacks on Jewish properties were frequent, and many faced forced exile from their homes. In Alsace, where the majority of the French Jews lived at the time of Dreyfus's birth in 1859, Jewish culture continued to set the community apart, as Jews spoke a different language, were largely merchants and peddlers, and observed the rituals associated with a Jewish calendar (Hyman 11-12). While local Alsatian authorities cast the Jews out, the central French state regularly intervened to defend their rights, so that Jews came to identify the state as the guarantor of human rights and equality, values they associated with the Revolution (ibid 20). Meanwhile, the Jewish consistories promoted social assimilation, a process they termed "regeneration," by encouraging Jews to become French-educated, practice religious reform, and enter agricultural professions (Albert 124-143). Jews thus learned to view the state as their ally and their own culture as backward. Becoming "French" was the surest route to full citizenship and all its promises of equality, justice, and freedom. This was still the case in the 1880s and 1890s, as Michael R. Marrus puts forth in *The Politics of Assimilation* (1971):

Citizenship was the sign of emancipation, the guarantee that the Jew was free. Citizenship meant that the Jews no longer formed a rigidly separated group in society and that they were as entitled as anyone to refer to their national culture as their own. Emancipation was thus from the start linked with assimilation; the Jews were freed and, as a part of their freedom, were in some sense obliged to become French. Jewishness might be preserved, but only in a sphere which did not affect the Jew's relationship with the nation. The matter went further than the mere assumption of French culture (acculturation), or even extensive social interaction with other Frenchmen; it affected the character of a man's being. (87)

According to Marrus, being politically "French" and socially "Jewish" were not mutually compatible at this point in history; more than simply confining religion to the private



sphere, religion had to be ousted from the Jew's ontological experience if he wished to belong to the nation as a free and upstanding citizen.

More recently, scholars have painted an increasingly nuanced picture of the transformations of French Jews' religious identity in the nineteenth century. In *Inventing the Israelite* (2010), Maurice Samuels unearths an overlooked corpus of specifically French-Jewish fiction from 1830-1870, arguing that French Jews indeed asserted their particularity in a variety of ways even as they accepted, even lauded, French universalism. Meanwhile, Jay K. Berkovitz (2006) has shown how social transformations associated with modernity (such as urbanization, greater access to luxury commodities, and population growth) began undermining traditional French-Jewish communities well before the Revolution, suggesting that changes in French Jewry's collective religious identity were part of a larger trend affecting much of Western European society ("Ritual"). Taken together, these scholars' works create a narrative in which French Jews, rather than blindly assimilating to the national ethos, consciously negotiated a hybrid identity throughout the centuries preceding and following 1789. Berkovitz in particular highlights an important aspect of how French Jews managed such a complicated negotiation of identity in post-revolutionary France; his work on Jewish *régénération* shows how French Jews interpreted French universalism through the lens of Jewish liturgy.<sup>42</sup> According to him, the Jewish belief in the Messiah and deliverance from oppression was applied to the actual experience of Emancipation brought about by the Revolution (ibid 33). The Jews learned to regard the Revolution as infused with the distinctly Jewish value of justice (ibid 37). Interpreted thus, it became a Jewish duty to serve the state in order to continue to work toward global emancipation of the Jews; in

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<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, in a previous article Berkovitz also shows how the Revolutionary use of this term was similarly inflected with Christian discourse: the "regeneration" of the French nation during the Revolution was paramount to its "re-birth" and "salvation" by its republican founders, heralding "a new faith in the future of humankind, led by the French Revolution" ("Revolution" 46-47).

the second half of the century, *régénération* denoted the practice of spreading such French (or, for them, French-Jewish) values abroad (ibid). In this respect French Jews effectively married their religious belief with the national values and, as Berkovitz demonstrates, they practiced public rituals to demonstrate their simultaneous allegiance to France and Judaism.

It is in this light that we may best understand Dreyfus's experience as a late nineteenth-century Alsatian Jew seeking to embody French national values. For, as the revolutionary discourse of *régénération* suggests, "regeneration" also implied the becoming of a new person—a republican citizen.<sup>43</sup> The "homme nouveau" or "homme régénéré" was at the center of the revolutionary movement to "régénérer l'État"—that is, to construct a new, modern, democratic France (opposed to the *ancien régime*) during the revolutionary period (Birnbaum 65-66). Dreyfus was indeed an assimilated French Jew in the sense put forth by Marrus, in that his overt character was built upon his French, not Jewish, identity. Yet, he devoted his life to re-defining what being "French" would mean in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, I argue, he did so inclusively of both French republicanism and Judaism. While he benefited from a public education and an increasingly integrated lifestyle, he was only the second in his family to grow up speaking French and enjoying such access to the larger national community. At home, his family recounted stories of the ravenous anti-Semitism that plagued their region until the 1860s, and he celebrated his older siblings' decision to marry Jews and carry on the family business (see Burns, *FA* 41-59 and "DF"). He experienced first-hand anti-Semitic acts as a young officer in the army, and of course again as the victim of the Affair. Dreyfus remained aware throughout his life of religious persecution, and continued to identify with the Jewish community. He would go on to be married by Grand Rabbi

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<sup>43</sup> This discourse is examined more fully in the Conclusion.

Zadoc Kahn and raise his children in the Jewish tradition. Today, the inscription on his tombstone in Paris is etched in both French and Hebrew. Berkovitz warns of Parisian Jews, “the acculturation of Parisian Jews must not be confused with assimilation” (*Shaping* 113), and the same observation applies to Dreyfus. For, despite overall enfranchisement, the Jews faced a repeated loss of rights, social anti-Semitism, and an overall pariah status throughout the nineteenth century, and Dreyfus was no exception.

And yet, the pariahdom Dreyfus experienced as a Jew was no less influential than that which he felt as a French child in Alsace. When he witnessed the Prussian invasion of Mulhouse in 1870 from his balcony window, Dreyfus became, like Arendt half a century later, a refugee in his own home. This moment prompted Dreyfus, in his words, to “me jur[er] de consacrer toutes mes forces, toute mon intelligence à servir mon pays” (*Écris* 72). As a Jew in Germany, Dreyfus would not have had the same opportunities for advancement as in France. At thirteen Alfred therefore left his mother to secure French citizenship and avoid the German draft; one year later he was again separated from his father and siblings to attend school in Paris with his brother Mathieu as his only companion. Despite these early experiences of outsiderdom, Dreyfus decided to join the army corps rather than return to the family textile business. He sought a higher goal than individual happiness—he aspired to restore France’s honor. He writes in his *Souvenirs*:

Les souvenirs de la guerre de 1870 étaient restés si vifs dans mon esprit que je me décidai à embrasser la carrière militaire, malgré la situation avantageuse que j’aurais pu avoir dans l’industrie familiale. Je pensai à l’Alsace frémissante sous le joug de l’étranger, à ceux dont le cœur était resté français et qui souffraient tant de l’oppression. (qtd. in Duclert 43)

For Dreyfus, defending an egalitarian and republican France was more important than pursuing purely personal interests, and, as Berkovitz’s analysis of the French-Jewish community suggests, this attitude also reflects an understanding of Jewish values common during Dreyfus’s time (“Ritual” 33). In joining the army, Dreyfus sought not to

eradicate religion from his life, but rather to protect his compatriots from oppression, including religious oppression. We may conclude that the feeling of pariahdom that marked his childhood was experienced at two levels: socially as a Jew in France, and politically as a Frenchman in German-occupied Alsace. The army promised Dreyfus the opportunity to rectify both of these defining experiences; as a leader in the army he could both belong to the community from which he felt ostracized (France) and defend all its citizens—including his coreligionists—from further oppression. Henceforth he would not only absorb the values of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*, he would work to improve them for Jews and Gentiles alike. In this way Dreyfus carries on a tradition stretching back to Aristotle in which man is thought to acquire his full potential only when a part of a greater social community. The individual is not lost in the process of social immersion; he is realized.

Dreyfus's choice to enter the *École Polytechnique* was therefore not made despite his Jewish upbringing, but rather because of it. This elite school, and the artillery division in particular, embodied the republican teachings of egalitarianism and intellectualism, making it the ideal place for a smart, motivated Jewish officer to advance in the spirit of restoring France's republican values (Duclert 44-45). Yet, in the army as elsewhere, Dreyfus continued to suffer from alienation and flagrant anti-Semitism, and his response was always to act honorably according to a republican doctrine—again, not to recoil from his Jewish identity but to permit it to thrive concomitantly with his French patriotism. For example, when he learned in 1892 that his candidacy for the prestigious Army General Staff was jeopardized due to an anti-Semitic general on the examination jury, he protested to the director of the school and succeeded in reinstating his rightful rank (Reinach 1: 69). He explains that his Jewish friend, also a victim of falsified grades, wished to complain to other “friends,” but that he decided a formal complaint to their

supervisor was the only correct way of moving forward (Duclert 105-06). And yet, Dreyfus did not hesitate to neglect orders when he deemed them inappropriate, as when he chose to visit his family in Alsace despite his official requests being refused (Burns *FA* 90). Dreyfus in some ways lived by his own rules, and these were always informed by those Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality. So, when the army acted in opposition to republican democracy, Dreyfus refused assimilation, choosing rather to challenge those practices that he considered to be definitively unpatriotic. This practice would continue even when Dreyfus was accused of the most horrific crime he could fathom: treason.

*The Affair Explodes, Dreyfus Writes*

With his arrest and the explosion of the Dreyfus Affair, the Captain's commitment to French republican values only intensified, as his copious writings make evident. Immediately following his arrest in December 1894, Dreyfus began composing letters to his wife Lucie from the prison du Cherche-Midi in Paris. Many of his letters were published in *Le Siècle* in 1898 (and, that same year, compiled and published by Pierre-Victor Stock under the title *Lettres d'un Innocent*) in order to revive public interest and provoke public outrage. In addition to the hundreds of letters he wrote from prison and exile, Dreyfus also maintained a daily journal in which he reflected on his situation, made drawings to occupy his mind, and carefully copied quotations, equations, and lessons from books he was sent while in exile. These *carnets* reveal an intellectual dedicated to keeping his mind alive and busy during a period of intense mental, emotional, and physical deprivation. Even more, Dreyfus chose to publish many of these writings upon his return to France. In 1901, when he had accepted amnesty despite being once again found guilty of treason at the Rennes trial in 1899, Dreyfus published *Cinq*

*Années de Ma Vie* with Fasquelle. He spent the next eight years (1899-1907) continuing to try to prove his innocence, and throughout this time kept detailed notes on the Affair and its aftermath—today published under the title *Carnets*. In these pages he discusses all aspects of the Affair, politics, and society starting with his second condemnation in 1899, to his exoneration in 1906, and concluding with his request for retirement in 1907 after the verdict that found him innocent failed to reinstate his rightful rank in the army. He expresses his personal opinions, relays his experiences, and dutifully copies official letters and decrees pertaining to his case. With his son Pierre, Dreyfus prepared much of this text for publication, which Pierre published in 1936, one year after his father's death. The 1936 text omits the more delicate passages that may have revived those tensions still simmering, although these too were intended for eventual publication, as Dreyfus's letters to Joseph Reinach indicate (*Carnets* 19-20). The integral text, annotated by Philippe Oriol, was finally published as *Carnets* in 1998.

All of these compositions reveal that, throughout the Affair, Dreyfus refused to remain on the sidelines while others fought his battles for him. His endless proclamations of innocence began at his degradation ceremony when he shouted to the crowd, "Je suis innocent!" and persisted throughout his letters and journals, ultimately constituting a public act of political resistance. In exile, he worked tirelessly to prove his innocence through the only method available to him—writing. We see this most clearly in *Cinq Années de ma Vie*, in which Dreyfus traces the Affair from his arrest to pardon (1894-1899). Here he includes letters he wrote to his wife, her responses, letters he wrote to administrative officials including the President of the Republic, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Minister of War pleading his case, and responses he received. He inserts drawings of the two cells he inhabited on Devil's Island, complete with labels of where each guard sat and where the sparse pieces of furniture were located. He even

inserts a graph in which he recorded the extremely hot temperatures of his cell over the course of a day. At the close of these memoirs he attaches an appendix of letters, the first to Charles Dupuy, Minister of the Interior, written while he was imprisoned on the Ile-de-Ré in January 1895, followed by twelve letters he sent to the President, Félix Faure, from Devil's Island between 1897-1898, and finally two letters composed for General de Boisdeffre, Chief of the General Staff, later in 1898. Dreyfus's decision to document every moment of his experience was part of his battle to restore his voice, his dignity, and his nation's reputation.

Before looking more specifically at the language in Dreyfus's letters, a word about the use of the epistolary genre is in order. As discussed in Chapter 1 on Napoleon, authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often employed the epistolary form to connect with readers' sentimentality and thereupon spur democratic reflection. Dreyfus's use of this form corresponds to his beliefs in the Enlightenment's political teachings, ideals he incessantly extols in his writings. Like his exilic predecessor on Saint Helena, Dreyfus documents facts, reflections, and emotions in order to prove his innocence and compose his own narrative of the case, while the epistolarity of his texts communicate his personal thoughts and experiences in order to incite readers to take political action. Joseph Reinach in particular saw the potential of Dreyfus's letters to rouse public concern when he asked Lucie Dreyfus to make them available for publication in 1898, eventually compiled as *Lettres d'un Innocent* (1898).

In this collection, we discern the importance of Lucie, Dreyfus's most common *destinataire*, and react emotionally to his experience of victimhood, as though we, too, were his loved one. In one example, Dreyfus writes to Lucie on October 20, 1896 from Devil's Island:

Ce que je ne puis assez te dire, ma bonne chérie, c'est tout ce que je souffre pour toi, pour nos chers enfants, pour nous tous. Je ne croyais pas qu'on pût vivre avec

de telles douleurs; enfin, je ne veux pas insister là-dessus, je ne puis, comme je te le disais, que souhaiter avec toi que, par la découverte de la vérité, nous retrouvions enfin cette atmosphère de bonheur dont nous jouissions tant, l'oublie dans notre affection mutuelle et dans celle de nos enfants. (*Lettres* 202)

We experience his suffering, confusion, and tenacity in reading this first-person narrative. We also feel the importance of his wife's presence to sustaining his morale, and we are aware that this presence is, sadly, also absence, as it necessarily is in a letter. These were love letters, and the devotion between husband and wife has not been lost on any reader or critic. Vincent Duclert entitled his critical edition of the couple's correspondence *Écris-moi souvent, écris-moi longuement* (2005), a refrain pulled from their letters that nicely captures the emotional and amorous resonances of their writings. Yet, the letter remains political even as it appeals to readers sentimentally. In her preface to Duclert's edition, Michelle Perrot notes, "Lucie et Alfred incarnent assez bien le couple républicain, dans son profil et son mode de vie" (9). Indeed, in the above-quoted passage, Dreyfus expresses love and devotion for his family while simultaneously, in the same sentence, reiterating his desire for the truth. He gives the impression that truth and justice are inextricably linked to personal happiness and the security found in untroubled family life. One engenders the other, and Dreyfus does not allow his readers to forget that. In tapping in to our—and his—emotions, Dreyfus introduces a political vision based on the combined values of truth, justice, and happiness. As during the eighteenth century, love letters once again became an effective medium for fusing the political with the sentimental to encourage public reflection and republican progress.

Further evidence for this is found in Dreyfus's official letters. Apart from the moments he expresses his love and devotion to Lucie and the children, Dreyfus's overall tone, word choice, and message interestingly do not change with his addressee. While he certainly knew his guards would read his letters, there is neither a sense of masking nor exaggerating his pleas. Whether writing to the President of the Republic or to his wife,



the same depiction of an ideal France emerges: France is the land of the Enlightenment ideals of truth and justice, and Dreyfus expresses immeasurable hope that these will prevail. In his view, their triumph will produce a twofold effect: one, exonerate his name and that of his children, and two, restore honor to his country. Dreyfus's espousal of republicanism conflates his personal fate with that of the nation, so that Dreyfus's embodiment of these national values becomes complete. Two more excerpts, one from a personal letter and one from an administrative letter, will further demonstrate this point. Dreyfus writes to his wife on January 21, 1895, while awaiting his departure overseas from the Île de Ré:

Enfin, qu'est-ce que je demande nuit et jour? Justice, justice! Sommes-nous au XIXème siècle ou faut-il retourner de quelques siècles en arrière? Est-il possible que l'innocence soit méconnue dans un siècle de lumière et de vérité? Qu'on cherche; je ne demande aucune grâce, mais je demande la justice qu'on doit à tout être humain. (*Cinq* 94)

Once again Dreyfus is completely self-effacing in the interest of the national legacy. He does not speak out on behalf of his individual innocence or trial, but rather on behalf of the ideal of justice, of the idea of innocence *tout court*, confident that if these prevail, he will be freed as a matter of course. His message implies that by fighting for Dreyfus one fights for truth and justice, and by exonerating him one fulfills the promises of the Enlightenment for the entire country. In this way Dreyfus criticizes the nation's present course at the same time as he extols its past values. He acts in defense of a certain vision of France (based on the values of '89) by embodying those very ideals he seeks to propagate. Likewise, in his formal letters, he refused to follow the contemporary rules of the penal administrative hierarchy; rather, he boldly wrote directly to the President simply because, in the democratic Republic the French had envisioned in 1789, he could (Duclert 495). To the President he again equates his future with that of his country:

Je n'ai jamais oublié, je n'oublierai pas jusqu'à mon dernier souffle que, dans cette horrible affaire, s'agit un double intérêt: celui de la Patrie, le mien et celui de mes enfants; l'un est aussi sacré que l'autre. (*Cinq* 342)

Restoring honor to his name was synonymous with restoring honor to a divided, wounded nation—a goal Dreyfus had aspired to fulfill since his childhood. Here, Dreyfus appears abundantly aware of how fusing the personal with the political might influence opinion and ultimately produce a revision of his case. And yet, given the similarities in message between his personal and official letters, we cannot presume that this was simply rhetoric; Dreyfus believed in this idea as one might believe in God—for him, the homeland and what it stood for were just as sacred.

Whether communicating the sentimental or the political, Dreyfus's letters above all expose his innocence, as the title of the first published collection iterates. Early on from the Prison de la Santé, he writes to Lucie:

Je te raconterai plus tard, quand nous serons de nouveau heureux, ce que j'ai souffert aujourd'hui, combien de fois, au milieu de ces nombreuses pérégrinations parmi de vrais coupables, mon cœur a saigné. Je me demandais ce que je faisais là, pourquoi j'étais là... il me semblait que j'étais le jouet d'une hallucination ; mais, hélas, mes vêtements déchirés, souillés, me rappelaient brutalement à la vérité, des regards de mépris qu'on me jetait me disaient trop clairement pourquoi j'étais là. (*Lettres* 54)

Far from depicting a manipulative traitor, Dreyfus's words evoke sympathy for a victim and skepticism regarding his accusers. His descriptive language astutely relays how he felt, what he saw, and what he was thinking throughout his time in prison. We imagine his tattered clothes and the cruel glances of his guards, and we feel his bleeding heart and utter incomprehension of what was happening to him. Indeed, he describes himself as a pawn in a great conspiracy—the object, not agent, of the entire Affair—and this completely devoid of any hatred or resentment, without assigning blame. Dreyfus's method for demonstrating his innocence did not include attacking the army or government, or even the individuals most obviously responsible for his arrest (for

instance, Major Du Paty de Clam, who arrested him, General Boisdeffre, Chief of the General Staff at the time of the arrest, or General Mercier, Minister of War, who orchestrated the arrest). Rather, Dreyfus sought to be the most honorable, transparent, and upright citizen he could be—that is, he fought against his oppressors by embodying their political and ethical opposite. Dreyfus simply wanted to be the best man possible. This could not entail kowtowing to his superiors when they were clearly in the wrong, but consisted rather of writing and documenting every aspect of the injustice propagated on him. By publishing this epistolary narrative, Lucie turned her husband's absence into presence, and this crucial perspective from the abyss of exile exposed the atrocity of the real crime, that of toying with an innocent man's life out of intolerance, hatred, and malevolence.

The introduction of Dreyfus's very real and personal voice into the Affair was understandably crucial to stirring public opinion both for its political stance and for its emotional resonances. Dreyfus too understood the potential publicity of each word he put on paper and what his writings might have meant for the Republic in crisis. Exile thus paradoxically presented Dreyfus with an opportunity to fulfill the mission of his youth: to become a part of the greater French community and, as such, to work toward the collective actualization of a more perfect society. By writing, he chose to turn his deplorable situation into an occasion for precipitating more widespread change. While Dreyfus may have always been eager to be an influential part of the whole that was France, as a generally private, quiet individual he likely would not have welcomed the opportunity to be its leader. It is thus all the more astonishing that, through writing, he spoke out against his oppressors as he did, and incessantly fought from exile to protect, honor, indeed save, the republican France he resolutely believed in. The act of writing became a political statement, and Dreyfus an instrument of political change. Put

differently, by representing the ideas of the Revolution, Dreyfus sought to shape the national heritage, effectively becoming not only a part of the whole, but the whole itself. In this way the figure of Dreyfus embodies what Kantorowicz has called a “man-centered concept of kingship,” in which Man (read Humanity) replaces King as sovereign. Pointing to how Dante in particular theorizes this transformation, and quoting in part from a Renaissance treatise, Kantorowicz writes, “Indeed, ‘Man’ appeared as a sovereign Dignity and a universal Office whose holder was probably that ‘best man, who is the standard of all others and, so to say, their Idea, whosoever he may be’” (493). In his missives, Dreyfus not only embodies this “Idea” of republican France, but also challenges the authorities to likewise embrace the *Dignitas* of the French nation—its promises of truth and justice that had made his very life—complete with fortune, career, and family—possible. Writing therefore transformed potentiality into actuality: as a mortal victim deported to Devil’s Island, Dreyfus understood his potential to shape French nationhood; but as a writer creating a narrative fusing self with polity, part with whole, Dreyfus actualized that which he believed to be most honorable about the French nation. Stranded on his exilic island in the Caribbean, Dreyfus became a sovereign man, at once mortal body, body politic, and humanity.

#### *A National Symbol of Laïcité*

Dreyfus’s supporters likewise considered the man a symbol of the republican nation. Back home, the Dreyfusards’ fight for justice also implored the nation to exonerate Dreyfus in order to exonerate itself. Zola’s “J’Accuse” (13 January 1898) calls the Affair a stain on the nation. Meanwhile, in a previous letter addressed to “la France” (6 January 1898) the father of Naturalism accuses France of being guilty for neglecting to uphold its values (*Vérité* 113, 102). Another journalist at *Le Combat* exposed the

injustices perpetrated on Devil's Island by apostrophizing "La France," suggesting throughout that it is in the nation's interest to right the wrongs heretofore committed (23 November 1897). In one final example, at the October 1898 hearing Dreyfus' attorney called for justice in order to restore France's reputation as a nation devoted to truth and enlightenment (Duclert 551). This emphasis on the importance of restoring the nation's reputation eclipsed any interest in the Affair's victim, Alfred Dreyfus. As Dreyfus's fate became blurred with that of France, the stakes of the Affair grew: saving Dreyfus was paramount to ensuring the survival of the Republic.

So, when Dreyfus accepted amnesty without clearing his name, it caused the Dreyfusard camp to irrevocably split; while some, like Joseph Reinach and Mathieu Dreyfus, understood that Alfred was too weak physically and destroyed emotionally to turn down the option to freely rejoin his family, others, particularly Clemenceau and his minions, castigated the Captain for surrendering. Clemenceau exclaimed during a debate on whether to advise Dreyfus to accept the pardon, "I am indifferent about Dreyfus, let them cut him into pieces and eat him" (qtd. in Harris 337). For the editor of *L'Aurore*, the symbolism of the Dreyfus case and what it meant for the Republic superseded any sympathy for the man. Dreyfus had become a martyr to the Republic as a result of his exile, and many wanted him to continue to sacrifice his life to the bitter end. However, it is clear from Dreyfus's intentional displays of resistance and willingness to embody French republican ideals that he too understood the national stakes of his Affair. And, contrary to Clemenceau's understanding of the Affair's implications for the nation, Dreyfus realized that his survival was essential to realizing his ideal France. Duclert eloquently sums up, "En choisissant de faire face à l'adversité de la raison d'État et à la violence des foules conjuguées, en parvenant à survivre pour témoigner et se défendre, il révéla pour ses contemporains et pour le temps présent un modèle de héros civique"

(Dreyfus *Écris* 54). In addition to such revolutionary ideals as reason, truth, and justice, resistance and survival formed the basis for Dreyfus's "model of civic heroism."

In this way Dreyfus revises the exile's call to martyrdom and sacrifice. While Napoleon, Hugo, and Michel capitalized on the public's perception of their self-sacrifice to shape their national legacies and further their political agendas, Dreyfus recognized that death on the exilic battlefield would thwart his aims for France. Awaiting deportation from the prison de la Santé, he wrote to Lucie: "J'ai le courage du soldat qui affronte le danger en face, mais hélas! Aurai-je l'âme du martyr?" (*Cinq* 86). Dreyfus conceives of the soldier and the martyr as two separate roles. And, we might agree that the willingness to sacrifice one's life in battle implies something deeper than training or duty; it suggests that the drive to fight is located in the "soul," that innermost belief system that is more motivating, and more worthy, than the individual. To return to Kantorowicz's discussion of the "king's two bodies," we recall that the king was both mortal body and immortal idea of the body politic. The body politic outlasted the body of the king because there would always be another king to take his place. The line of succession was infinite and, even more, the idea of the *patrie* was bound up in the irrepressible collectivity of the nation's people, customs, laws, administration, and so on. Martyrs thus sacrificed their individual bodies to prolong the institution of this idea, the body politic, their *patrie*. The idea of the *patrie*, like the "soul," remained sacred and everlasting even though the king was mortal. Originally, martyrdom was a religious call to die for one's faith; as Kantorowicz shows, death on the battlefield became a similarly virtuous sacrifice for the sake of the body politic in the age of burgeoning nation-states (232-68). In the Middle Ages, martyrdom thus became a political act of *caritas* (Roland in the *Chanson de Roland* exemplifies the soldier's simultaneous sacrifice for god, king, and country; see also Kantorowicz 241). Unlike his medieval counterparts, Dreyfus did

not seek the continuation of the French *patrie*; rather, he desired its evolution. He could not rely on France's past to inform its future, for the very fact of his conviction demonstrated the nation's betrayal of its republican pieties. He may have represented a limb of the body politic, but he also represented its head—that is, the everlasting idea of the nation-state.

This is evident in the way he describes his “résistance” (the word and its derivations appear in this context over 20 times in *Cinq Années de ma Vie*) and “lutte” (25 appearances); he fights not only against his oppressors, but also against his own body, which wanted desperately to surrender. Dreyfus writes, using phrasing he will often repeat, “Il faut que je lutte contre mon corps, il ne faut pas que celui-ci cède avant que l'honneur me soit rendu” (*Cinq* 129). His body was split in two: while his physical, mortal body (or “body natural,” to quote Kantorowicz) was slowly dying, his principled, immortal body (his “*Dignitas*”) symbolized the perpetuating idea of a modern, republican France. Duclert suggests that had Dreyfus chosen death, his actions would have been viewed as honorable according to military codes (*Honneur* 484). But for Dreyfus only unequivocal proof of his innocence would suffice, and this required more than a sense of honor—it exacted a veritable martyrdom. While he employs the word “martyrdom” to describe his suffering (the term appears under his pen over 55 times in *Cinq Années de ma Vie*), he believed that man—not God—would ensure the perpetuation of a just and sovereign Republic, and this man included, perhaps above all, himself. By surviving his torture and meticulously documenting it, he ensured that the ideal republican nation he embodied would also emerge triumphant. This nation was built not only on French Enlightenment values, but also, and more crucially in his case, on French *laïque* values. Dreyfus's symbolism prompted republican leaders like Clemenceau to ignore Dreyfus's personal suffering, but in so doing they misunderstood the necessity of

Dreyfus's survival for the survival of the body politic. For only once justice prevailed (and Dreyfus's tortured death on Devil's Island would surely have been the greatest failure of French "justice") would the propagation of the next generation of Republican—and more specifically, secular—French citizens be assured. Dreyfus had the soldier's courage and training to die for his country, but he needed the martyr's soul to live for it.

While Dreyfus's letters attest to his political consciousness and activism (some were even used by his defense attorney to demonstrate his innocence, Duclert 550), he not once suggests that he was targeted because he was Jewish, and for this is considered an "unconscious pariah" in Arendt's terminology. However, I contend that it is because Dreyfus sought to be tried as a Frenchman who was Jewish and not the other way around that he exemplifies a particular notion of "Frenchness" that was at the heart of the Affair's controversy. As his will to survive indicates, Dreyfus was interested in promoting a national French tradition that would transcend particular religious or ethnic ties in favor of universal notions of human equality, justice, and *laïcité*. He went beyond actors like Reinach and Lazare, whose loyalties were split between French republicanism and Judaism (Reinach never ceased to proclaim the anti-Semitic nature of the Affair, while Lazare became the French leader of Zionism, although not out of any religious conviction), as well as pivotal Dreyfusards like Zola, who preferred to target the judicial error committed by the Republic in his famous "J'Accuse," rather than the anti-Semitism of Dreyfus's oppressors. Ruth Harris has suggested that many Dreyfusards were unable to separate their public, political convictions from their inner, spiritual ones, leading many to become attached to new ideologies like Zionism, the Barrèsian cult of the soil, Catholicism, or occultism in an attempt to reconcile their private beliefs with their political discourse (379). Dreyfus, by burying his religious convictions under a public portrayal of Enlightenment values, more fully embodied *laïque*, republican France. In so



doing he helped pave the way not only for a revision of his case, but also for the institutionalization of French *laïcité*.

In this Dreyfus actually resembles what Arendt dubs the “true” Dreyfusards who fought in the name of such abstract principles as truth and justice, rather than for the mere salvation of a single victim of an anti-Semitic act (*Origins* 93). This is the crux of her criticism of Dreyfus and his family throughout the Affair, and a closer look at her misgivings will demonstrate the fundamental parameters of *laïcité* that Dreyfus represented. For Arendt, the Jews, as a highly assimilated group, were wholly ignorant that what divided France at the time of the Affair was not whether one was Jewish or Catholic, anticlerical or pro-Army, but whether one adhered to what she calls “concrete” nationalism, practiced by Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras, or “abstract” principles like justice and liberty (ibid 110). Arendt quotes Clemenceau on what it meant to be on the side of justice: “to stand, come what may, for justice, the sole unbreakable bond of union between civilized men” (ibid 112). In her view, justice would rise above political oppositions and unite a country split by faction. Unfortunately, according to Arendt, those Dreyfusards who finally did rally to Clemenceau’s camp did so not out of the same steadfast belief in abstract justice, but because they shared the same enemies—the rich, the army, and the clergy (ibid 113). Their fight remained essentially an individualistic struggle for personal rights and not for the preservation of the republic in the interest of the common good. Referring to the downfall of the Third Republic, she writes, “What made France fall was the fact that she had no more true Dreyfusards, no one who believed that democracy and freedom, equality and justice could any longer be defended or realized under the republic” (ibid 93). She neglected to see that Alfred Dreyfus himself was one of these “true Dreyfusards.”

Throughout her recounting of modern history, Arendt explores how the triumph of individual concerns over the plurality common to humankind resulted in an apolitical organization of people and their subsequent vulnerability to totalitarianism. To her mind, the solution was self-conscious political action in support of the common good, often with the byproduct of effacing the self. In *Speaking Through the Mask: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Social Identity*, Norma Claire Moruzzi examines Arendt's theory on the social and the political to demonstrate that the Jewish theorist's political actors wear a social mask in order to act politically. By constructing their social identity as a mask to be worn in the public sphere, individuals (like Arendt) managed to define themselves as political actors. For Arendt, this took the form of writing about another Jewish woman's life, in *Rahel Varnhagen*. According to Moruzzi, Arendt developed in this text her theory of the Jewish pariah as a potential political agent, while the feminine remained for her fundamentally personal, private, and therefore not political:

But because she would not claim the generality of feminine experience, for Arendt feminine writing could not lead to feminine politics: politics meant transcending the feminine, moving from the interior truth of emotional empathy to the worldly truth of shared experience. To the extent that she began to interpret Rahel's life in political terms, Arendt characterized that life as defined by its Jewish identity, and split off the political analysis from the representation of its feminine interiority. (59)

Arendt shed the private, social, and individual aspect of her identity (the feminine) to emphasize the public, political, and common aspect (the Jewish). Dreyfus, who never wrote specifically as a Jew, cannot therefore be a political actor for Arendt. But, if we consider that "being a Jew" is not, and was not during Dreyfus's era, a common experience, that there were numerous Jewish communities, each with its own needs and interests, we may begin to understand Dreyfus's covering up of his Jewish identity with the "mask" of a republican one. His Jewish identity and practice were his private and personal concerns, like Arendt's conception of her feminine identity, whereas his beliefs

in truth and justice were elements of a public, political critique and mobilization. This is the voice he found and used in public, because these were the ideas he felt most represented his and others' political will. For these reasons Dreyfus can be understood as a political actor in the Arendtian sense and, moreover, one who undermines her insistence on the role of the Jew in politics. Like the conscious pariah, he did not act out of personal gain but for the good of all, according to what he thought was right, and without regard for the debilitating consequences he and his family suffered. And yet, he did not act as a Jew, but as a Republican, during a time when the French Republic and its century-long traditions guaranteeing Jewish and human rights alike were in jeopardy. In the end, he embraced his French-Jewish identity and sought to define it on his own terms. He created a public republican identity built on common, universal values while preserving in the private sphere the specificity of his Judaism. Dreyfus's "two bodies" were reflected in his construction of these two identities—the one universal, and republican, and the other personal and therefore private. If we see this analogy through to its logical end, we would be led to conclude that the Republican idea Dreyfus embodied was everlasting whereas his private, Jewish self was the mortal body he would eventually lose. However, as I suggested earlier, Dreyfus's fight for the survival of both bodies indicates that he not only understood the importance of staying alive to enact French justice, but also that he recognized the need for French Republicanism to preserve the possibility of Jewish political actors. In this Dreyfus presented a successful model for what the Separation of Church and State would look like in France in 1905 and how the increasing institutionalization of French *laïcité* would continue to be interpreted to the present day. For, one question at the heart of the debate on French *laïcité* today is whether it protects religious freedom or eradicates religious practice. Dreyfus's

experiences and actions suggest that the preservation of diverse religious cultures is in fact what makes a free and equitable Republic possible, and vice-versa.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Separation*

Dreyfus not only embodied an idea of *laïcité*, he publicly expressed his support of the law of 1905 and socialized with the key players who made the bill a reality. He was a regular at the Marquise Arconati-Visconti's salon, where the major anticlerical figures met weekly, including Émile Combes, Jean Jaurès, Georges Clemenceau, Aristide Briand, and Joseph Reinach. These were the leaders of what has been called the "Dreyfusian Revolution," which effectively dismantled the power of the church in French society (Larkin 1). As Gérard Baal has shown in his analysis of the relationships in the Marquise Arconati-Visconti's salon, this leftist "bloc" (that is, the non-revolutionary leftist coalition led by Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes) was united in two things: their support of Dreyfus and of the separation of church and state (438). An otherwise diverse mix of radicals, moderates, communists, and socialists, these crucial Dreyfusard figures coalesced around the fundamental principle of anticlericalism, which they believed would pave the way for future social and political progress. Their dissolution following the Separation law is further evidence of the bill's unifying power. In his correspondence with the Marquise, Dreyfus too praises "la politique ferme et courageuse de M. Combes" (qtd. in Baal 446), and in his *Carnets* he credits the Affair with paving the way for this important legislation. Here he writes: "Toutes les réformes importantes qui furent faites successivement par les ministères Waldeck-Rousseau et Combes n'auraient jamais été acceptées sans l'affaire qui y prépara peu à peu, mais sûrement, l'esprit public" (265).

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<sup>44</sup> This is still evident today. Following the Charlie Hebo attacks, the *Atlantic* published an article in which Prime Minister Manuel Valls is quoted as saying, "If 100,000 French people of Spanish origin were to leave, I would never say that France is not France anymore. But if 100,000 Jews leave, France will no longer be France. The French Republic would be judged a failure" (Goldberg).

While Dreyfus offered a model of how to practice *laïcité*, the Affair helped mold the general public opinion in favor of what was otherwise a highly controversial piece of legislation.

Indeed, few could have predicted that when the law finally passed in 1905 the public would have remained so indifferent (Larkin 104). In 1901, the *Directeur des Cultes* called the idea of Separation “une folie semblable à celle d’un gouvernement qui, ayant sur cette place des animaux féroces en cage, ouvrirait toutes grandes les grilles pour laisser les fauves se précipiter sur la foule” (qtd. in Bruley 78). For the Affair had actually interrupted the otherwise gradual process of secularization that had been taking place throughout the nineteenth century. This process included the passage of a series of laws, including the Jules Ferry laws, in the 1880s that progressively eliminated religion from the public sphere: schools were secularized, as were funeral processions, cemeteries, and hospitals. Divorce was made legal and seminarians were required to serve one year in the military. As anticlericalism continued to escalate through the 1890s, the Church issued a call to all Catholics to participate in politics in an attempt to avoid social divisions; this movement was called the “Ralliement.” On the other side of the aisle, Republicans in power practiced tolerance and understanding in regard to their Catholic compatriots —dubbed “l’esprit nouveau”—likewise in order to bring a divided nation closer together. With the eruption of the Affair in 1898, however, these kinds of moderate politics dissolved as the nation reeled into crisis.

The anti-Semitic nature of the Affair provoked a reappraisal of the role of religion and its institutions in society, leading leftist republicans to conclude that these forces needed to be controlled in order to protect republican liberty and democratic government. Zola in particular launched an anticlerical campaign in his articles defending Dreyfus. In “Lettre à la France,” published one week before the celebrated

“J’Accuse,” Zola warns the nation of its impending fall into dictatorship, should it not recognize the grave error of Dreyfus’s arrest. He exclaims:

Et sais-tu encore où tu vas, France? Tu vas à l’Église, tu retournes au passé, à ce passé d’intolérance et de théocratie, que les plus illustres de tes enfants ont combattu, ont cru tuer, en donnant leur intelligence et leur sang. Aujourd’hui, la tactique de l’antisémitisme est bien simple. Vainement le catholicisme s’efforçait d’agir sur le peuple, créait des cercles d’ouvriers, multipliait les pèlerinages, échouait à le reconquérir, à le ramener au pied des autels. Et voilà que des circonstances ont permis de souffler au peuple la rage antisémite, on l’empoisonne de ce fanatisme, on le lance dans les rues, criant: ‘A bas les juifs! À mort les juifs!’ Quel triomphe, si l’on pouvait déchaîner une guerre religieuse! Certes, le peuple ne croit toujours pas; mais, n’est-ce pas le commencement de la croyance, que de recommencer l’intolérance du moyen âge, que de faire brûler les juifs en place publique?” (*Vérité* 106)

Zola here associates the Church with all things anti-Republican and anti-intellectual: tyranny, the Middle Ages, intolerance, fanaticism, injustice, and anti-Semitism. The Church was thrown in the same pot as anti-Semites and reactionaries, guilty of attempting to undermine the Republican values the nation had worked so hard to institutionalize. Clemenceau summed up, that same month of January 1898, “On a fini par comprendre que l’antisémitisme est un nom nouveau du cléricalisme, en train de reprendre sur nous l’avantage” (qtd. in Capéran, *Anticléricalisme* 87). French society quickly split into “us” and “them” with the Republic on one side and the Church on the other. The Dreyfusard movement was not only a defense of Dreyfus and the Republic, it was also an attack on the army and the Church, viewed as responsible for the anti-Semitism and renunciation of justice at the root of Dreyfus’s illegal arrest.

As a result of these intense divisions and heightened emotions driving politics, both the moderate *Ralliement* and accommodating *esprit nouveau* failed (Bruley 73). René Waldeck-Rousseau took office in 1899 and mounted a “gouvernement de défense républicaine,” which included pursuing a complete separation of church and state. Already embedded in this terminology was the spirit of battle that gripped the nation during the Dreyfus Affair. However, Waldeck-Rousseau’s “defense” of republican France

quickly took the offensive with the passage of the Associations Law of 1901 requiring congregations to apply for state authorization. Unlike associations, the reasoning went, religious orders were not free-thinking entities and therefore should not have the right to form independently of the state. However, Waldeck-Rousseau left office before the law went into effect and his successor, Émile Combes, used the law to shut down thousands of religious schools and over a hundred other religious establishments, resulting in the expulsion of 15,000 members of religious orders who suddenly found themselves practicing their occupations illegally in France (Bruley 80-81). The severity of “combisme” continued up to the Separation, constituting a blatant attack on the Church and putting an end to what was otherwise a gradual process of secularization.

And yet, even Combes did not intend to completely separate church and state. The Law of 1901 led to greater government oversight of church associations, not their independence. But public disapproval of the Church and its influence had been unleashed, and many considered the religious institution a threat to Republicanism. For Republicans, the Church represented an anti-democratic invasion, inculcating the youth and restricting their freedom of thought (ibid 85). And yet, their philosophical thinking contained an essential contradiction, as Clemenceau makes clear in the following quotations. In 1903, during Combes’ militant attack on the Church, Clemenceau spoke out for freedom of religion, asserting, “Je repousse l’omnipotence de l’État laïque parce que j’y vois une tyrannie... [L’État ne doit pas imposer] un dogme d’en bas [après avoir] ruiné le dogme d’en haut” (qtd. in Bruley 85). Then, in 1905 when the Separation was imminent, Clemenceau opposed its controversial article four. This provision granted church associations the power to oversee their property and acquisitions, and went so far as to require that these associations conform to the rules of the religious organization. In other words, the established hierarchy of the Church was recognized and upheld over

that of individuals in managing church revenue, property, councils, consistories, etc. Clemenceau worried in particular for those non-believing Catholics who would be thrown under Roman, and not French authority. He exclaimed to the Senate: “vous l’enfermez [cette masse d’incrédules pratiquants] dans les serres de l’article 4 pour la refouler sous l’autorité romaine. Vous la livrez à Rome” (ibid 111). Again, he feared a top-down imposition of power, but this time coming from the Church, not the State. This was not political flip-flopping, but rather the real issue at the heart of the Separation bill: how to preserve freedoms, including the freedom of religion, while also protecting citizens from tyrannical authority, including the authority of the Church. In the end, in order to avoid a veritable civil war, article four remained in the bill and, paradoxically, the Church was endowed with greater intra-institutional oversight than it would have been if regulated by the State.

As this apparent setback demonstrates, Separation was intended, above all, to establish popular sovereignty and ensure the realization of a truly republican government. Many drafts had anticipated the final bill, including those proposed by Waldeck-Rousseau, Combes, and Jaurès, but, according to Maurice Larkin, Francis de Pressensé’s bill of 1903 most closely resembles the law ultimately authored by Aristide Briand (108). Pressensé’s preamble states unequivocally the bill’s republican inspiration: “In drafting the bill I have been guided,” he writes, “not only by republican doctrines, the traditions of the Revolution and the interests of French democracy, but also by the Socialist programme” (qtd. in Larkin 112). For Pressensé, the Separation would restore power to the people socially, politically, and economically. Combes reiterated these philosophical underpinnings in his address of September 4, 1904 announcing the debate on Separation:

Messieurs, le système politique en question consiste dans la subordination de tous les corps, de toutes les institutions, quelles qu’elles soient, à la suprématie de



l'État républicain et laïque. Il a pour base, en thèse générale, le principe fondamental de la Révolution, la souveraineté nationale, pour formule dernière et pour conclusion, la sécularisation complète de la société. (qtd. in Bruley 95)

The bill was considered the logical outcome of secularization initiated by the 1789 Revolution, and it was ultimately sponsored by the League of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. As such it represented the culmination of French universalism born of the eighteenth century but, as we can glimpse in this last passage, it struggled with the authoritative role of the secular State. The bill sought to provide the circumstances for change “d'en bas,” but necessarily did so by issuing change “d'en haut.” Still, as Yves Bruley makes clear in *Histoire de la Laïcité à la Française* (2005), the bill's debates were nothing if not parliamentary and in the end represented a “victoire de l'esprit républicain” (111).

Dreyfus, as we have seen, symbolized these lofty ideals of freedom, justice, and equality but, unlike the bill's most staunch advocates, he was associated with a religious community. And, just as he makes no mention of God as savior in his writings, he equally resists language that would elevate the “State” to the level of emancipator. Rather, I have argued, he relies on Man to institute and enact change. In this he most closely adheres to the anticlerical Republicans' insistence on change from the bottom up, rather than the top down. Dreyfus shows that authority—whether issued from the principles of the Church, rabbi, or '89—means nothing unless enacted and embodied by a united collectivity of citizens.

### *Devil's Island*

Before moving on to a brief analysis of the role of the island space in Dreyfus's martyrdom, let me sum up my main points thus far. It has been surmised that, because Dreyfus incessantly proclaimed his steadfast faith in France's republican values and the

nation's ability to right the judicial error that wrongly convicted him, he is the portrait of the quintessentially assimilated Jew, looking to the state as the guarantor of his rights. However, I suggest that it is erroneous to interpret these cries as evidence of the Captain's naïve faith in the Republic. Rather, his thousands of pages of letters (both personal and administrative), journal entries, reflections, and copies of official documents all point to Dreyfus's quest to set the record straight; like Napoleon on Saint Helena, he employed his time in exile to exonerate himself through writing. Entirely ignorant of the complex Affair taking shape back in France, Dreyfus on Devil's Island refused to allow fate decide how his story would be remembered. The self-portrait he penned is not simply that of an assimilated Jew, but rather the model of a politically active, republican Frenchman masking his very private and personal religious convictions in the interest of the common good. Dreyfus not only spoke out in an attempt to right the wrong done to him, but—even more so—in order to realize a vision of nationhood that would embrace *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and *laïcité*, and his very person came to symbolize that ideal.

Indeed, his refusal to be silenced greatly troubled his accusers, and their trepidation is evinced in the space selected for Dreyfus's exile. As a political prisoner, Dreyfus was subject to deportation to a fortified enclosure, and it was presumed that he would be sent to the *presqu'île* Ducos in New Caledonia (as Michel was). However, authorities passed a sudden change in the deportation legislation one month after Dreyfus' conviction, and reinstituted Devil's Island as a possible place of exile. Newspapers from this time suggest reasons for the change: the New Caledonian peninsula was deemed too lenient, friendly, and would encourage the possibility of escape. Conversely, Devil's Island, as its name evokes, was a harsh land previously reserved for the most dangerous of people, and deportation to the remote island had

actually ceased in 1867 because of the island's deleterious conditions (Miles 17-20). *Le*

*Matin* explained on January 9, 1895 the project to amend the deportation law to include the Îles du Salut as a suitable "fortified enclosure" for deportees:

Cette mesure, qui modifie la loi du 20 mars 1872, est prise, comme nous l'avons dit, pour donner satisfaction à l'opinion publique. On considère en effet qu'une *villégiature* à la presqu'île Ducos serait un châtement peu en rapport avec le crime pour lequel Dreyfus a été condamné.

Cette presqu'île, avec ses vastes espaces, son long développement de côtes et le personnel très restreint de ses surveillants, se prête trop à des tentatives de fuite que ne manquerait pas de mettre en œuvre le condamné du 1er conseil de guerre. Tel n'est point, au contraire, le cas des îles du Salut.

The article continues to describe the location and topography of each island and the unlikelihood of being able to escape from any one of them; it notes a few failed attempts, and explains how cadavers are handled (wrapped in a linen shroud, weighted with lead, and thrown to the sharks and rocks at sea). The article finishes by reporting on the "régime des forçats," including their food rations, clothing, and work life, assuming that Dreyfus will likely be installed on the Île Royale. It concludes that: "Il est, en effet, beaucoup plus difficile de s'échapper de ce rocher que des deux îlots voisins...et jamais aucun condamné n'est parvenu à s'enfuir." This article thus highlights two main reasons for deporting Dreyfus to the Îles du Salut, rather than the presqu'île Ducos: he is less likely to escape, and more likely to be punished.

The newspaper *Le Quotidien Illustré* reiterated these concerns. Shortly after Dreyfus' degradation, on December 24, 1894, this paper reported on the *presqu'île* Ducos:

L'ex-capitaine ne sera pas à plaindre. Les condamnés y jouissent, en effet, de toute la liberté compatible avec la nécessité d'assurer la garde de leur personne. Leurs femmes et leurs enfants ont la faculté d'aller les rejoindre. Ils peuvent enfin obtenir des concessions de terres, et le gouverneur a le droit d'autoriser l'établissement en dehors du territoire affecté à la déportation de tout condamné dont la conduite aura été irréprochable pendant cinq ans.

Three days later the paper published a color illustration of the “Le Camp des déportés à la presqu’île Ducos” (fig. 4) showing a quaint village with several houses along roads and paths, complete with gardens and plots of land, and the ocean in the background. It is described as “fort habitable” with “un puits et des sources d’eau douces” and a “seul habitant notable ;” the article even goes on to say “l’ex-capitaine Dreyfus trouvera en lui un digne compagnon.” Less than a week later, meanwhile, this paper ran an anecdotal story, taken from *Le Figaro*, in which a “personnage” expresses his concerns about the lack of security at Ducos. He insists that “avant un an Dreyfus sera évadé...” Then, upon Dreyfus’ arrival in the Îles du Salut at the end of February, the paper published a front-page, black-and-white spread picturing the island destination and describing the conditions there (fig. 5). This time, however, the image depicts “les surveillants,” “le bourreau,” “le village lépreux,” and, in a smaller, separate image below, a single man sitting atop a rock, surrounded by water. The article gives a tour of the islands, listing the various hazards one encounters there. Sharks, extreme heat, and a rocky coast entrap the prisoners; scorpions, spiders, and mosquitoes are a constant threat; even the vegetation seems dangerous with cacti and “herbes folles” populating the land. Prisoners are housed in cells with barred windows and suffer during the silence of deserted days under a “soleil de plomb.” The sea extends “à perte de vue” and a dispatch boat keeps lookout like “un énorme oiseau de proie.” Devil’s Island in particular is described as “un amas de blocs rocheux, où de rares cocotiers abritent de misérables cases en bambou.” While the risk of escape and the mild punishment at Ducos are the public’s principle concerns in not sending Dreyfus to the peninsula, the total isolation, danger, and constant surveillance emerge as reasons to send him to Devil’s Island.

Additional published images of Dreyfus on Devil’s Island support this view. *Le Quotidien Illustré* published a map of Devil’s Island in April, after Dreyfus’ arrival (fig.

6). The space east of the island is labeled “requins tout autour des trois îles” while the narrow passageway to the south, separating Devil’s Island from Île Royale, is filled in with a “chenal très dangereuse, mer très forte” and the northern part of the island is cut off by a “porteau...pour défendre à Dreyfus le côté N de l’île.” The short article reads: “Ainsi qu’on peut en juger, le prisonnier est gardé d’un côté par les surveillants, de l’autre par la mer.” The sea acts as a natural barrier to escape, making the island, unlike the peninsula, an ideal space of imprisonment and exile. The better-known front page of *Le Petit Journal Supplément Illustré* from September 27, 1896 again shows a melancholy Dreyfus in a foreign land (fig. 7). Heat and desert saturate the color illustration, Dreyfus appears completely hopeless and defeated, while a stern guard nonetheless keeps strict watch, and the ocean peeks out from behind. Escape—even the idea of it—seems impossible.

Indeed, upon arrival in the Îles du Salut, Dreyfus faced aggravating living conditions. He was first cloistered in the ship’s hold for three days while preparations for his arrival continued. He was then imprisoned on the Île Royale for one month in complete seclusion, never allowed to leave his cell or open the windows, so as to avoid publicity or recognition. Finally transported to the Île du Diable, Dreyfus was the only prisoner on the island, which had until then been a leper colony.<sup>45</sup> Rules regarding his treatment were likewise draconian: his family was never able to join him and he was not permitted to move about freely. He was confined to a four-square-meter cell and sentenced to twenty-four-hour surveillance; even during walks outdoors a guard followed his every step. The rare times when other prisoners were brought to the island to perform hard labor, Dreyfus was locked in his cell to prohibit any form of contact. In addition, though he was unaware of it at the time, even in the event of his death, his case

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<sup>45</sup> It is unclear what happened to the lepers who resided there previously. Their huts were burned, and they were “dispersés” (Reinach 1: 395).

was exceptional. Rather than throwing his body to sea, guards were instructed to send his cadaver back to France.<sup>46</sup> He was considered a public threat, necessitating even posthumous surveillance. The island was not only the ideal space for such isolation, secrecy, and constant surveillance, it was the only space that guaranteed all these conditions be met.

While the choice to send Dreyfus to detention on Devil's Island was motivated by a desire to prevent his escape and protect the public, even more important was the hope that Dreyfus' total isolation would cause the public simply to forget about him. With Dreyfus out of sight he also drifted out of mind, and his family needed publicity in order to raise awareness and conduct their fight for his exoneration. For this reason, in September 1896, they managed to have a phony article published in the English press announcing Dreyfus' escape from Devil's Island. The article revived public interest in his case, and also helped recruit notable Dreyfusards, among them Émile Zola. With the publication of Zola's "J'accuse" in 1898, revision of the case finally became imminent.

As a result of the press and publicity, a veritable media explosion occurred. Dreyfus was pictured in papers, on posters, and in everyday postcards. On the Dreyfusard side were those images that encouraged the public to simply remember him, stranded on Devil's Island. For example, a German postcard (1899?) features a portrait of Dreyfus in the upper right-hand corner, dressed in uniform and well groomed, while an insert in the upper left-hand corner shows a close-up of his shack on the island.<sup>47</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> These facts are gleaned from Dreyfus's own accounts of his exile, as well as Burns, *FA* 154-169.

<sup>47</sup> The postcards I examine here were consulted in the Lorraine Beitler Collection of the Dreyfus Affair, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania. The images are not attached, but three more examples can be readily accessed for viewing: *Affaire Dreyfus #2: Le prisonnier*, postcard (Venice: G. Sternfeld, [n.d.]): <[http://www.dreyfus.culture.fr/en/multimedia/media-theme4\\_cite\\_The\\_Dreyfus\\_Affair\\_The\\_Prisoner\\_cite\\_and\\_cite\\_The\\_Dreyfus\\_Affair\\_Esterhazy\\_in\\_London\\_cite\\_.htm](http://www.dreyfus.culture.fr/en/multimedia/media-theme4_cite_The_Dreyfus_Affair_The_Prisoner_cite_and_cite_The_Dreyfus_Affair_Esterhazy_in_London_cite_.htm)>; this drawing from a private collection: [http://www.dreyfus.culture.fr/en/multimedia/media-theme4-Dreyfusard\\_drawing.htm](http://www.dreyfus.culture.fr/en/multimedia/media-theme4-Dreyfusard_drawing.htm); and a postcard *Dreyfus on Devil's Island* (Budapest: Seljenka & Szél, 1899) in Kleeblatt 198.

empty island occupies the center of the card, containing the shack, a couple palm trees, and the guard's hut. Choppy waters and a dark sky loom all around. The caption reads, "Gruss von der Teufelsinsel" (Greetings from Devil's Island). This postcard, which has a postmark, addressee, and a short hand-written note, seems simply to want to remind us that Dreyfus exists, over there on Devil's Island. Another German postcard (n.d.) features a portrait of Dreyfus in uniform with rosy cheeks and a small picture at the bottom of an island. The title reads "Alfred Dreyfus: La Vérité est en Marche/Die Wahrheit bricht sich endlich Bahn." The island once again served to remind the public of where Dreyfus was, and therefore why it was so urgent to discover the truth. Several representations of Devil's Island combine more than one image in different corners of the frame. The effect of juxtaposing a picture of Dreyfus in uniform with his dilapidated hut functions to separate the proud and glorious Captain, as a representative of the French army and therefore of France itself, from the confining prison space. One is left with the impression that Dreyfus, like France, does not belong locked up, but rather must be set free and returned to his rightful place of honor. He is pictured not as a French traitor rightfully banished to a foreign land, but as a Frenchman trapped on a strange island, stranded and desperately needing rescue.

In this revolutionary fight for a just and honest France, the space of Devil's Island thus plays an important role in fabricating the symbolism of Dreyfus's case in the French imaginary. All but forgotten an ocean away, Dreyfus ceased to be an individual and became, for his supporters and enemies alike, a symbol of what the nation had become, could become, or risked becoming. Another postcard (pub. Venice, n.d.) pictures an island in the distance with a single man standing, looking longingly toward the foreground where a blinded woman in white (Truth) is being pulled away by two men: one carries a balance (Justice) and the other is in uniform and carries a sword (the

Army). Behind the island a setting sun has the letters R-E-V-I-S-I-O-N etched between its rays. Here, Dreyfus on Devil's Island carries not only symbolic value, like the caricatures that encompass him, but he is also the martyr, sacrificed in exile so that Truth and Justice might prevail. Indeed, a final postcard (pub. France, 1904?) depicts Dreyfus as a Christic martyr, a not uncommon rendering of the Jewish Captain (fig. 8).<sup>48</sup> Here, he is dressed in rags and bent over, suffering the torture of irons while being forced to look at pictures of his family. The sun sets somewhat merrily over the horizon, presumably over France and us, the viewers. As in Dreyfus's missives, we have the impression that he is sacrificing his own life and body for the good of his family and his country off in the distance, while his demonic persecutors urge him to confess to a crime he never committed.

While it appears an easy metaphor to depict Dreyfus as a Christ-like martyr, in his writings Dreyfus resisted this particular take on the symbolism of his suffering. Like the Christic exilic martyrs before him, Dreyfus's body took on new meaning as a symbol of nationhood. But, as a Jewish exile, Dreyfus needed to portray certain secular attributes that equated him with a universalist notion of mankind rather than with the more particular embodiment of Christianity. As he writes to the Marquise Arconati-Visconti:

...nous sommes dans une période de transition bien remarquable pour l'Histoire. Nous nous dépouillons de nos vêtements usés, allègrement, pour aller vers des horizons nouveaux où l'Humanité trouvera, sinon le bonheur (les souffrances et la douleur existeront de toute l'éternité), mais chaque jour plus de joie à la vie." (qtd. in Baal 440)

He is aware of the potential of his case to give rise to a new epoch in French history, and he embraces the opportunity to help define this new idea of France. Dreyfus's "two

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<sup>48</sup> Ruth Harris, in her book *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century* (2010), explores the relationship between Christic renderings of Dreyfus and depictions of Lucie as the Virgin Mary (264-272).



bodies”—the soldier and the *Dignitas*, man and Mankind, homo and *humanitas*—had both to survive in order for either to endure. In contradistinction to previous French exiles of the nineteenth century, we thus see Dreyfus linked to Adam rather than to Christ, as the man who engenders humankind, the mortal who gives rise to an immortal idea—in Dreyfus’s case, French *laïcité*.

### *Dreyfus and Napoleon: Remembering History*

Many aspects of Dreyfus’s narrative call to mind Napoleon’s exile to Saint Helena eighty years earlier. Like the Captain, Napoleon represented a radical vision of nationhood and, thus, was banished to a distant island prison. Like Dreyfus, he did not know where he was being exiled when he boarded the *Bellerophon* off the coast of France. He felt betrayed when he learned that he was not going to live out his days relatively peacefully in a new colony on the other side of the world, but would suffer in isolation in the middle of the Atlantic. From his island prison, he too reflected on the teachings of 1789 and wrote his own narrative of exile. The *Mémorial* resembles Dreyfus’s published memoirs in its epistolarity; both appeal to readers’ emotions as well as to their critical reflections. In his narrative, Napoleon constructed a vision of nationhood of which he was both body and head, and consistently associated his very person with republican principles. He portrayed himself as a Christic figure, and ensured that history would remember him as a national savior. He ultimately transformed the act of martyrdom from a Christian sacrifice for God and country into a republican sacrifice for principles and nation, providing a paradigm for future nineteenth-century exiles to experience banishment as a glorious act undertaken for the sake of the Republic. Dreyfus, in describing his own “martyrdom” on a distant, tropical island prison, evokes Napoleon’s memory and builds on the Emperor’s construal of the national ethos. In

surviving for the sake of the Republic and incessantly appealing to friends and leaders back home, Dreyfus elevates neither God nor principles but humanity to the level of savior, effectively eliminating the religious dimension of political sacrifice. This is not all.

In concluding, I would like to suggest that the Napoleon/Dreyfus connection constitutes one piece of Michael Rothberg's archive of "multidirectional memory," showing how the legislative and cultural outcomes of the Dreyfus Affair emerged in dialogue with the memories of France's First Empire, Revolution, Enlightenment, and Christian past. We saw how Napoleon on Saint Helena appealed to both the French Revolution's teachings and the Christian concept of martyrdom to reconstruct an ideal nation, of which he was the perfect embodiment. By writing his exilic experience of martyrdom on a similarly isolated island and also employing the metaphor of embodiment to develop an ideal national community, Dreyfus dialogued with all these memories associated with Napoleon's exile and France's history. In fashioning these connections, Dreyfus inscribed his Jewish minority experience into French collective memory in the nineteenth century. His writings invite readers to recall Napoleon's role in furthering Jewish emancipation in Europe and instituting a more secular society, actions that anticipated that further secularization (by the Dreyfusards) would be couched in a similar republican lexicon of truth, justice, and freedom. Meanwhile, such a comparison reveals how the nineteenth-century French Republic was shaped by the idea of the body politic, in which individuals—soldiers, rulers, and everyday men and women—embrace republican values to survive crisis and construct a common national identity. As the press never ceases to remind us, this republican character (and the identity conflicts it creates), persists in France and Europe today. And yet, recognizing how Dreyfus's narrative interacted with the memories of Napoleon points the way toward a new, intercultural understanding of how French republicanism came into

being, and how it can continue to evolve. The memory of the Dreyfus Affair, with its narrative associating judicial wrongdoing, anti-Semitism, and the Separation of Church and State, appears in some ways bound to the memory of Napoleon, and his association with the French Revolution and Enlightenment. Understanding these memories as “multidirectional”—that is, cutting across time, space, and culture—shows how the nineteenth-century French nation was in fact engendered by intercultural dialogues—between leaders and citizens, Jews and Christians, political exiles and the public majority. By its very nature, this form of memory rejects the cultural particularism associated with specific, and separate, cultural histories. Rather, by drawing on the diverse memories of the past, it mobilizes new articulations of collective memory, nationality, and identity. The exilic space once again proves to be particularly conducive to the development of such free and radical expressions.

Dreyfus, we have seen, was very much a “conscious pariah,” at odds religiously as well as politically, socially, and temporally with the dominant national ideology. His exile to Devil’s Island in particular demonstrates just how “incomplete” the Revolution remained a century later, and what officials were willing to do to keep such “abstract” republicanism at bay. As we will see in the next chapter, such humanistic, even utopian, republicanism, as espoused by both Michel and Dreyfus, in the end threatens the administrative and dogmatic structure of the nation. For once republicanism loses its French specificity, the nation must be dissolved. Zola will again tackle the Revolution’s paradoxical legacy, parsing out the conflicts between authority and collectivity, the nation and the human. Dreyfus, for his part, chose to challenge his superiors, and sought to redefine a national identity that would embrace both Republicanism and Judaism. From exile, he looked upon his homeland with a critical lens, publicly identifying its errors and shortcomings, and actively soliciting a reappraisal of its basic tenets; upon his

return, he continued to publish in support of French secular republicanism even after his pardon. As a martyr cast away to a distant island prison, his case, his very body, became a symbol of French republican values. While his individual body suffered and eventually did perish, the French collectivity that he symbolized—citizenship based on *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, and *laïcité*—would continue to live on and contribute to an evolving definition of “Frenchness” in the twentieth century.

Fig. 4. "Le Camp des Déportés," *Le Quotidien Illustré* 27 December 1894. Image courtesy of the Lorraine Beitler Collection of the Dreyfus Affair, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania





Fig. 5. "Les Îles du Salut," *Le Quotidien Illustré* 26 February 1895. Image courtesy of the Lorraine Beitler Collection of the Dreyfus Affair, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

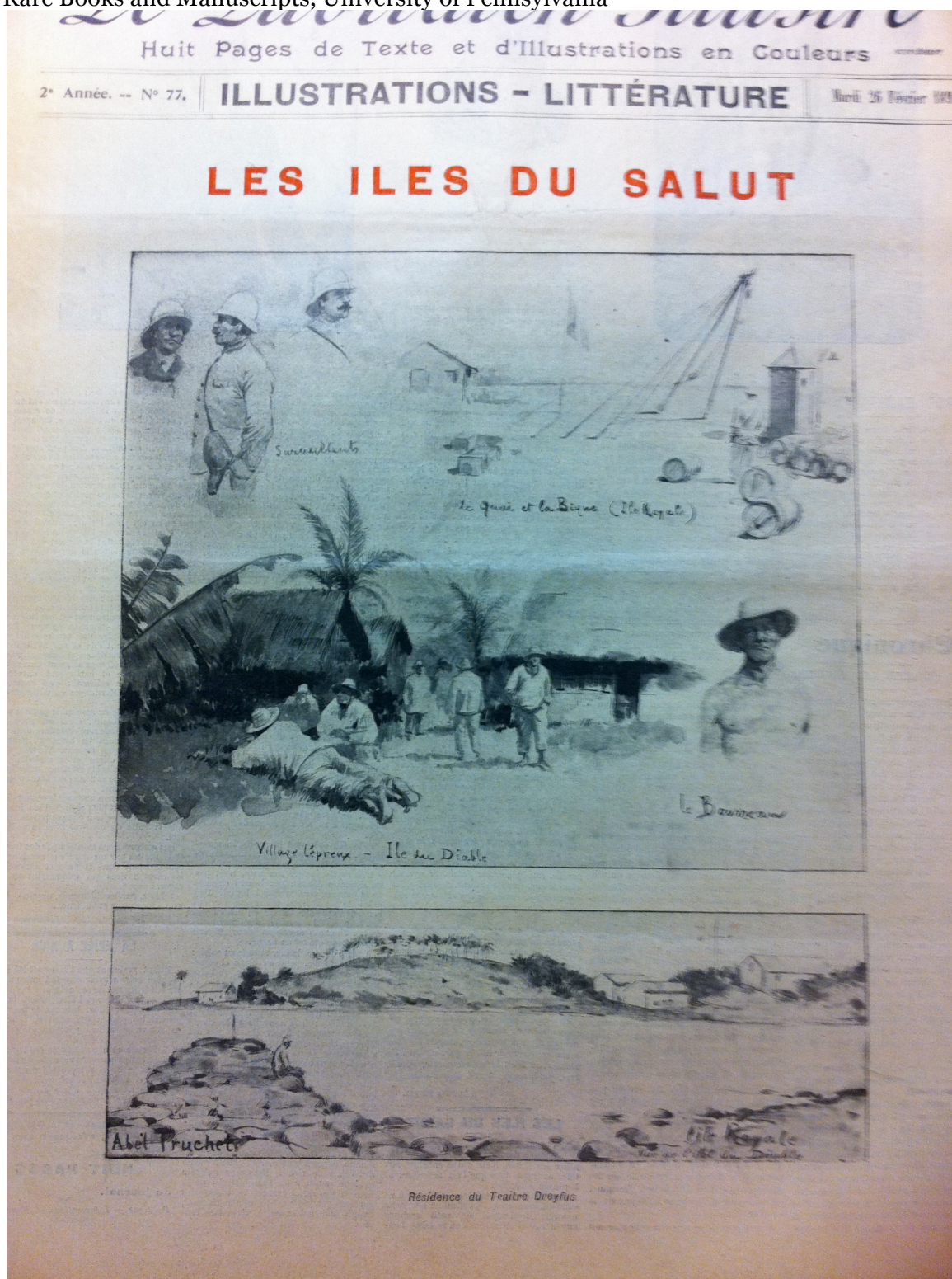






Fig. 7. "Dreyfus à l'Île du Diable," *Le Petit Journal Supplément Illustré* 27 September 1896

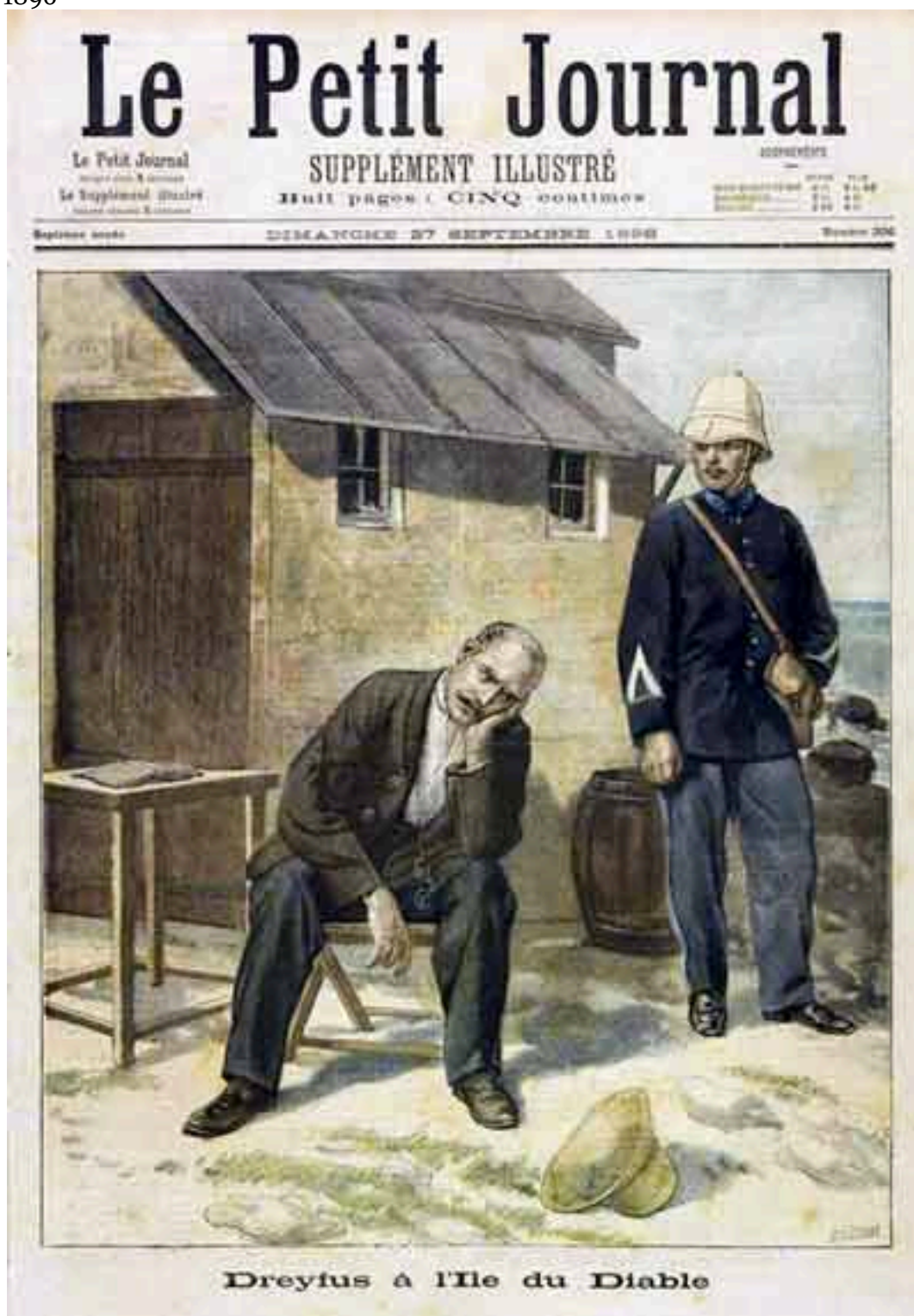
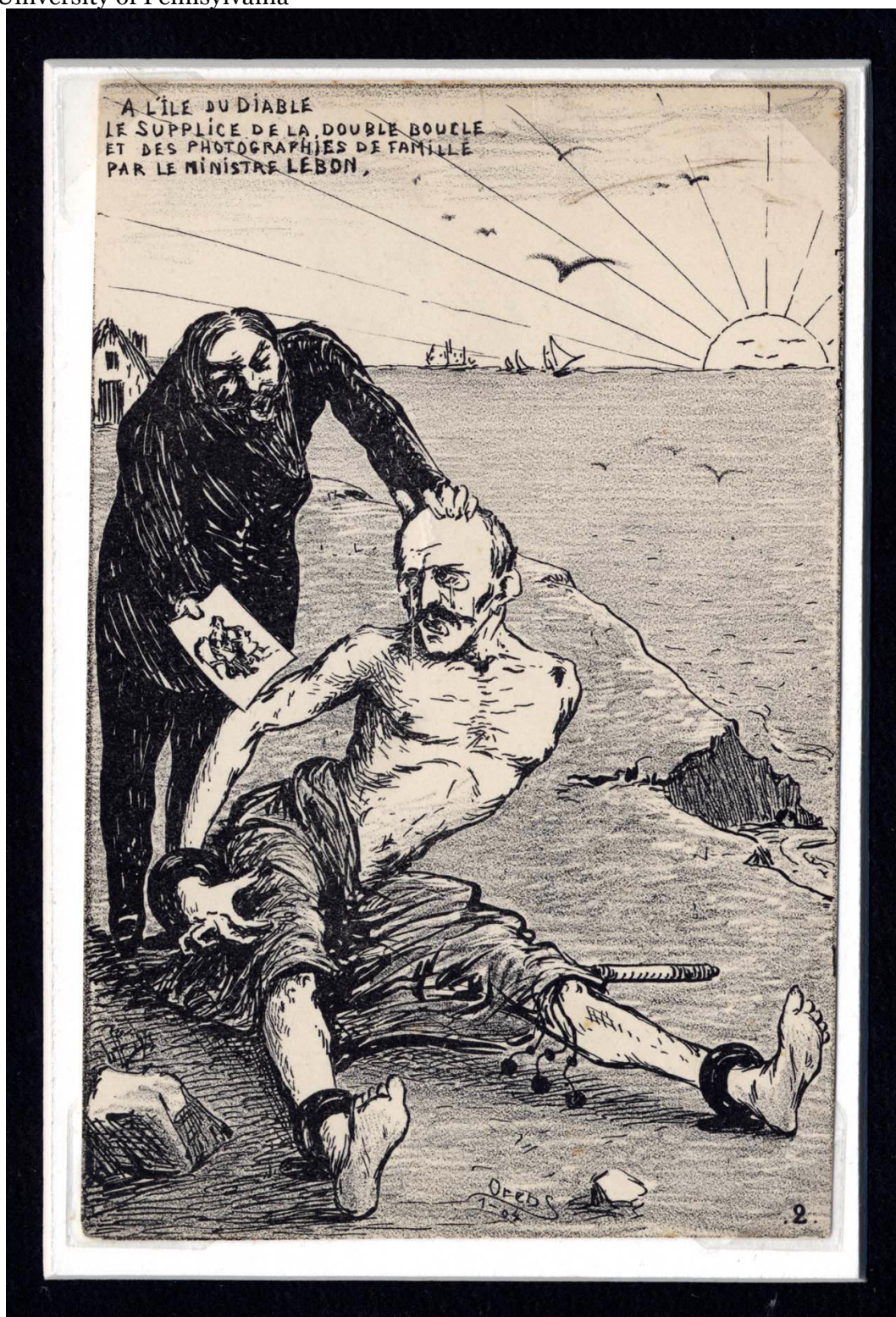




Fig. 8. Postcard, France, 1904? Image courtesy of the Lorraine Beitler Collection of the Dreyfus Affair, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania



## CHAPTER 5

## Zola in England: Rejuvenating French Roots

“...nous voulons, nous aussi, être les maîtres des phénomènes des éléments intellectuels et personnels, pour pouvoir les diriger. Nous sommes, en un mot, des moralistes expérimentateurs, montrant par l’expérience de quelle façon se comporte une passion dans un milieu social.”  
 --Émile Zola, *Le Roman Expérimental*

*Zola on the Run*

In many ways Émile Zola’s experience of exile is in concert with Dreyfus’s, for the two were cast out of France at the same time and for the same reason—their republican symbolism during a time of political crisis. And yet, in exile Zola constructs a very different, nearly opposite, idea of patriotism and nationhood. Rather than leaning on the burgeoning secularist discourse that aimed to establish an egalitarian society, Zola’s writings from this time reveal a religiously inflected nationalist discourse that in many ways anticipates the biopolitical regimes of the twentieth century. Whereas Dreyfus imagined *laïcité* in a multicultural nation, Zola allows us to understand how these same egalitarian principles would continue to be challenged and modified as French national identity developed in response to twentieth-century trials and transformations.

Following the publication of “J’Accuse” in *L’Aurore* (January 13, 1898), Émile Zola was accused of libel and, in a court of appeals on July 18, sentenced to twelve months imprisonment. To escape his sentence and thereby ensure that both his and Captain Alfred Dreyfus’s case would remain open, he fled that night, carrying only enough belongings to fit rolled into a newspaper. He spent the next year in hiding, traveling about England looking for shelter. As a fugitive on the run, Zola differs from the other exiles discussed in this dissertation who were officially sentenced to deportation. Yet, like Hugo, he intentionally decided to flee north not only to avoid

capture and imprisonment, but also to carry on the fight for the political and social principles he believed in. He writes of his departure upon arriving in London, “Je suis arrivé ici tranquillement, mais le cœur bien gros [...] Mais il faut que la vérité et la justice triomphent” (*Corr* 225). These terms evoke the battle Zola was waging, and this lexicon of combat characterizes both his letters and the novel he wrote concurrently, *Fécondité* (1899). Meanwhile, many of the exilic tropes already discussed in this project re-surface in Zola’s work. Zola writes that, while he did receive some visits from his family and mistress, he spent much of the year alone, unable to communicate in English, immersed in his work, and angry at France for failing to live up to what he considered the nation’s true values: justice, freedom, and equality. By juxtaposing his misery in exile with his hope for justice, Zola frames his flight as part of his fight for justice, like Hugo and Michel before him. Finally, Zola’s particular relationship with the land and geography points to how he develops the concepts of “France” and “Frenchness” at the turn of the century. A more thorough analysis of his national imaginings will be important in reaching both a fuller understanding of how French nationalism continued to develop beyond the nineteenth century and how Zola’s take on the French nation compares with Dreyfus’ own political stance considered in the previous chapter. As this chapter will demonstrate, considering Zola’s experience in exile is crucial to understanding the tenets of his nationalist ideology, and in particular how that ideology manifests in the novel *Fécondité*.

### *Journalist of the Dreyfus Affair*

Although Zola became involved in the Dreyfus Affair relatively late (his first publication in—rather hesitant—support of the captain appeared nearly three years after Dreyfus’s initial arrest), the publication of the article entitled “Lettre à M. Félix Faure,”

and now known as “J’Accuse,” is considered a turning point in the development of the Affair. It was, for all intents and purposes, the moment the stakes became national. Following its publication, anti-Semitic violence and public protest heightened, with riots taking place from Paris to Algeria (Wilson 66; Burns *FA* 231; Harris 118). Zola himself remarked that the Affair only just began upon the appearance of his letter, “puisque aujourd’hui seulement les positions sont nettes” (*Vérité* 123). The audacious article appeared after Esterhazy, who was the true author of the treasonous bordereau that led to Dreyfus’s arrest, was acquitted. Tensions were high and Zola was convinced that the wrong man has been punished. In his now famous article, the author of the *Rougon-Macquart* traces the development of the faulty case against Dreyfus, accusing individual members of the Ministry of War (especially the Lieutenant Colonel du Paty de Clam as well as the Generals Mercier, Billot, Boisdeffre, and Pellieux), for leading an unjust investigation and condemning Dreyfus—twice—without sufficient evidence. He lays blame on the president of the Republic himself, Félix Faure, along with handwriting “experts,” the press, and others for failing to intervene in the name of justice. In the end, he acknowledges his own crime of libel and defies the justice system to prosecute him, anticipating that a public trial would expose the true facts of Dreyfus’s case and, consequently, the indubitable crimes committed by the War Ministry. Unfortunately for Zola, his trial ended in a conviction on February 23 after two weeks of skewed testimony in the courtroom and violent outbursts by inimical crowds outside. Those who sought to re-open Dreyfus’ case were silenced by the court while the perspectives of those associated with the army were granted full audience to present the “facts” as they saw fit (Harris 122-125). Zola’s lawyer, Maitre Labori, quickly appealed the ruling, then managed to delay further proceedings in the hopes of uncovering new evidence in support of Dreyfus, but at the July court of appeals Zola was once again found guilty and

sentenced to the maximum penalty: a fine of 3,000 francs and one year in prison. Labori predicted this outcome and escorted Zola out of the courtroom before the ruling could be issued, allowing his client a few more hours to escape the country.

Historians suggest that Zola's relatively late arrival on the scene of the Affair was primarily due to the writer's sole interest in the Affair's dramatic elements; a common claim is that the novelist was indifferent to the mundane reality of the Affair's early days, but his interest peaked as the case became a good story (Harris 112; Wilson 67). Zola, for his part, ascribes his late involvement to his physical absence from France—he was in the Italian capital conducting research for his novel *Rome* when Dreyfus was first condemned (*Vérité* 66). Upon his return, M. Auguste Sheurer-Kestner, the vice-president of the Senate, invited him for dinner and convinced him to become an active Dreyfusard. Oft-quoted passages from Zola's letters following this meeting indeed point to the author's interest in the literary import of the Affair: "Cela me passionne," Zola writes to his wife Alexandrine, "car il y a peut-être plus tard une œuvre admirable à faire" (*Corr* 99); and, a few days later in a note to Sheurer-Kestner: "Je ne sais pas ce que je ferai, mais jamais drame humain ne m'a empli d'émotion plus poignante" (*ibid* 101). However, in the next line of this letter, Zola continues: "C'est le combat pour la vérité, et c'est le seul bon, le seul grand. Même dans l'apparente défaite, la victoire est au bout, certaine" (101). As we will continue to see in *Fécondité* and as the twenty novels of the *Rougon-Macquart* series make abundantly clear, Zola's literary texts do not preclude a simultaneously deep political interest and activism. The father of Naturalism set out to depict French society in all its filth and malady in an attempt to heal and reconstruct a deteriorating world.<sup>49</sup> As Zola critics have observed, it was most natural for the author of

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<sup>49</sup> See Zola, *Le Roman Experimental*, especially section III. His socialist tendencies can be gleaned especially from *Germinal*'s depiction of an impoverished mining community engaging in a workers' strike against the bourgeois management.

the *Rougon-Macquart* to spark the Dreyfusard movement of the so-called “intellectuals,” for Zola’s thought had always straddled the line between the literary and the political (Roy 862). Zola himself writes in “Lettre à la France” (January 6, 1898), “Et j’oserai tout dire, car je n’ai jamais eu qu’une passion dans ma vie, la vérité, et je ne fais ici que continuer mon œuvre” (*Vérité* 102). Like his fiction, Zola’s articles on and interest in the Dreyfus Affair reflect in equal parts the writer’s attraction to real-life drama suited for a novel and his commitment to improving the national community through political involvement. I contend that this politically literary (or literarily political) agenda ties into and ultimately informs Zola’s nationalist creed, which he developed in and as a result of his exile during the Dreyfus Affair.

When Zola composed his first public article related to the Dreyfus case, he wrote it in a fury, calling it “écrit en coup de foudre...J’étais hanté, je n’en dormais plus, il a fallu que je me soulage. Je trouvais lâche de me taire” (*Corr* 102). This article, seemingly written out of necessity, indeed stresses the dramatic aspects of the Affair—its “personnages,” “beauté si tragique” (*Vérité* 67), and “héros” M. Sheurer-Kestner (*ibid* 69). Then, it quickly gives way to ruminations on the need for justice, even at the risk of dire consequences for the nation’s army and reputation. It concludes with the famous line that would become the Dreyfusards’ refrain, “La vérité est en marche, et rien ne l’arrêtera” (71). It contains both the excitement of a *roman feuilleton* and the political aim of seeking justice. At the end of November 1897, Zola again writes to his wife: “Je désire élargir le débat, en faire une énorme affaire d’humanité et de justice” (*Corr* 109). No longer only about Dreyfus and his family, Zola’s subsequent articles treat the Affair as representative of larger forces defining contemporary society, much as the characters of the *Rougon-Macquart* are but exempla of all of French society under the Second Empire. The article “Le Syndicat,” published only two days later (December 1, 1897), squarely

emphasizes the Affair's significance for France, leaving behind all traces of novelistic intention. In this text, Dreyfus is no longer a single man, Zola writes, but rather "une abstraction, incarnant l'idée de la patrie égorgée, livrée à l'ennemi vainqueur" (*Vérité* 76). As discussed in Chapter 4, Dreyfus's case becomes a symbol for the defeat of Republicanism in France, and hence of the nation's heightened vulnerability to potential enemies into the twentieth century. His tale, much like a fable, serves as evidence for France's decline from a world bastion of republicanism to a substandard authoritarian state ruled by military leadership.

Zola suggests that this trajectory is reversible, that France can indeed recover from such atrocities as rampant anti-Semitism, military corruption, and criminal activity, and he relies on a lexicon of malady, health, and healing to characterize France's situation. In his next publication, entitled "Procès-Verbal" (December 5, 1897), Zola writes that Esterhazy's trial must "cautéris[er] les plaies," and "nous guérir" (84), while anti-Semitism must dissipate "pour notre santé et notre bon renom" (85). In pairing France's health with its reputation, Zola develops a metaphor of both national and international implications that will also form the basis for the primary thesis of *Fécondité*: France must physically and morally rejuvenate at home to spearhead a just, republican movement abroad. The "what" of France's recovery thus stated, Zola moves on to the "how" in his subsequent text, "Lettre à la jeunesse" (December 14, 1897). Here, he pleads with the French youth to not only embrace the republican ideals of widespread truth and justice that their elders fought so hard to realize, but to be even more generous, mindful, and hardworking in order to finally establish France as a paradigm of peace and prosperity. In this idea he anticipates the heart of the subject of *Fécondité*, asking the youth to "nous dépasser par ton amour de la vie normalement vécue, par ton effort mis entier dans le travail, cette fécondité des hommes et de la terre qui saura bien faire enfin

pousser la débordante moisson de joie, sous l'éclatant soleil" (96-97).<sup>50</sup> Here Zola already links the key concepts that would define *Les Quatre Évangiles*—work, fecundity, truth, and justice—in an address to the nation's youth. He sees in the Dreyfus Affair not only an opportunity to usher in the era of republican government (disseminating values from above), but also to teach and nurture the next generation of French citizens (inculcating values from the ground up).

We saw in Chapter 4 how Zola's journalistic defense of Dreyfus became an anticlerical campaign that viewed the Church as an infectious enemy poisoning an otherwise healthy Republic. In his article "Lettre à la France" (January 6, 1898), Zola again stresses the corporeality of the nation infected by the Church's invasion: "On a l'air bien portant, et tout d'un coup de petites taches apparaissent sur la peau : la mort est en vous. Tout ton empoisonnement politique et social vient de te monter à la face" (*Vérité* 105). Here, Zola's emphasis undeniably shifts from the personal dramas of the Affair to its implications for a vulnerable nation, again imagining the nation as an ill organism needing to be "cured." Recall, too, that in "J'Accuse," Zola calls the Affair a stain on the nation ("la France a sur la joue cette souillure") that the president must efface and rectify for his own honor and that of France. The crimes Zola describes at length in this article are committed against the country, rather than only against one man, and the result is a sullied, contaminated nation.<sup>51</sup> This man, moreover, is perfectly abstracted and even deemed "inventé" by du Paty de Clam (*ibid* 115). For Zola, the truth must be restored for

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<sup>50</sup> This passage is also reminiscent of the concluding paragraphs of *Germinal*: as Étienne departs from the mining community he can feel his comrades working under the ground beneath his feet. The narrator comments, "Maintenant, en plein ciel, le soleil d'avril rayonnait dans sa gloire, échauffant la terre qui enfantait" (587).

<sup>51</sup> The press's crime is "d'avoir accusé de troubler la France ceux qui la veulent généreuse...d'égarer l'opinion...d'exploiter le patriotisme pour des œuvres de haine..." (*Vérité* 122), while each individual accused in the article is said to have contributed not merely to the arrest and conviction of a single innocent man, but also to have machinated an "œuvre néfaste," "une des plus grandes iniquités du siècle," and committed a "crime de lèse-humanité et de lèse-justice" (*ibid* 123).



the health and well-being of France, while Dreyfus is reduced to just another actor in a much larger plot (the “Affair”).<sup>52</sup> For Dreyfus’s most staunch defender, the Affair was not about Dreyfus at all, but rather about saving the French nation from irreparable humiliation and deterioration, a goal that Zola’s novels, and especially *Fécondité*, likewise seek to achieve.

Throughout this commentary, and even after returning from exile, Zola sustained the metaphor of a sick nation contaminated by injustice. Reacting to the amnesty Dreyfus accepted, despite the second guilty verdict, Zola wrote: “Dreyfus est libre, mais notre France reste malade” (qtd. in Reinach 2: 898). Zola’s medico-moralist discourse is consistent with the literary-social goal of Naturalism—to understand social phenomena in order to master them, and ultimately “cure” social woes.<sup>53</sup> However, in conceiving of the nation as a “body”—whether healthy or ill—Zola, like other Dreyfusards, comes to consider Dreyfus a mere symbol of a larger social problem. Just as the Church, army, and political leadership were poisons destroying the body politic, so Dreyfus was but a vein in the machine and, unlike these greater forces, he was neither fatal nor necessary to its functioning. In his nationalist discourse, Zola, like many other Dreyfusards, held the value of the collective body politic above that of individual citizens’ bodies, thus imagining a national community fundamentally at odds with Dreyfus’s own vision.

### *Fécondité, Novel of Exile*

From the beginning, then, Zola’s defense of Dreyfus was inseparable from his passion for drama and literature. Even more, as he grew more and more publicly invested in the Dreyfus case, his polemical rhetoric began to mirror the lexicon of his

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<sup>52</sup> Zola repeatedly blames France for the lies resulting in Dreyfus’ conviction (“la démence qui emporte [la France],” *Vérité* 105), while simultaneously stating that exposing the truth will restore the nation’s former glory (“son triomphe certain,” *ibid* 102).

<sup>53</sup> See Zola, *Roman Experimental*, especially ch. 3.

fiction. While analysts are quick to point out the influence of Zola's literature on his politics, they are hesitant in this instance to see the reverse influence, going so far as to deny any relation between the novel *Fécondité* and Zola's exile or involvement in the Affair (Baguley 81). However, as the remaining sections of this chapter aim to demonstrate, Zola's literary and political aspirations from this time cannot be separated; for him, writing, whether articles, essays, or novels, had to serve the interest of the French nation, and thus the world.<sup>54</sup> His decision to self-exile is further evidence of this claim: in so doing he hoped to redirect the course of France's development, rather than act on the purely individual motive of avoiding imprisonment or even the more empathic concern for Dreyfus' fate. And yet, Zola's vision of the nation—what it was, and what it should aspire to be—differs in important respects from those of the *exilés* before him. Zola describes the values that France must embody—those born of the 1789 Revolution, that is to say truth, justice, freedom, and fraternity, and in this his imagined community resembles the idealistic image of Republican France common to other exiles. In addition, however, Zola's construal of the French nation as “body politic” literally takes into account the power of the people's collectivity of *bodies*, which, in *Fécondité*, holds the key to national citizenship and fuel global imperialism. In his exilic novel, Zola posits popular sovereignty during a time of intense mistrust of authority, be it presidential, judicial, or military. His protagonists, the Froment family, represent the new populace that, bolstered by republican ideals, breaks free of authoritarian restraint and begins to self-govern. This process resembles the shift from monarchy to democracy that characterizes the entire nineteenth century and has been theorized by Eric Santner in *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (2011).

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<sup>54</sup> Zola writes in “Dépopulation” (May 23, 1896), an article for *Le Figaro* that sums up the impetus for *Fécondité*, “O mères françaises, faites donc des enfants, pour que la France garde son rang, sa force et sa prospérité, car il est nécessaire au salut du monde que la France vive, elle d'où est partie l'émancipation humaine, elle d'où partiront toute vérité et toute justice!” (OC 14: 790)

By comparing Zola's writings during the Dreyfus Affair to his novel *Fécondité*, my analysis offers an example of what this shift looked like at the close of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, a critical look at Zola's utopian depiction of the Froment family's vast proliferation and resulting sovereignty helps expose the very real implications of evolving biopolitical regimes on the demographic landscape in the twentieth century.

Surprisingly, *Fécondité* is widely read to evoke numerous historical specificities (such as depopulation and the roles of women, breastfeeding, and childbirth in either sustaining the nation's vigor or challenging its patriarchal framework), but it is also understood to neglect the pivotal historical moment—the Dreyfus Affair—during which it was written.<sup>55</sup> This oversight may stem from the work's status as a thesis novel, that is a work whose didacticism often eclipses its literary import. Critics tend to zero in on *Fécondité*'s obvious thesis—that social utopia arises from widespread adherence to the “religion de la mère,” as Zola puts it—rather than examine the more subtle details of its language and message. However, as Susan Suleiman has demonstrated in her work on the thesis novel, this genre can be a powerful tool of rhetoric designed to persuade its readership to think, and therefore act, in a certain way (1983). In *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*, Suleiman defines the thesis novel as “a novel written in the realistic mode (that is, based on an aesthetic of verisimilitude and representation), which signals itself to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical, or religious doctrine” (7). If we read *Fécondité* in the light of Zola's polemical position during a time of national upheaval (in fact, Suleiman notes that most all thesis novels are written during such times of political debate, and furthermore almost all those in her study were written

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<sup>55</sup> For the theme of depopulation in *Fécondité*, see Baguley, Ch. 2, Counter, and Huebner; for the role of women and breastfeeding see Bertrand-Jennings, Toubin-Malinas, Mayer-Robin, Perry, and Marcus.

during the Dreyfus Affair), we can perceive how the interest of this thesis novel goes beyond the general preaching of the cult of motherhood on a global scale, to trying to persuade actual partisan readers in France to follow his proposed course for strengthening the nation.<sup>56</sup> Moments in the text where Zola recognizes his readership as those in France suffering the effects of the Dreyfus Affair suggest that *Fécondité* indeed reflects this tumultuous time and that, as with his other novels and writings, Zola's literature cannot be considered separately from his politics. A thorough analysis of the novel will reveal just what Zola's politics were at this time and how he defined "France" and "Frenchness."

To my knowledge, no one has yet proposed a reading of *Fécondité* as a novel evoking Zola's time in exile or his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair. David Baguley's book-length study of the novel (1973) is perhaps the most thorough treatment of the novel's themes and style. He argues that *Fécondité* be read in cohesion with Zola's oeuvre, as it develops the same themes and myths pertaining to scientific progress, fecundity, and society, albeit in the form of a dream accomplished rather than a brutal, deterministic process. Baguley analyzes the religious dimension of Zola's *roman à thèse*, but nonetheless concludes that the text favors a leftist, republican, and *laïque* ideology (26), while suggesting that the text's ostensibly Christian morality should be read independently of the Church's doctrine (178). And, given that there is no mention of the Affair in Zola's preparatory notes to the novel, Baguley goes so far as to state that there is "aucun effort pour relier les problèmes sociaux et nationaux qui le préoccupent sur le plan littéraire à ceux qu'il affronte sur le plan politique. [...] Le rôle de Zola dans l'Affaire a donc peu d'intérêt pour l'étude de ce roman" (81). I propose here, on the contrary, an

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<sup>56</sup> Suleiman does not examine *Fécondité* in her study.

alternate reading of Zola's novel: through the very religiosity of Zola's text, I suggest we see a link to his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair.

Although Zola conceived of the idea for *Fécondité* prior to his flight, he began his preparatory notes in December of 1897, exactly the time he started publishing articles in defense of Dreyfus, while he composed the novel in its entirety during his short year in exile (Baguley 80).<sup>57</sup> *Fécondité* is the first novel of the series *Les Quatre Évangiles* (along with *Travail*, 1901, *Vérité*, 1903, and the unwritten *Justice*), an extension of the series *Les Trois Villes*, all aimed at depicting Zola's utopian vision of the coming century. In the author's words, writing *Fécondité* was a means of letting go of his self-imposed obligation to represent all aspects of reality; in this novel he could allow himself to "rêver un peu."<sup>58</sup> As a *roman à thèse*, *Fécondité* seeks to prescribe a certain ideology, and then to persuade its readership of its validity. This ideology can be summed up as the "religion of the mother," and those characters that honor this belief (the Froments, the doctor Boutan) are celebrated and successful while those who reject it (the Beauchênes, Séguin, Morange) suffer as a result of their ostensible heresy (in the form of losing children, wealth, and their own lives). In a conversation with the protagonist Mathieu Froment, the doctor Boutan acts as a spokesman for this primary thesis that informs all the novel's events:

Dans notre démocratie, la femme, dès qu'elle est enceinte, devient auguste. C'est elle qui est le symbole de toute grandeur, de toute force, de toute beauté. La vierge n'est que néant, la mère est l'éternité de la vie. Il lui faut un culte social, elle devrait être notre religion. Quand nous saurons adorer la mère, la patrie d'abord, puis l'humanité seront sauvées... C'est pourquoi je voudrais, mon ami, que cette image d'une mère allaitant son enfant soit la plus haute expression de la beauté humaine. Ah! Comment donc persuader à nos Parisiennes, à toutes nos Françaises, que la beauté d'une femme est d'être mère, avec un enfant sur les

<sup>57</sup> It is true that the idea for *Fécondité* precedes the Affair entirely: in his 1896 article "Dépopulation," Zola says that the idea occurred nearly a dozen years earlier (*OC* 785). However, the composition of the text, I will argue, evokes the Affair and exile in subtle ways that can greatly enrich our appreciation of this understudied work.

<sup>58</sup> Zola writes in a letter to Octave Mirbeau on November 29, 1899: "Voici quarante ans que je dissèque, il faut bien permettre à mes vieux jours de rêver un peu" (qtd. in Pagès 323).

genoux? Le jour où cette mode-là prendrait, comme celle de la coiffure en bandeaux ou celle des jupes étroites, nous serions la nation reine, maîtresse du monde! (*OC* 8: 202).<sup>59</sup>

This passage ties together several key aspects of Zola's thought, and we can extrapolate from a close analysis of it a reading of the novel in general. Here, we perceive a direct line drawn from the individual mother who births her own children, to the building of an entire nation, which, finally, results in the widespread health and happiness of all of humanity. But, rather than a perfectly equal and peaceful co-existence among all nations, France alone ("nous") emerges as the world's most powerful leader. France is credited with having first sewn the seeds of this ideology then, presumably, spread them single-handedly across the globe. This infuses Zola's utopian vision with an imperial dimension. The Froment family's vast proliferation not only on their own land, but also into the French capital and its African colonies, actualizes this dream. At the close of the novel, they alone are credited with having built the utopian empire, even as their personal victory is relinquished to allow for the more general aggrandizement of humankind: "...leur œuvre achevée, prodigue, inépuisable. Ils n'avaient plus rien à eux, rien que le bonheur d'avoir tout donné à la vie" (502, my emphasis).<sup>60</sup> In addition to reproduction, a certain religiosity is likewise an important factor in the nation's triumph, as a steadfast commitment to and belief in the biological aspects of motherhood (here, pregnancy and breastfeeding) are imagined to engender humanity's physical and moral salvation. The depiction of the "Parisienne" as the life-producing mother's urban foil indicates the centrality of land and soil in Zola's vision of the nation. Finally, the whole ideology is bound up in an aesthetic vision of society; its import is not only utilitarian, it is also

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<sup>59</sup> All citations from *Fécondité* hereafter referred to only by page number.

<sup>60</sup> In fact, as Katrina Perry astutely points out, not all copious reproducers are successful in Zola's text, thus contradicting the stringent "thesis" of the novel that would have all those families with numerous children rewarded for their efforts (94). It is undeniable that the Froment family is singled out; I am arguing that it is because they embody Zola's brand of "Frenchness" in ways beyond mere reproduction of bodies.

beautiful. Zola's ideal mother thus literally and figuratively embodies the nation; he names the Froment mother Marianne, an evocation of the Republic, and she is both the head (leader, "maîtresse") and body (her body creates the people who make up the nation—"le symbole de toute grandeur, de toute force") of France. Zola's imagined national community adheres to the French secular republicanism that characterized the Dreyfusard camp at the end of the nineteenth century but proposes an essential modification. While the general Dreyfusard mindset of the time (to sum up briefly) advocated individual rights against an authoritarian state (reflected primarily in the military and the church), Zola's brand of republicanism displaces the authoritarian voice onto the family, and more specifically onto the mother and father who together create the bodies and land of the nation.<sup>61</sup> In *Fécondité*, Zola thus proposes a new kind of holy authority that would propel a strong and glorified France into the future. This driving force is the amalgamation of the concepts mother/God/land/nation.

Meanwhile, Zola also defines his readership in this short passage with the personal pronoun "nous," referring to the French, and the invocation of "toutes les Françaises" who must be convinced of this new, righteous way of life. He appeals to those readers disappointed with France's lack of vigor by suggesting, in the conditional, that "nous serions la nation reine" if only they would uphold his recommendation. Believing that the nation is currently weak is, in fact, a prerequisite to hearing Zola's argument for a new society based on the cult of motherhood, and readers during the uproar of the Dreyfus Affair would not have been able to deny France's current state of

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<sup>61</sup> Roger Soltau, in *French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (1931) calls French Republicanism during the Dreyfus Affair "difficult to define" because of the variety of philosophies emerging on the scene (322). However, in his subsequent discussion it becomes easier to grasp what Republicanism was by understanding what it was not—it was not, he suggests, strong allegiance to church, military, or an authoritarian state (322-358). Zola here offers an alternative "authority"—the family.

despair.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Zola implicitly addresses the youth in this passage by proposing that, thanks to his newfound “religion,” they will be the future generation of imperial leaders. Doctor Boutan here mirrors Zola’s role in “Lettre à la Jeunesse,” discussed earlier. Both seek to guide the nation’s youth during a period of national decline by indoctrinating them with a particular nationalist ideology. This role is highlighted when Mathieu goes to the doctor with his excitement about rejuvenating Chantebled, a formerly desolate landscape that Mathieu and his family will acquire, repair, and make flourish. Boutan replies, “vous flattez toutes mes idées, voilà plus de dix ans que je ne cesse de démontrer la nécessité, pour la France, si elle veut reflourir les familles nombreuses, de se remettre à la passion, au culte de la terre, de désertir les villes pour la vie forte et féconde des champs” (199). He subsequently vows himself “prêt au même combat” (199). Boutan echoes Zola’s letter to the French youth at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, in which the author implores them to carry on the values of the French Revolution, encourages them to surpass their elders for the sake of France, and joins them in the battle for truth and justice. *Fécondité* announces a nascent nationalism specific to the epoch of the Dreyfus Affair, when internal strife and military weakness contributed to a sense of national decline and disillusionment with France’s core values. Although Zola proposes a future utopia, he never loses sight of the present turmoil that gave rise to such dreams.

Nor does he fail to include his actual readership in his discourse. Writing in exile, Zola chose the genre of “authoritarian fiction” (to borrow Suleiman’s translation of “*roman à thèse*”) to dictate a new way of life to his (French) readership through a variety of exempla. Suleiman points out that the parable of the sower is the first such exemplum

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<sup>62</sup> Zola in fact wrote that the *Quatre Évangiles* project was his dutiful response to contemporary social concerns: “I am merely placing certain problems before them, and suggesting in some respects certain solutions, showing what I hold to be wrong and what I think would be right” (qtd. in Przybos 178).



in the New Testament and serves as an excellent example for understanding how the *roman à thèse* functions as a didactic tool (28-31). Interestingly, the content as well as the form of this parable are reflected in *Fécondité*. In Jesus's tale (Matthew 13:1-23), seeds are sown in differing soils to demonstrate how the "good soil" will alone bear fruit. In *Fécondité*, the fertile soil is also a metaphor for the female womb, and the text functions as a didactic tool instructing readers how to best achieve the goal of healthy reproduction. Zola stages a variety of families, each with their own ways of bearing and raising children, to demonstrate that there exists a "right" theory among many "wrong" ones. Each family functions, like the soils in the parable, as an exemplum: the Beauchêne couple limits their reproduction in order to keep most of their wealth then ends up losing their only son and their ability to bequeath their fortune along with him; the Morange mother and daughter perish gruesomely after undergoing back-alley abortions; the Séguin father, practicing abstinence at home, resorts to adultery, which in turn leads to gambling, loss of fortune, and intense marital suffering; and finally the Froments reproduce limitlessly and enjoy enormous power, wealth, and success. The readers of course are meant to identify with the successful heroes, but this presupposes that the reader already carries a particular political and biological inclination. If one criticizes Zola's text for its unwavering and monovocal thesis, the text counter-argues that only those predisposed to understanding its message (in Jesus' parable, "hearing" the story) will reap its benefits. The text thus inherently designates those who can properly interpret then enact its story as alone worthy of its meaning, and those readers must resemble Mathieu and Marianne: they are youthful, hardworking, and patriotic.

This helps explain why the working-class *exemplum* in the novel, the Moineaud family, continue to suffer in poverty despite their copious reproduction: they lack the education, motivation, and especially youthfulness that foment success. Zola targeted

those who would be critical of the current course of the nation and simultaneously eager and willing to pioneer political change, that is to say the French youth whom he also addressed in the context of the Dreyfus Affair. Writing during a momentous period of social division in France, Zola must have known that he would not easily convince an opposing camp of his convictions, and so he seems to have “chosen” not only the Froments, but his readers as well. And, paradoxically, he identified religiosity as an important characteristic of his ideal readership. By composing *Fécondité* in the spirit of a re-writing of the Bible (both by entitling his new series *Les Quatre Évangiles* and by evoking biblical forms throughout the text), Zola offers his readers an alternate unifying belief to the increasingly antagonistic political persuasions dividing his country.<sup>63</sup> This religiosity also serves, however, to further delimit the intended reader’s values: he is politically secular (against resurging clericalism) yet privately religious (if not believing in God, at the very least, unwilling to abandon a certain amount of Western, Biblically-based spirituality). In addition, Zola appeals to the reader’s revolutionary spirit by pointing the way toward a radical overhaul of the entire French system based on this new “religion de la mère”: Boutan’s depiction of mandatory maternal breastfeeding is called “une révolution” (213), while the very idea of “fécondité” (referred to at different moments in the text as the “pullulement,” or “poussée du nombre”) is repeatedly described as a revolutionary movement (36, 417, 499). Mathieu’s experience of enlightenment is in fact depicted as a fusion of cult and revolution. Upon realizing that what distinguishes him from the others is his ability to love, he desires to conceive both

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<sup>63</sup> Examples of the text’s biblical form are the refrain that opens each chapter of Book IV: “Deux [or Quatre] ans se passèrent. Et pendant ces deux [quatre] années, Mathieu et Marianne eurent un enfant encore [...]” (247, 262, 281, 297, 317); and that which closes the chapters: “Et c’était toujours la grande oeuvre, la bonne oeuvre, l’oeuvre de fécondité [...]” (262, 280, 297, 316, 331). Here Zola uses repetition and moralization as in a Bible story. Additionally, Mathieu and Marianne achieve the biblical age of 100 years, and their enormous family branches out like that of Abraham and Sarah to establish a new tribe of people. For an alternate analysis of the Biblical forms used in the text, see Evenhuis. Rather than see this as a form of persuasion, Evenhuis suggests that its excessiveness has the opposite effect.

children and the new society. He exclaims, “Voilà donc la vérité que je cherchais! C’est le désir, c’est l’amour qui sauvent. Qui aimera, qui enfantera, qui créera, est le sauveur révolutionnaire, le faiseur d’hommes pour le monde qui va naître” (237). The “revolutionary savior” is at once a political and religious messiah with the power to spread the “truth” and reinvigorate the French nation. This “truth” concerns the political regime (socialism over capitalism), religion (motherhood), and everyday values (justice, fraternity, love), summing up what, in Zola’s view, it would mean to be “French.” This purported fictional utopia reflects the reality of the French situation in which neighbors were engaging in hostile ideological battles, and it remained up to the next generation to re-establish a united nation by fighting for its survival, promulgating the “right” views, and effecting just political change.

The blurring of fiction and reality goes in both directions: while readers are impelled to model themselves on the Froments, the fictional Mathieu in many respects emulates his actual creator. Zola, too exhibited a relentless faith in work and creation, as Baguley suggests (127), but even more interestingly he was, like his protagonist, an outcast exiled from the dominant national space. Following Mathieu’s epiphany, Zola writes, “Jamais il n’avait si nettement compris que leur ménage, que sa femme et lui étaient autres” (237). Mathieu’s encounters with the urban Parisian space further highlight his feeling of “otherness.” Whereas Mathieu and Marianne’s countryside is characterized by the “vaste étendue” of plains, slopes, woods, and greenery, uncharted but nonetheless promising future proliferation and even love (176-77), Paris is described as “le champ pierreux, la terre calcinée, où la semence se desséchait, jetée au hasard de la rue, en haine de la moisson....Paris enfin mal ensemené, ne produisant pas la grande et saine moisson qu’il aurait dû produire” (73-4). The result is a diminishing, and therefore powerless, national space—“le Paris qui voulait mourir” (73). More than establishing the

opposition between the fertile countryside and the sterile city, Zola depicts these two sides engaged in a veritable fight for power, illustrated by Mathieu's inner struggle with sexual temptation. While he strolls about the city at night, he is haunted by Sérafine's proposal of "une nuit stérile" (76): "Jamais il n'avait été en proie à un combat si rude, ne sachant plus où était la sagesse et la vérité, sous les assauts que sa raison recevait depuis le matin; et il restait éperdu, au milieu des sollicitations brûlantes du milieu, dans ce Paris sacrifiant au culte de la jouissance égoïste" (76). The temptation grows in him, Sérafine and Paris fuse into one image ("Sérafine devenait comme l'incarnation même de cette ville ardente," 77), and the military vocabulary continues: Mathieu begins to give in to desire "comme l'appel victorieux du plaisir pour le plaisir" (77) as even the scent of Sérafine/Paris "conquers" him, and all men ("dont l'odeur seule les conquérait" 77). Just as Mathieu is about to fall prey to Paris' seduction, he envisions Marianne and "l'immense paix fraîche de la campagne" (78), and runs to the Gare du Nord "pour se jeter dans un wagon" (78) and escape home to her, "la face au petit vent froid de la nuit, comme pour se laver du désir mauvais" (78). The battle is between Mathieu (brave, idealistic, and rooted in a set of concrete values) and the urban crowd (luring, violent, and ultimately irrational)—in other words, between the lone fighter seeking to stay on the just and true path and the national community that has strayed from all reason and thus lost its power. It is a small jump to see in this figurative war Zola-the-republican-Dreyfusard taking on the senseless anti-Semitic French crowd, as he did throughout his two trials, then fleeing by train in the middle of the night to the safe (though rural and isolated) haven of his English exile.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> In *Zola's Crowds*, Schor interestingly does not discuss the actual violent crowd Zola faced before fleeing into exile and undertaking the utopian project of *Les Quatre Évangiles*. If we heed her claims that there is an original, ritual, violent sacrifice inscribed throughout the *Rougon-Macquart* series, we might extend her analysis to apply to Zola himself during the Dreyfus Affair: he actually becomes the sacrificial black sheep, exiled in an attempt to restore harmony to a community in crisis. In this view, *Fécondité* (also not mentioned in Schor's study) stands out for

The *rapprochement* of the author's and the protagonist's fight against society is supported by the language Zola uses throughout the novel: the militaristic lexicon of conquest and battle as well as the republican vocabulary of truth and justice characterize Zola's numerous letters regarding his fight in Dreyfus Affair as well as the Froment family's quest to disseminate world peace. In his letters, Zola tirelessly advocates the perpetual search for truth, justice, and reason in the midst of what was perceived as pure folly—Esterhazy's acquittal and Dreyfus' continued persecution. Meanwhile, early on in *Fécondité*, Mathieu likens the expatriation of large numbers of people to the decline of the nation, citing the historic demolition of "weak" civilizations at the hands of stronger ones. He waxes philosophical:

Alors, vous ne craignez plus le péril jaune, ce terrible pullulement des barbares asiatiques qui devaient, à un moment fatal, déborder sur notre Europe, la bouleverser et la féconder de nouveau?... Toujours l'histoire a recommencé ainsi, par des déplacements brusques d'océans, par des invasions de peuples brutaux venant redonner du sang aux peuples affaiblis (60).

The inflow of people as they topple over entire civilizations resembles that of oceans, echoing Hugo's and Michel's revolutionary oceanic poetics. In Mathieu's thought, civilizations are thus destroyed and recomposed until, finally, truth and justice might triumph. This sets the stage for Mathieu and his family to be that driving force that will advance the rational, civilized choice—truth and justice—in the battle against folly and savagery. Indeed, in the novel's final scene Zola weaves together the notions of conquest and justice in describing the Froment family reunion: "C'était le flot de la fécondité victorieuse" (498), he writes, "qu'on refasse un monde avec cette beauté triomphante de la mère qui allaite l'enfant" (499), and "[La fécondité victorieuse] était la grande révolutionnaire, l'ouvrière incessante du progrès, la mère de toutes les civilisations,

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the way it revises certain themes highlighted by Schor, signifying a transition in Zola's career from depicting exile and sacrifice to experiencing it. Mathieu Froment plays the counterpart to Zola's earlier protagonists: rather than the outsider arriving in a new community, he is in a sense an insider choosing to be set apart; rather than provoking a sacrificial murder, he ensues on a mission to endlessly procreate.

recréant sans cesse l'armée de ses lutteurs innombrables, jetant au cours des siècles des milliards de pauvres, d'affamés, de révoltés, à la conquête de la vérité et de la justice" (499). Throughout *Fecondité*, reason (as the practice of fecundity) is something to fight for, and because it is right it ultimately triumphs, and as a result the future nation flourishes. This language is replicated in Zola's discussions of the Dreyfus Affair, and indeed the idea of fighting tooth and nail for the triumph of reason characterizes actors on both sides of the Dreyfus debate. In this analysis, the demise of France due to a declining birth rate suggested by *Fécondité* is likened to the loss of national dignity as a result of the actual military scandal France was facing. While Zola planned to write a novel addressing the former before the Affair, it seems the latter nonetheless seeped in to his novel as he sat down to compose *Fécondité* from exile.

Like Zola then, Mathieu escapes the madness of Parisian degeneration and retreats to his own space (Chantebled) from which he can reflect, like his creator, on his society and his role in shaping it. Chantebled is only one of the protagonist's numerous creations—"ce Chantebled [...] Quelle belle tâche, quelle création pour un homme!" (178) Mathieu proclaims as he begins to ponder acquiring the abandoned terrain in Chapter 1 of Book 3. A few pages later, when he shares his grandiose idea with his wife Marianne, Mathieu again refers to Chantebled as "tout un royaume de blé, tout un monde nouveau," eliciting a comparison between the forlorn, rural property and the "wild" space the Third Republic's colonizers were also in the process of appropriating. Indeed, by the last chapter of book 4, Mathieu has successfully domesticated and enriched Chantebled, of which he becomes "roi, par sa conquête prudente, élargissant son empire, à mesure qu'il se sentait devenir fort, dans son combat pour les subsistances" (329). The Froment family has become the conquerors Mathieu alluded to earlier on. As already discussed, *Fécondité* is riddled with this military lexicon of conquest ("conquête" and

“conquérir” appear in the novel 67 times combined) and battle (“combat” and its derivatives over 30 times); sister words “lutte,” “victoire,” and “triompher” likewise appear repeatedly (55, 50, and 68 times respectively). The Froment family’s success is thus characterized not only as personal gain but also, as in a veritable war, as the accumulation of power and the victory of a particular ideology—summed up as “fecundity.” By harvesting Chantebled and populating the land with their offspring, Mathieu and his descendants achieve sovereignty for their family; they break free from the demise of the nation, represented by abortions depicted as murders, destroyed families, and the failures of those who practice birth control, while at the same time they begin to transform their environment, both physically and socially. Their ideology of the life- and happiness-producing power of motherhood and hard work is shown to be the most effective and enjoyable means of building an empire, of particular interest to France on the threshold of the twentieth century.

Power in *Fécondité* is thus transferred onto the bodies of the children and the spaces they inhabit—whether the rural Arcadia of Chantebled, the urban industry of the Parisian factory, or, as in the case of Nicolas Froment and his family, pre-colonial Africa. In Zola’s utopian vision, this physiological construction of sovereignty displaces other authoritarian voices in the text—for example that of the landowner Séguin, factory manager Beauchêne, or the poor but economical Morange family. Henceforth Zola signals the demise of those forms of power these figures represent—the aristocracy, capitalism, and the rising petite bourgeoisie—and replaces them with a corporeal power inherent to the French citizen, wherever s/he may be. He singles out the Froment family values as not only individual and familial, but also as having the ability to engender national sovereignty and global dominion through the dissemination of their bodily mass across the continents. Zola, writing from outside France yet maintaining allegiance and

attachment to his nation, here finds a way to belong to the national community all the while being exiled from it. The final line of the novel evokes, in point of fact, the exodus of all humankind, a Biblical image that can be seen to directly relate to the writer's experience in exile: "Et c'était l'exode, l'expansion humaine par le monde, l'humanité en marche, à l'infini" (502). The use of the term "en marche" equally evokes the Dreyfusard refrain, also coined by Zola, "la vérité est en marche." The text's imperialist conclusion distinguishes it from Zola's previous novels that also lionize the mother figure and develop the idea of the *terra mater* (i.e. *La Terre*, 1887; *Le Docteur Pascal*, 1893) (see also Przybos 181-2), furthering my contention that *Fécondité* must be read as an exilic text and that the imperialist culmination of Zola's nationalist creed may indeed have come to fruition in this novel as a result of the author's exile during the Dreyfus Affair.

"Que la terre nous soit une bonne mère!": *Zola's Imagined Community*

An analysis of the role of land and soil in Zola's nationalist cult of motherhood will lay the groundwork for my theoretical analysis of Zola's body politic in the final section. At the close of Book 1, Mathieu lies with Marianne in the peacefulness of their countryside home and reflects on the population control arguments he confronted in the capital. Removed from the Parisian environment, where individual desires for social advancement reign, Mathieu cogitates on what is best for the greater community, and wonders whether Séguin is right: the larger the population the more widespread the poverty. But, he reasons, "Seulement, ce n'était là qu'un fait social, dépendant de l'injustice des hommes, et non de l'avarice de la terre, qui aurait nourri des nations décuplées, le jour où serait réglée la question du travail nécessaire, distribué entre tous, pour la santé et pour la joie" (90). Mathieu separates the social from the natural, imagining that with a more just (in this case, socialist) system in place the problem of



collective happiness could be resolved—indeed, would be resolved since the earth would respond in kind. Easily convinced, he experiences a moment of enlightenment:

Et ce fut comme une délivrance, un souffle vivifiant d'infini, lorsque cette certitude lui revint que la fécondité avait fait la civilisation, que c'était le trop d'êtres, ce pullulement des misérables, exigeant leur part légitime de bonheur, qui avait soulevé les peuples, de secousse en secousse, jusqu'à la conquête de la vérité et de la justice. [...] Puisque la fécondité faisait la civilisation, et que celle-ci réglait celle-là, il était permis de prévoir que, le jour où les temps seraient remplis, où il n'y aurait qu'un peuple fraternel sur le globe entièrement habité, un équilibre définitif s'établirait. Mais, jusque-là, dans des mille ans et des mille ans, c'était œuvre juste, œuvre bonne, que de ne point perdre une semence, de les confier toutes à la terre, comme le semeur dont la moisson ne saurait être trop abondante, cette moisson des hommes où chaque homme de plus est une force et une espérance (90-91).

Mathieu's revelation is first described in quasi-religious terms ("délivrance" coming from the "infini") available to anyone open to its message (the indefinite "une" implies generality), then quickly transforms into a rational conclusion all should simply accept (the demonstrative "cette certitude" establishes the revelation as a universal and singular truth). It is so valid ("légitime") that it will spark a just uprising of both people ("soulevé les peuples") and land ("secousse en secousse") and ultimately result in a new order ("conquête"). This truth is that of fecundity as the producer of civilization, and here "la civilisation" is understood to be Western, read French, civilization as opposed to the barbarism of those peoples yet to be "civilized" under the Third Republic.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the end society is singular ("qu'un peuple fraternel"), which in turn manifests a perfect equilibrium among individuals. Republican values can still be gleaned from this description of Zola's utopian community in the phrases "fraternel," "équilibre," "vérité," and "justice," but the community, however widespread and global, cannot be separated

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<sup>65</sup> Earlier, we saw this racial categorization with the "pullulement des barbares asiatiques" on European soil, and at the close of the novel we see the racial division again; Dominique, Nicolas Froment's oldest son, announces his civilizing mission in Africa, a mission that also parallels perfectly the Froment mission at home: "une famille française installée en plein chez les sauvages [...] Nous portons notre bonne vieille France là-bas, nous nous sommes taillé, au milieu des terres vierges, un champ illimité qui deviendra une province [...] Il n'est pas, aux colonies, de race plus féconde que la race française [...] Et nous pullulerons, et nous emplirons le monde!" (497).

from the soil that produces it. The “œuvre” is to entrust the land with human seeds, which will in turn produce a “moisson des hommes.” Here, land and womb are one and the same, together creating the “force” and “espérance” to propel France powerfully and righteously into the future. By locating the nation’s strength in its everyday men and women working, harvesting, and developing their land, Zola imagines not only a model for a Republican, egalitarian society but also for a sovereign society, liberated of any leadership exterior to the workers themselves. His imagined national community functions as a single unit, infinitely expandable, in which people live in a symbiotic relationship with the land they inhabit. The land thus becomes like a person itself—both parent and offspring, provider and dependent—and even more, like Zola’s ideal mother, it receives infinite seeds and creates as much life as it can.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, Mathieu then turns his attention at once to the fertile murmurs of the spring evening and the soft breath of Marianne in bed, confusing the two in their reproductive promises: “tout germait, tout poussait, s’épanouissait, en cette saison d’amour” (91). He concludes that the loss of seed—whether a plant’s, animal’s, or his own—constitutes a form of death and vows to abandon his declaration of sterility. But his decision does not only come from a place of reason and philosophy; he also desires, and this desire is good: “il n’y eut plus que le désir, l’insatiable et éternel désir qui a créé les mondes [...] Le désir, toute l’âme de l’univers est là, la force qui soulève la matière, qui fait des atomes une intelligence, une puissance, une souveraineté” (91). Marianne lies awake, and desire is not absent from her will either: “Mais d’elle, quand même, émanait

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<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note here how the Zolian mother in *Fécondité*, when seen in resemblance to the land, becomes infantilized and objectified. Although Marianne will assume a certain amount of intellectual power both in this passage and throughout the novel, she is rarely the agent of change or progress. That role is reserved for Mathieu and his sons. This observation supports Katrina Perry’s argument that the female bodies in Zola’s novel are the product of male desire and not, as Carmen Mayer-Robin suggests, the incarnation of the progressive feminization of the Republic (see Perry 92 and Mayer-Robin 76-7). To add to the work of both of these scholars, I am arguing that women, and more specifically mothers, are indeed endowed with a democratic power in Zola’s text, but that that power is meaningless without a concurrent connection to the soil.

le triomphant désir” (91). While Mathieu’s desire is that of an omnipotent creator, Marianne’s is almost an afterthought (“quand même”) and is immediately linked to her body, reinforcing the claim that the male power, though itself unable to bear offspring, is nonetheless superior to the female’s in the text. Still, it is the couple’s mutual desire that allows them to engage willfully in the act of procreation, which will reward them with greater strength, power, and sovereignty. When Mathieu finally apologizes for having suggested they should cease having children, Marianne responds, “Oh! Moi, je n’ai pas douté, je savais bien que tu allais me reprendre” (92), an expression that at once endows her with greater intelligence while relegating her to the position of his servant and object of his desire. As they finally give in to “l’amour vainqueur” (92), the ideas of love, nature, land, and life again meld together and conception takes place as a result of these combined forces:

Et ce fut un long baiser d’amour, sur l’invitation de l’amoureuse, de la féconde nuit de printemps, qui entraînait toute par la fenêtre [...]. La sève de la terre montait, procréait dans l’ombre, embaumée d’une odeur de vivante ivresse. [...] C’était le frisson d’accouplement des milliards d’êtres, le spasme universel de fécondation, la conception nécessaire, continue de la vie qui donne la vie. Et toute la nature, une fois encore, voulut ainsi qu’un être de plus fût conçu. (92)

It is unclear who is the agent or recipient of desire in this passage: both Marianne and the “féconde nuit” instigate the act of procreation, and both are inseminated. The entire world seems to rejoice along with them, establishing a world that tends toward life. This commitment to procreation is what magnifies and validates Mathieu and Marianne’s love (“Si [...] ils avaient restreint l’acte, ils ne se seraient plus aimés de tout leur être,” 92), their happiness (“Voilà la semence jetée au sillon, dans un cri de délirant bonheur” 93), their power (“que [la semence] germe donc et qu’elle fasse de la vie encore, de l’humanité, de l’intelligence et de la puissance!” 93), and, most importantly their sovereignty (“le fait souverain de la conception, un être de plus, non pas de la misère, mais de la force, de la vérité, de la justice de plus” 93). The ability to contribute their

seed, their life, and their values to the richness of the land ultimately endues them with political power in the nation's development, a power that stems from a certain holiness. Zola writes that the couple "eurent la superbe, la divine imprévoyance" (92) in conceiving a child at that time, suggesting that Mathieu and Marianne are compelled by God in their actions as much as by philosophy, enlightenment, or desire. This not only validates their decision (or lack thereof) from a religious perspective, but also further defines their characters which, we will remember, are the model of the ideal French citizen; they are at once educated and philosophical, republican and rational, loving and sexual, and religious and spiritual. Zola manages to make procreation a product of these combined influences, and to show that when they all work together a utopian "France" is born.

As a result of their increasing number and righteous, "French" attitude, the Froments go on to populate, develop, and consequently colonize, the land(s) they inhabit. Zola writes of Mathieu's feat, "C'était pour [ses enfants] qu'il conquérirait un champ nouveau, il donnait une patrie à son petit peuple. Plus tard, les racines, tout ce qui attache et nourrit serait là, même si plusieurs se dispersaient, allaient par le monde, aux diverses situations sociales" (296). Mathieu effectively creates France, and then the world, in his image. The first Froment children indeed expand Mathieu's "kingdom" by carrying on its initiatives at home and imparting its inspirations to others. Nicolas is the first child to take his father's ("le dieu créateur," 435) teachings out of France. He has his sights set on Africa, but is careful to marry a French woman first so that his conquest is not in vain; to depart without the hopes of spreading French genes and values would be meaningless. Mathieu and Marianne understand they may never see this son again, but they recognize that this is the necessary next step in their plan:

Leur consentement allait être leur part de cruel sacrifice, leur don suprême à la vie, la dîme que la vie prélevait sur leur tendresse, sur leur sang. Il fallait à la

victoire de la vie, sans cesse conquérante, ce lambeau de leur chair, ce trop-plein de la famille nombreuse, qui débordait, s'étendait, colonisait le monde [...] Au-delà de la patrie, il y a les vastes continents inhabités encore, et la semence que charrient les souffles du ciel ne connaît pas de frontières. Après la race, il y a l'humanité, l'élargissement sans fin, le peuple unique et fraternel des temps accomplis, quand la terre entière ne sera qu'une ville de vérité et de justice (446).

Again we can perceive Zola's own situation in his characters' conflict; he too had to sacrifice life on French soil for the victory of truth and justice. To assure such a victory at home was to reinforce it abroad, for once France had emerged healed and triumphant from its own challenges (the 1870 defeat, the Dreyfus Affair, the declining birth rate), it would be able to lead other, presumably less developed nations in the pursuit of true, just, republican progress. In this passage the spread of the Froments' bodies—their blood, their flesh, their offspring—is once again confused with the earth's geography: “semence” is at once the male seed of Mathieu and actual grains dispersed by wind; “déborder” refers to the vast family outgrowing its space while evoking, as in an earlier passage, the movement of the oceans tumbling over various continents; and finally, the “race” of people founded here by the Froments develops alongside and in conjunction with “la terre entière” to establish widespread truth and justice. In Zola's vision, the individual family creates the nation (“la patrie”), which goes on to colonize the world and install universal equality. The end result is “le peuple unique,” which is to imply French and, even more, of the Froment brand of Frenchness. They earn their power by conquering and appropriating their neighbors' lands, families, and institutions: the death of the only Lepailleur son Antonin allows Grégoire Froment to take over that family's windmill business once he marries their daughter Thérèse; the death of Maurice, the only Beauchêne son, paves the way for Denis Froment to advance in the factory and come to run it himself; and finally Ambroise Froment acquires the Seguin hotel when that family descends into ruin as a result of their rampant immorality. The Froments achieve sovereignty for themselves *and over* others.

Inaugurating Chantebled with the first “coup de pioche,” Mathieu pronounces, “Que la terre nous soit une bonne mère!” (230), summing up the novel’s main idea: (re)production of family and land are one and the same, leading to power over one’s own space and that previously belonging to others. Their current compatriots are not their equals within a virtuous republican system, but rather, like foreign populations in uncharted territories, a weaker population in need of their leadership and civilization. This picture of French society reflects the divisiveness of the Dreyfus Affair, caricatured by Caran d’Ache in the drawing “Un Dîner en famille” (fig. 9); in *Fécondité*, Zola recognized that national advancement was impossible without familial unity, but in imagining the family as a metaphor for the nation, he offered a vision of nationhood based on ties to blood, soil, and religion. His nationalist vision was inspired by the Dreyfus Affair’s grip on France in which the “other” at home had to be conquered first in order to engender the ideal global community.

#### *A Whole New World: The Body Politic at the Turn of the Century*

The theory of Eric Santner helps to elucidate the biopolitics at the core of Zola’s text. In Santner’s reading of Kantorowicz’s 1957 *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (discussed in previous chapters), he sees the groundwork for the transition from royal to popular sovereignty in the nineteenth century (Ch. 2). Kantorowicz develops a theory of the history of the secular state in which the monarch came to represent both mortal man and the immortal body politic (the law-centered body of the state). While acknowledging the continuing importance of religious values in an increasingly secularized state, Kantorowicz writes: “But the value of immortality or continuity upon which the new polity-centered rulership would thrive, was vested in the *universitas* ‘which never dies,’ in the perpetuity of an immortal people, polity, or *patria*, from which the individual king might easily be separated, but not the Dynasty, the

Crown, and the Royal Dignity” (272). Santner argues that the people become invested with the same dynamics of sovereignty following the transition from “polity-centered Kingship” to “nation-centered Polity” (Santner 51). He then follows and builds on Kantorowicz’s analysis of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* in which Richard experiences the loss of both his kingly super-body and the ability to recognize his own personal body. What is left over when Richard looks in the mirror is something “less than human” (Santner 48), a corporeal material Santner calls the “flesh” or being “creaturely.” For Santner, the process of destitution or deposing reveals what he terms “the leftover of sublime flesh previously figured by that representational corporeality” (49), whether of the king or of the collective “People.” This surplus makes its way into the body of the people once they become invested with sovereignty in the modern age of nation-states. Following Hannah Arendt’s discussion of citizenship and human rights in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and Giorgio Agamben’s reformulation of Arendt’s ideas in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Santner points out that the people’s (national) sovereignty became a function of belonging to a nation after the passage of the Declaration of the Right of Man and of the Citizen. That is to say, one was a citizen of a nation because one was born on its soil, but such power could be taken away. For Santner, the body of the citizen holds claim to these rights, and this body must therefore undergo duplication to assume sovereign power (to become natural body and body politic), but always risks morphing into “creaturely flesh” following the (always possible) loss of power and citizenship (61).

According to Santner, the biopolitical aspects of the transition from royal to popular sovereignty in the nineteenth century uniquely characterize modernity; as the people acquired the secularized power formerly belonging to the theocratic king, their physical bodies became equally invested with political authority (xi-xii). The Froments in

some ways exemplify how this transition from monarchical to popular sovereignty was inscribed on the body. In fact, Susan Harrow (2010) has argued that the figure of the body in Zola's texts represents Zola's modernist aesthetic and that, more often than not, this body is shown "under conditions of extreme stress" (5).<sup>67</sup> This idea recalls Santner's notion of the unstable, uncomfortable "flesh" that characterizes the modern (and postmodern) condition. For, Santner's concept of the "flesh" describes not only what is "leftover" from the physical transition of power from one body to another but also the general instability that results from what he calls "the semiotic and somatic stresses" associated with human life (5). For both Santner and Harrow, then, the body suffers as a result of the impact of modernity—the transition from stability to instability, order to chaos, routine to rupture, etc. that occurs with the shift in our understanding of the nature of power and governance. Although Santner acknowledges that this transition occurs in the nineteenth century, he goes on to tie together theorists from Freud to Foucault and solely analyze twentieth-century texts. According to him, the "flesh" in these texts suffers a crisis of symbolic representation as a result of this biopolitical metamorphosis, giving rise in particular to the modern theorization of psychoanalysis (xxi-xxii).

While Zola's *Fécondité* has not been perceived as a particularly modernist text, the emphasis placed on the transference of political power onto the bodies of everyday people can be seen to point to a crucial moment in the transition from theocracy to democracy. *Fécondité* stages this transition as a dual process: as the characters' simultaneously produce (sovereign) human bodies, they also expand their propertied lands. Ultimately, they grow the nation militarily, economically, politically, and socially

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<sup>67</sup> Harrow lists, among other defining characteristics of literary modernism, the exploration of fractured subjectivities, literary experimentalism, non-representationalism, and Barthes' concept of the *scriptible* as opposed to the *lisible*.



as a result of their intense production, advancing France as a world leader in the modern age. While we may not see the fragmented, abstracted bodies Harrow foregrounds in the *Rougon-Macquart* novels, we experience a fusion of the human body with the national body in the repeated figure of the *terra mater*. This dual growth of population and land gives rise to images that confuse human flesh, and especially the mother's body, with geography. Zola's attempt to master the discomfort associated with surplus "flesh" and the transference of sovereignty in the modern era becomes a thesis on the power that results when the body and the nation grow in concert with one another. Santner's history of the body politic can help contextualize the (bio)political stakes of the novel, which I sum up as follows: in imagining their nation as *terra mater*, French society can recover from *fin-de-siècle* decadence and national political division to emerge as a leader in the global humanitarian effort and, even more, effectively appropriate the rest of the world's lands and peoples. As seen through the lens of Zola's novel, the application of this theory has profound effects on the notions of citizenship, nationhood, and therefore "Frenchness" in the twentieth century.

Indeed, the physical bodies of the people (here, the Froment family) assume a dual status as mortal entities and immortal ideas; in other words they make up the physical composition of the nation as well as its republican doctrine. They come to create a sovereign and expanding community—first familial, then national, and finally global—by virtue of each one's birth on the land they own, inherit, develop, and master. This is the basis for Zola's imagined national community, and adeptly illustrates the post-monarchical transition Santner describes, following Arendt, from "king's subject" to "national citizen." Arendt makes the claim, quite astutely in my opinion, that as a result of the new form of governance following the French Revolution in which the state became the guarantor of ostensibly human, universal rights, any human who became

exiled from the state would also face the loss of their so-called human rights. Refugees, exiles, and anyone deemed outside the national community (i.e. non-Aryans in Nazi Germany) not only lost the national right of citizenship, but the actual human right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes:

The secret conflict between state and nation came to light at the very birth of the modern nation-state, when the French Revolution combined the declaration of the Rights of Man with the demand for national sovereignty. The same essential rights were at once claimed as the inalienable heritage of all human beings *and* as the specific heritage of specific nations, the same nation was at once declared to be subject to laws, which supposedly would flow from the Rights of Man, *and* sovereign, that is, bound by no universal law and acknowledging nothing superior to itself. The practical outcome of this contradiction was that from then on human rights were protected and enforced only as national rights [...] (230).

This characterized the plight of refugees, including Arendt's, during and after the Nazi takeover of Germany. Without knowing what political, social, and humanitarian catastrophes would come to pass in the twentieth century, Zola paints the picture of just this sense of citizenship, in which life, land, and nation become the only ways of assuring the people's right to justice, equality, and ultimately sovereignty. Those who fail to demonstrate a commitment to these values—who exist outside Zola's ideal French nation—are destroyed, conquered, or assimilated to the "ideal" way of life led by the Froments. In Arendt's analysis, the legislation of national citizenship paved the way for a definition of "citizen" (i.e. who belonged, and who didn't) based on race and ethnicity; human rights were no longer higher, universal ideals but rather rights that could be granted, and therefore also taken away.<sup>68</sup>

Although Zola purports in *Fécondité* to advocate for universal human rights and envisions a utopian society based on seemingly global justice and equality, he

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<sup>68</sup> "Denationalization became a powerful weapon of totalitarian politics, and the constitutional inability of European nation-states to guarantee human rights to those who had lost nationally guaranteed rights, make it possible for the persecuting governments to impose their standard of values even upon their opponents" (*Origins* 269).

nonetheless creates this new world from one specific French family; their story becomes the seed that literally—and literarily—gives life to Zola’s values, teachings, and imagination. As such, he fosters a similarly ethnicized view of the national community, as those who belong only come to do so once they’ve been assimilated to the heroes’ way of life. For, while the Froments come to enjoy the sovereignty associated with belonging to a nation and enjoying the justice and freedom its laws protect, those other “people” in *Fécondité*—the non-French, nameless inhabitants of the “globe”—encapsulate what Santner calls “creaturely,” or “merely human” (57). This is the leftover corporeality characteristic of those who are cast out of the community—in the twentieth century and more specifically in Arendt’s work, they are the stateless refugees, the rightless. In the late nineteenth century and in Zola’s work, these people are found in an unspecified “elsewhere”—they are the “uncivilized” the French sought to convert and assimilate. They are the “savages” of Nicolas’ Africa, the nameless lives wrapped up in Zola’s musings on “global” fraternity, and even the destitute Parisian crowd who rejects the Froment family values. In Zola’s novel these people are depicted as physically and morally weak, as “merely human,” and quickly lose their right to sovereignty. This is especially important to Zola in exile, for he faced just this form of loss of his (national) rights, and thus sought a way to reinstitute them with both the help and absence of a specific national belonging. He continued to feel and act “French,” without the reassurance of French soil beneath his feet or the French government backing his ideas.<sup>69</sup> This state of being informs the lesson at the heart of *Fécondité*—France, weakened both by encroaching imperialism and internal divisions resulting from the Dreyfus Affair, would only emerge victorious in global politics if it could prove to be

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<sup>69</sup> This observation responds to Mossman’s assertion that, in *Fécondité*, “Colonial expansion is thus proposed as the solution to a (nonexistent) problem” (219). To my mind, the “problem” in the novel is the same one the writer faced at the time: human rights could only be upheld to the extent that national citizenship was recognized.

stronger than its neighbors and enemies. This strength would be found in the augmentation of French citizens and the spread of (Zola's definition of) French values. For Zola, a fundamentally national and nationalist paradigm would engender global sovereignty. Thus Zola illustrates Santner's contribution to Arendt's insight on citizenship in the age of nation-states: citizenship becomes primarily a corporeal experience, where the citizen experiences two bodies as the king once did—that of his/her natural life, and that of the body politic. This second body is not, as the French Revolution and the Declaration of Human Rights would have one believe, a God-given right bestowed on each individual, but rather a right protected by the state in the form of national citizenship. It is therefore always at risk of being taken away, thereby revealing only the natural body, the “merely human” one, the “creaturely flesh,” to borrow Santner's terminology, or, to sum up, the human body void of political sovereignty.<sup>70</sup>

This perspective, I have argued, is intricately tied to Zola's experience as an exile expelled from the (singular) national community. Zola sought in his novel to re-conceive nationhood and national belonging to include those who found themselves physically dispersed, separated from their motherland. His imagined community is founded on the survival of the fittest (the Froments), who effectively beat out all competition to create and develop their own global kingdom founded on French “republican” values—truth, equality, and fraternity. Carol A. Mossman (1993) aptly describes these textual underpinnings as “the authoritarian—nay, the specifically royalist—base of the republican fiction” that Zola weaves (223). While it may be tempting to consider Zola's ideology equally royalist in nature (Mossman, tracing the development of “gynocolonization” from Rousseau to Zola, indeed demonstrates the impossibility of

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<sup>70</sup> Santner makes clear that this surplus body is not simply the mortal body made of organs and tissue, but is something more abstract—the “organ without body” studied by psychoanalysis, literature, and theorists such as himself (62).

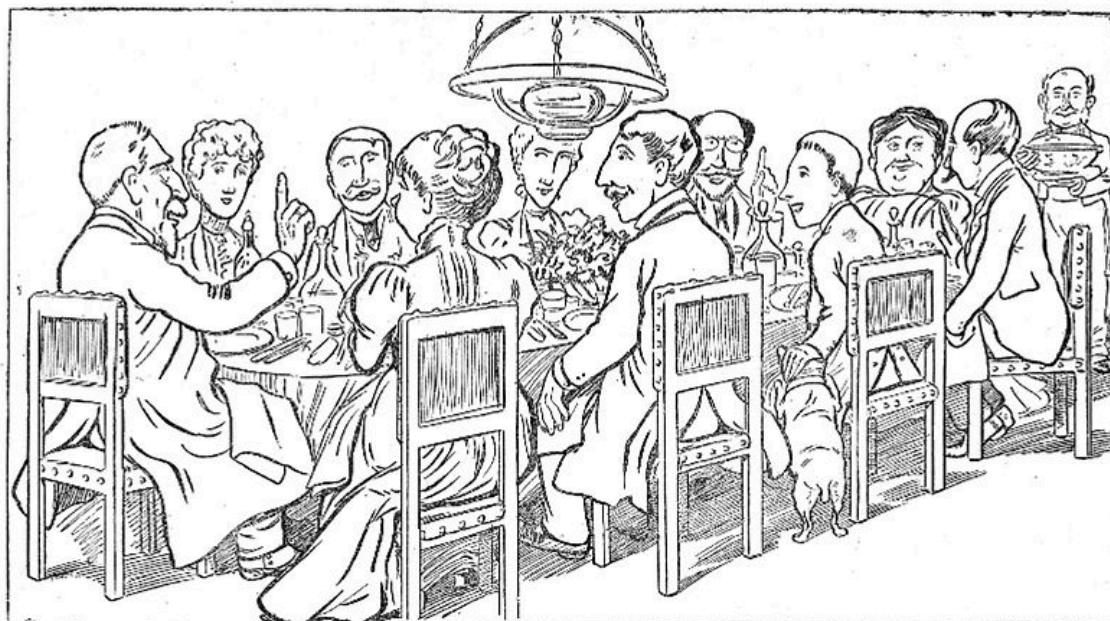
ideological republicanism given its century-long patriarchal appropriation of the maternal space), I would like to argue that it is Zola's experience in exile, and not an underlying royalist tendency, that fuels the imperialist aspects of the novel. As an outcast and exile, Zola was critical of France's current course and took pains to imagine a new, ideal French community that would embrace him and his ideology, whether he found himself residing at home or abroad. The utopian society he creates in *Fécondité* is an answer to his quest for acceptance in the national community, in addition to being his model for French republicanism. By making nationhood a corporeal experience bestowed on the population by the maternal (that is to say through birth, breastfeeding, and an attachment to the "mother"land), Zola re-inserts himself into the national community while being exiled from it. In so doing he picks up on the concept of biopolitics that twentieth- and twenty-first-century theorists would continue to explore.

Fig. 9: Caran d'Ache, "Un Dîner en famille," appeared in the *Le Figaro* 14 February 1898.

## UN DINER EN FAMILLE

(PARIS, CE 13 FÉVRIER 1898)

PAR CARAN D'ACHE



— Surtout ! ne parlons pas de l'affaire Dreyfus !



... Ils en ont parlé...

C. d'A.

## CONCLUSION

## The French Revolution, the Body Politic, and Exile

In *La France Imaginée* (1998), Pierre Birnbaum traces the fundamentally ambivalent conception of the Republic as a “body politic” to the French Revolution. He identifies in particular two discourses that contribute to this understanding of the nation as “body”: that of social “regeneration” as gleaned in the Abbé Sieyès’s *Qu’est-ce que le tiers état* (1789), and the complementary discourse of “degeneration” often found in caricatures depicting bodies as gangrenous parts of the nation (i.e. the king, the “gros” aristocrat, the reactionary, etc.) (ch. 2). For him, the transference of sovereignty from the body of the king to the collective body of the people implied that the nation needed to be both unified and transparent. Its healthy functioning depended on its “organs” working together (unity) and displaying their operations clearly (transparency). Those who threatened the unity of the organism needed to be severed from the body politic, leading to a politics of exclusion and even annihilation (he employs the term “purification” after Sieyès). And the idea of transparency held that one’s politics could—and should—be read on the body to identify those very threats (we can see how this persists in the nineteenth century with the popularity of physiognomy in drawings and literature).<sup>71</sup> True citizens would thus together rejuvenate a stronger, better, and—importantly—unified national body. This was, Birnbaum shows, the Jacobin philosophy that demanded citizens’ patriotic devotion and, ultimately, their absorption into the state, a thinking that spawned the Terror (90). It is easy to see, after Birnbaum, how this “imagined France”

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<sup>71</sup> The importance of the body as signifier of popular sovereignty following the execution of King Louis XVI is well documented: Peter Brooks cites the speeches of Saint-Just as well as the birth of melodrama during the Revolutionary period to argue that an “aesthetics of embodiment” became necessary to fill in the void left by the eradication of the traditional, monarchical system (Fort, Part II). For more on the idea that the Revolution aimed to “regenerate” French society by creating new “bodies” of citizens see Birnbaum, Hunt, Jennings, and Ozouf.

came to view heterogeneity as the enemy and to demand absolute unity, even uniformity, in order to remain in tact (93).

It is also easy to connect this paradigm with Zola's novels. Zola writes in *Le Roman Expérimental* that he set out to "cure" society of its social and political maladies, and reiterates the organicist view of society: "Le *circulus* social est identique au *circulus* vital : dans la société comme dans le corps humain, il existe une solidarité qui lie les différents membres, les différents organes entre eux, de telle sorte que, si un organe se pourrit, beaucoup d'autres sont atteints, et qu'une maladie très complexe se déclare" (68). In *Fécondité*, Zola shows how this kind of corporeal representation of the nation, inherited from the Revolution, continued to inform views of nationhood on the cusp of the twentieth century. By relying on the revolutionary idea that nation-wide fraternity and homogeneity would bring about popular sovereignty, Zola's exilic novel reveals how the corporeal notion of nationhood, unified by a singular set of principles, ultimately perpetuates an authoritative state rather than challenges it.

Like Zola, the exiles in this dissertation all continued to feel a strong attachment to France following their banishment, and the rupture they experienced led them to re-imagine the national (and often times, global) community as one that would embrace their ostracized political views. They found a model of how to do just that in the French Revolution, which not only defined modern France, but also provided an example of how conflicting political doctrines could negotiate a new, unified French identity.<sup>72</sup> Yet, like the French revolutionaries of the eighteenth century, the exiles in this dissertation continued to struggle with the question of how to enact peaceful equality during a time of national crisis, whether to institute democratic change from the bottom up or from the

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<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Jennings (2011) asserts that, despite the political instability and catalogue of ideological tensions it created, the Revolution established for French political thought a remarkably stable conceptual core that would help define nationhood in the two hundred years following 1789 (26-28).



top down, what role religion should play in a republican nation, and where to find a model of a successful, fraternal society. For Napoleon and Hugo, authoritative acts, like those committed during the Terror, were for the good of justice, though Hugo chose to put his faith in God as the orchestrator of such seemingly inevitable atrocities while the Emperor assumed that responsibility himself. Michel located a new model of egalitarianism in the maternal relationship and eliminated governmental intervention altogether. At the close of the century, Dreyfus and Zola both returned to republican teachings but imagined two very different communities springing up from the values of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and *laïcité*. Dreyfus chose to make national allegiance to Enlightenment principles the unifying quality at the base of his vision of French citizenship, while Zola imagined the national community built on imperialist expansion, attachment to the soil, and blood ties. In this Zola continued Napoleon's process of enacting democratic change through authoritative and antagonistic practices. If Dreyfus's memoirs dialogue with Napoleon's to rejuvenate France's universalist ideology, Zola demonstrates how this ideology is ultimately one of aggression and exclusion. These two Dreyfusards can thus be seen to represent the two sides of Hugo's Revolution, and we might conclude that the nation cannot, in fact, have progress without crisis, peace without war, universalism without authoritarianism.

Together, these national imaginings show that the universalist notions born of the Revolution are far from universal—they were subject to multiple interpretations throughout the age of nationhood just as they are today. At times they were applied in order to defend the masses from the loss of rights, at other times they were used in the spirit of combat and imperialism. They were alternatively imposed on others and nurtured from below, spread around the globe to bolster power at home and invoked as a defense against such very aggressions. As the century wore on, they became “Keywords,”

rife with cultural significance and, importantly, changing through time.<sup>73</sup> At the close of this dissertation, we can see how these words, at one time considered the people's slogan against unjust authority, also came to signify, during the course of the nineteenth century, that very authority. Postcolonial theorists and scholars of contemporary French society continue to ask these same questions today: What is the nation? How does French universalism engender a politics of exclusion in a multicultural Republic? How does one approach the "Other" in these contexts?<sup>74</sup> The exiles of the nineteenth century lay the groundwork for understanding these explorations in their historical contexts; their writings show that modern French nationhood was built on the paradoxical experiences of exiles and the paradoxical meanings of republicanism that continue to inform (and often, misinform) debates on nationhood and identity in the post-modern era.

In conclusion, I suggest we can draw three key lessons from these voices from exile. The first is a discursive understanding of French nationhood as a unified body politic; the corporeal paradigm of the nation persists in all their analyses and informs their conclusions. This thinking stems directly from conceptions of power in monarchical France, when the king represented the nation in body and spirit. These exilic writings, which all necessarily address various political crises in nineteenth-century France, trace how this national "body" was reconceived at each moment of social and political turnover in the modern nation. By applying French republican and revolutionary values to the body—whether the body of the nation, the bodies of the citizens that comprise it, or their own authorial body—these writers sustained a representation of France as a body unified not by the body of the King, but by the body of an emperor (Napoleon), by a

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<sup>73</sup> Williams (1985) writes that the significance of "Keywords" is cultural and social, and is not always easily perceived by those using them. It is their difficulty to define and understand that led him to create a vocabulary of a selection of these words and explore how they not only express thought but also form it (see Williams, Intro).

<sup>74</sup> See for example Balibar and Wallerstein, Bancel, and Dubois.

set of principles (Enlightenment ideals), by a group of keywords (the Revolutionary slogan), or by a code of laws (“human” rights), etc. And, as Birnbaum and others have discussed, the construal of popular sovereignty as an embodiment of rights and values defines debates on what it means to be French, whether in the nineteenth century or today. It can be used to pursue a politics of war and exclusion (as Zola would have it), or to establish practices of “healing” (recall Michel). Above all, it assumes the nation as a unity, comprised of parts that each share equally in its functioning. Recalling Dreyfus’s embodiment of both “part” and “whole” simultaneously, we can assert that in order for these “parts” to evolve over time, so must the “whole” concurrently change to reflect the developing identity of the nation.

This brings us the second lesson: what is the “whole” of the nation? The exiles in this study show how the Revolution functioned as a moment of rupture with the past and as a foundation on which to build the new nation. It was no longer process or history; it was product, present and future. They alternatively sought to tame it, end it, revive it, or redistribute it. It represented: a set of values that could establish national unity, a way of acting in relation to one’s enemies, or a way of being true to humanist and universalist principles. In other words, it was not simply an event in time, it was an inspiration, a site of memory; its very name gave voice to host of ideas, principles, and a particular construction of French identity. To quote François Furet, “the Revolution had become its own end. The Revolutionary *idea* henceforth took on a different sense than it had had in 1789 since it came to designate less a rupture or a passage between two social states than a privileged form of action by which the human will took a lasting hold upon the historical world in order to transform it” (Fort 152-53, my emphasis). The Revolution allowed these exiles to link their marginality to France’s communal past, to define “Frenchness” according to its spirit, however they chose to interpret its messages. The

centrality of the French Revolution to the construction of French identity and nationhood can therefore not be ignored. The Revolution simultaneously broke ties with France's past and transposed the past's paradigms onto the new order of government and social organization, "creating" France. Likewise, the exiles considered here at once opposed the prevailing views of nationhood during their time and reinvented them for the next generation of French citizens.

So we arrive at our third lesson, concerning exile itself. By definition, the exile presents a challenge to the nation's reigning doctrines, hence the need for proscription from the national territory. Yet, none of those in this study contented themselves with living out their exile on the margins, accepting their new destiny away from France. They fashioned the exilic space into a site of power, incorporating spatial and geographical perceptions to shape their legacies and determine how their memories would impact France. By taking up their pens, re-writing history, re-imagining France, and re-conceiving France's foundational values, they all sought to impact the development of the national identity back home. The fact that the majority have already earned their place in the canon (Napoleon, Hugo, Zola and, to a lesser extent, Dreyfus) is evidence of their success, and the volume of scholarship now appearing regularly on Michel attests to her rapid ascendance into the French literary and historical mainstream as well.<sup>75</sup> These political actors discovered their influence upon being exiled and, like so many other marginal notes in the pages of History, crept inward from the periphery to shape the overarching messages of the center. They continue to serve as an example of what so-called "pariahs" can accomplish on a national scale, and their stories can serve as an inspiration: like them, those who construct the paradigms of tomorrow are, very often, those who live on the margins of today.

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<sup>75</sup> Two more of Michel's works were edited for publication in 2015: *À travers la vie et la mort* and *La Commune*.

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