2.

"Eh! eh! Bomba, hen! hen!": Making Sense of a Vodou Chant

ALASDAIR PETTINGER

UNE CHANSON AFRICAINE

Eh! eh! Bomba, hen! hen!
Canga bafio té
Canga moune dé lé
Canga do ki la
Canga li.

These words made their first appearance in print in Moreau de Saint-Méry's classic survey of the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which he compiled from notes made during his long residence there in the years immediately preceding the revolution that ended with the creation of the independent state of Haiti in 1804.[1] They can be found in a section devoted to the religious beliefs and practices he calls *vaudoux*, named after the snake god to which its followers are devoted, and who communicates his wishes through a high priest and priestess (or "king" and "queen"). We are told how the initiates are led into a circle by the king, who taps each one lightly on the head with a piece of wood while intoning this "African song," which Moreau de Saint-Méry transcribes in a footnote. But while he is quite precise about how some of the words are to be spoken or sung ("the first two vowel sounds of the first line are wide open, the last two, mere muted inflections"), he makes no attempt to translate them.[2] And, indeed, this chant proved a mystery for several subsequent generations of writers on Haitian religious beliefs and practices, none of whom had any idea what it meant.[3]

The first part of this chapter examines some of the ways the chant has been deployed by travel writers and other foreign observers, both sympathetic and hostile toward the new republic, and tries to account for its appeal. Translations of the chant began to appear in the 1930s. In the second part, I consider

the role they play in two key twentieth-century Caribbean works on the Haitian Revolution, and in the debates over the chant's interpretation that followed. Finally, I try to identify what is at stake in these attempts to make sense of the chant, and whether translators of the chant can indeed fix its meaning any more than their predecessors for whom it was unintelligible. How we understand the chant certainly has implications for our understanding of the history of Vodou, especially during the revolutionary period. But it is also important to recognize the limits of what it can tell us.

In a pamphlet written during the reign of Faustin Soulouque, who governed Haiti in the 1850s (and under whom the religion briefly enjoyed official recognition), Théophile Guérin quotes the chant and asks, "What does it mean, this euphonious, pure-blood African dialect? No one knows."[4] The chant is also described as unintelligible in a full-length book on Soulouque published the same year by the French consul writing under the name Gustave d'Alaux. He is not sure which language it is in, just that it is a "Negro" language.[5] He observes that colonists in Saint-Domingue, upon hearing the chant, immediately stepped up the defense of their plantations (counting their slaves and calling out mounted troops), even while revealing that the ceremonies, somewhat anticlimactically, always ended with scenes dominated by "the triple excitement of promiscuity, drunkenness, and darkness."[6]

Alaux's account is significant because in it we see the emergence of a pattern by which the relatively rich detail of Moreau de Saint-Méry's description of vaudoux is whittled down to two key, related elements: the dangerous power of its leaders and the bacchanalian frenzy of its followers, which, in due course, can be evoked by the words of the chant alone.[7] Thus Alaux proves a valuable source for the Baptist missionary Edward Bean Underhill, who visited Haiti in 1860 as a guest of a Mr. Webley, whose firsthand acquaintance with vaudoux is no match for the more literary pretensions of the Frenchman, who grants him the authority to link "Eh! Bomba!" with a "wild dance" and that "triple excitement."[8]

All this reinforces Underhill's claim that "the black . . . is strongly imbued with the superstitions of his African origin, which no cultivation has removed."[9] But he is equally emphatic that missionary effort is not wasted, and further, that this effort is much more likely to succeed now that slavery has been abolished: "Freedom alone is the true school in which men's faculties can be trained for the higher purposes of life, and the black is as capable of attaining them as the fairer-skinned peoples of more favoured climes."[10]

An anti-abolitionist pamphlet published in the United States the same year, however, shows that the chant could be used in support of the opposite point

of view. Citing Underhill against himself (and culminating in the reference to that "triple excitement" he borrowed from Alaux), the author wonders how such "a disgusting picture of savageism and heathenism" can possibly support "the idea that negroes can remain civilized when left to themselves." On the contrary, it exemplifies "the relapse of these negroes into their original barbarism."[11]

The chant also turns up in several descriptions of New Orleans toward the end of the century. George Washington Cable's study of "Creole slave songs" includes a free, imaginative rendering of Moreau de Saint-Méry's account—in which the transcription of the chant is revised for English-speaking readers ("Eh! eh! Bomba, honc! honc!") to better capture the "horrid grunt" of those last two syllables. For Cable this chant shows how things were "in the times when the '*veritable Vaudaux*' had lost but little of the primitive African character," in contrast to the "rather trivial affair" the rituals had now become, with formal religious "worship" largely superseded by more diffuse "superstitions."[12]

Other writers were more willing to collapse the differences between late eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue and late nineteenth-century Louisiana, as the chant's verbatim reappearance in an avowedly eyewitness account of a "Voudoo Dance" in a street just off Congo Square in the late 1880s would seem to suggest.[13] The strange familiarity of the "history, mysteries and practices" of the "Voodoo" outlined in *New Orleans as It Was* (1895) is explained by its reliance on a memoir of 1883 whose anonymous "creole" author evokes her Louisiana childhood by quoting long passages from Moreau de Saint-Méry's study of colonial Saint-Domingue—including, of course, "Eh! Bomba!"[14]

From this condensed survey, we can see how a few lines in an unknown language can anchor a whole network of associated meanings. From the beginning, they connote both the dangerous power of religious leaders and the moral and intellectual confusion of those who follow them, a confusion manifested above all in intoxication and sexual license. If these associations are all made to point to the inferiority of people of African descent, and are invariably thought to indicate the extent to which they are capable of governing themselves (economically, socially, politically), they can support both abolitionist and proslavery arguments.

The whole history of this chant as it appears in print from the 1790s onward appears to consist of one writer citing another.[15] It seems perfectly possible that none of Moreau de Saint-Méry's successors had heard it firsthand. Arguably, the versions of the chant resemble one another more closely than they

would had they been direct transcriptions. Indeed, it is even tempting to believe that Moreau de Saint-Méry simply made it up. At any rate, one can surely understand the weary complaint of the Haitian writer Frédéric Marcelin, who in 1913 accuses travellers of turning lazily to the same old sources for the exotic content of their narratives that present-day Haiti seems unable to supply. And he singles out the "strange guttural sounds" of Moreau de Saint-Méry's "baroque incantation," which he dismisses as "meaningless" and no more authentic than the elaborate "fetish-drums" manufactured specifically for export to museums overseas.[16]

The association of the chant with the superficial (and largely patronizing, even derogatory) attitudes of foreign visitors is one reason why the chant does not figure at all in the considerable body of Haitian literature in which Vodou is an important theme (although I later refer to one possible, if encrypted, exception). Its absence from anthropological studies of the religion would tend to confirm the suspicion that it is, indeed, a fabrication.

But the citational history of the chant intersects at various points with that of another chant, whose associations—and fortunes—are markedly different. Drouin de Bercy first recorded this chant in a short book supporting the restored Bourbon monarchy's plan to retake the colony, some ten years after independence. He refers to "the Vaudou" as "the most dangerous of all the Negroes"[17] and goes on to describe a ceremony in which the participants sing and repeat in chorus the following lines, beginning and ending with a beat on the *bamboula* drum:

A ia bombaia bombé,
lamma samana quana,
é van vanta, vana docki.

This translates to: "We swear to destroy the whites and all that they possess, let us die rather than renounce this vow [*mourrons plutôt que d'y renoncer*]."[18]

Drouin de Bercy not only translates the chant but also notates the melody to which it is sung. The words and the music reappear forty years later in Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's massive study of the Native American population of the United States in a passage whose source, however, is identified as a certain "William S. Simonise, Esq. of Port au Prince, a native of Charleston, South Carolina, but for many years a resident of Hayti, and one of her first lawyers."[19] This time a translation is not deemed necessary, for the most notable feature of the transcription—which differs considerably from that found in Drouin's text—is the proper name that is embedded in it:

Aya bomba ya bombai (Bis)
Lamassam Ana-coana (Bis)
Van van tavana dogai (Bis)
Aya bomba ya bombai (Bis)
Lamassam Ana-coana (Bis).

This suggests to Simonise that the chant is in praise of "Anacoana, the Carib Queen," described by Las Casas, Oviedo, and other Spanish chroniclers of the sixteenth century.[20]

Native Caribbean warrior-leaders like Anacaona (to use the more common spelling) were anointed as heroic, romantic figures in the first half of the nineteenth century by such biographers of Columbus as Washington Irving and Alphonse de Lamartine. Her story is also told by the Haitian author Emile Nau, who claims that the chant—in the truncated form of "Aya Bombé"—was popularized by the advisers to King Henry Christophe (1811–20), apparently fascinated by his namesake, Anacaona's nephew, sometimes referred to as Cacique Enrique or Henri, who waged a guerrilla war against the Spanish until 1533. Their translation—"Rather die than be enslaved" (*Mourir plutôt que d'être asservis*)—is less specific than Drouin's, although it preserves the same general form.[21]

The Dominican poet José Joaquín Pérez opens his collection *Fantasías indígenas* (1878)—which acknowledges Irving, Lamartine, and Nau as historical sources—with a poem titled "Igi aya bongbé (Primero muerto que esclavo)."[22] But it was the reproduction of the words and music from the Schoolcraft version a few years later in *Cuba primitiva* by Antonio Bachiller y Morales that seemed to establish the *areíto de Anacaona* (as the chant was called) as an iconic reference point for proponents of *indigenismo* in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico.[23]

If, elsewhere in the Caribbean, indigenismo has a tendency to marginalize the role of black slaves and their descendants in the anti-colonial movement, and indeed to marginalize Haiti itself,[24] in Haiti emblems of indigeneity had for a long time been associated with black self-definition, most obviously in the name of the republic.[25] And—as Nau recognized—"Rather die than be enslaved" neatly mirrors the "Haitian marseillaise,"[26] namely, the "liberty or death" motif that adorns Jean-Jacques Dessalines's Declaration of Independence. This motif colors subsequent invocations of "Aya Bombé" in Haitian literature.[27]

If the first chant has acquired (generically) African connotations, thereby allowing it to serve as a convenient shorthand for a primitive level of moral and

political development, always in various ways requiring the civilizing influence of Europeans, the second chant has assumed a more distinctly (and more historically specific) Caribbean form that imaginatively fuses native Indian and black resistance to slavery and colonialism around 1500 and around 1800. This perhaps explains why Haitian writers have been much more inclined to make use of the second chant rather than the first.

But it may be unwise to make too much of this contrast, especially as both chants have been quoted together on several occasions.[28] In one case, the rebellious overtones of the "Aya Bombé" seem to have spilled over into the "Eh! Bomba!," as Louis Elie offers the theory that the latter was a "war chant . . . composed by the followers of Telemaque Canga," a Maroon leader who was active in the 1780s.[29] We should also remember that the first chant has always carried a certain menace, too, not only through its first appearance in a text published in the middle of the Haitian Revolution, but also in the flurry of citations in the 1850s during the regime of Soulouque (when the mulatto elite were perhaps most on the defensive).

Nor should we place too much emphasis on the fact that the second had been translated while the first remained inscrutable. The translations offered for "Aya Bombé" (by Drouin de Bercy and by Nau) are not very convincing. Neither identify the source language, and if Drouin's openly propagandist text hardly suggests that his rendering is supported by participant observation or careful scholarship, Nau himself claims that the chant was invented by Christophe's advisers in an attempt to flatter him, thus rejecting the assumption that it is of Amerindian origin.

In any case, when the chants appear together in at least two of the many sensationalist North American travel books that appeared during the occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934 by the United States, neither are translated and any sense of their different histories is missing. In *The Magic Island*, William Seabrook lays before us (one immediately after the other) "two Voodoo invocations made up almost entirely of old African words. The first ["Eh! eh! Bomba, Hen! hen! . . ."] I have heard, with slight variations, in several Voodoo temples. The second ["Aia bombaia bombé! . . ."], which was given to me by Dr. Price Mars, of Pétionville, I have never heard in actual use. I do not know the meaning of either."[30] Richard Loederer's *Voodoo Fire in Haiti* reduces the differences further by quoting them together as if they formed a single song, performed before a frenzied crowd by a highly sexualized *mamaloi* (priestess).[31]

Seabrook's and Loederer's accounts are typical of the period in the way vaudoux—now thoroughly Americanized as "Voodoo"—figures largely as a

form of entertainment, comfortably satisfying a taste for the macabre and the pornographic, Haiti having been made safe for prurient visitors by the United States Marine Corps. Far cry, perhaps, from the rather more pointedly allegorical reports of the nineteenth century, when more explicit hopes and fears regarding the emancipation of slaves were at stake. Nevertheless the chant continues to enjoy its special status as a particularly convincing demonstration of a primitive mentality and way of life.[32]

From this perspective, "Eh! Bomba!" might be compared to other citations of African and pseudo-African vocal and drummed rhythms in Euro-American modernism. After all, there is more than a hint of Moreau de Saint-Méry's *chanson africaine* in the *chants nègres* of early Dadaist performances.[33] There is also Vachel Lindsay's notorious poem "The Congo" (1914), in which the heavy meter of the "blood-lust song" of the "fat black bucks" frequently slips into onomatopoeia and nonsense: "Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM."[34] The gap between the author's avowed intention to defend and celebrate "the negro race" and the uproar of protest he faced from those who condemned his negative stereotypes testifies to the ambivalence of blackface performance, popular since the mid-nineteenth century and a tradition on which the poem—and these early twentieth-century voicings of the Haitian chant—conspicuously draw.[35]

In Rachel DuPlessis's reading of Lindsay's poem—particularly its provocative "hoo" syllable (and the way it is taken up by apparently more respectable figures such as T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens)—she speaks of it as a form of "white conjure" that seems to substitute the cartoon menace of savages ("Boom, kill the white men") for the historical realities of colonial and racist violence.[36]

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

"Eh! Bomba!" did not resist translation for much longer. Several independent lines of research in the 1930s and 1940s allow us to see the mysterious refrain in a whole new light.

In his study of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938), C. L. R. James seems to make the first breakthrough. He quotes the "Eh! Bomba!" chant on two occasions: first, in the opening chapter that outlines the situation of the slaves on the eve of the revolution, and then (this time with the fourth line, "Canga, do ki la," printed twice) as the epigraph to his fourth chapter, in which the narrative of the slave uprising takes off, beginning with an account of the gathering of the night of August 22, 1791, in the forests overlooking Le

Cap Français.[37] On the first occasion, James does something his predecessors had singularly failed to do. He provides a translation: "We swear to destroy the whites and all they possess, let us die rather than fail to keep this vow."[38]

Attentive readers will realize that this could easily be an English rendering of the French translation Drouin de Bercy provided for the *other* ("Aya Bombé") chant. James was clearly careless with his source, possibly Vaissière (whom he cites several times in the same chapter), who quotes both chants (as they appear in Moreau de Saint-Méry and Drouin de Bercy) on the same page.[39] But one can also suggest reasons why this translation might have appealed to James and why he might have found it plausible.

In Drouin de Bercy's text, the slaves' willingness to fight to the death is meant to serve as a warning to a future invasion force: his translation deglamorizes this determination by grounding it in premodern sentiments and values (e.g., oaths, revenge, witchcraft). Transplanted to *The Black Jacobins*, where the struggle to "destroy the whites" is ennobled by the higher cause it serves, the *mourir plutôt* acquires the characteristically modern twist in the "liberty or death" motif as it circulated in the Age of Revolution, when the preference for death became identified with the assertion of universal, human rights rather than the defense of a family's honor or good name. In Haiti, the scope of these rights was pushed further than anywhere else.

In an article on Toussaint Louverture and the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, Paul Foot argues that "Liberty or death" was "the slogan which dominated the entire slave campaign."[40] This claim would certainly be supported by James's account, not only because it culminates in Dessalines's creation of the Haitian flag by removing the white from the French tricolor and replacing the initials "R. F." (République Française) with the motto "Liberty or Death,"[41] but also because of the way James punctuates his narrative with cited pronouncements that express similar sentiments using the same propositional form. These include Robespierre's outburst from 1790 ("Perish the colonies . . . if the price is to be your happiness, your glory, your liberty"); a message from Sonthonax to his officers in 1794 ("Let us perish . . . rather than . . . fall again into enslavement and servitude"); and Toussaint's letter to the Directory in November 1797 ("We have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it").[42] As James's remarks on the latter document suggest—he compares it to "Pericles on Democracy, Paine on the Rights of Man, the Declaration of Independence, the Communist Manifesto"—this rhetoric is indeed distinctly modern, pointing both back and forward in time and space to emphasize its universal application and appeal.

James's remarks on the chant itself follow a similar pattern. Its appearance in the first chapter is in a section that characterizes the "intellectual level" of the slaves, to support his point that "one does not need education or encouragement to cherish a dream of freedom." James introduces the chant with the following words: "At their midnight celebrations of Voodoo, their African cult, they danced and sang, usually this favourite song."[43] And after quoting and "translating" it, he observes, "The colonists knew this song and tried to stamp it out, and the Voodoo cult with which it was linked. In vain. For over two hundred years the slaves sang it at their meetings, as the Jews of Babylon sang of Zion, and the Bantu to-day sing in secret the national anthem of Africa."[44]

As the earliest citation of the chant dates from 1797, James's claim that it was sung by slaves as far back as the late sixteenth century would appear to be purely conjectural (although there is certainly evidence that the colonial authorities outlawed vaudoux). The "two hundred years," though, prepares us for the much vaster historical sweep of the comparison that follows—one that underscores James's reading of the chant as expressing a general principle rather than particular interests, tracing its sentiment back to biblical times and forward to "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" in the present and beyond. In a footnote added to a revised edition, James writes, "Such observations, written in 1938, were intended to use the San Domingo revolution as a forecast of the future of colonial Africa."[45]

If the repositioning of the chant at the head of this revolutionary sequence emphasizes its implicit appeal to generalized liberty, the fact that James quotes the chant (in its original language) and makes no attempt to hide its associations with oaths, revenge, and a religious "cult" allows him to show "Eh! Bomba!" occupying two planes simultaneously. "Voodoo" may have been "the medium of the conspiracy," as he puts it,[46] but its message was clearly that of the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution.

The reputation and authority of *The Black Jacobins* is such that the mistranslation of the chant has largely gone unnoticed—in fact, it has been reproduced numerous times.[47] In George Lamming's essay on the book, "Caliban Orders History," Caliban might stand for Toussaint and the revolutionary slaves as they make history, or James as he writes history, or even Lamming himself, whose account reorders James's material so as to book-end his summary of the narrative with two vocal performances: "Eh! Bomba!" in 1791 and a song overheard by one of Leclerc's officers in 1803.[48] For Cedric Robinson, the chant appears to underscore his argument in *Black Marxism* that "bourgeois culture and thought and ideology were irrelevant to the development of revolutionary consciousness among Black and other Third World peoples," while

Darcus Howe quotes it in order to show that "Caribbean musicality has always been a fundamental part of the revolutionary movement."[49]

But the story does not end here. For while James was working away in the archives in Paris, elsewhere two other researchers were making some interesting discoveries about the chant that point in another direction entirely. One was Jean Cuvelier, a Catholic missionary based in the Belgian Congo, whose history of the first attempt to Christianize the region in the early sixteenth century by King Afonso I was—after a long delay caused by the Second World War—published in 1946. In one chapter he describes at length the native animistic beliefs Afonso aimed to eradicate, such as the belief in shape-shifting witches or *ndoki*. In a footnote citing some sources that testify to the worship of animals, particularly snakes, he refers, almost in passing, to a chant recorded in a book on Haiti written by a fellow missionary, Henri Op-Hey. Cuvelier presumably had not read Moreau de Saint-Méry, but Op-Hey certainly had, for his account—written in Flemish—of the "initiation of the vaudoux" draws heavily on the master. "Then he taps him gently on the head with a small wooden stick," writes Op-Hey, "while intoning an unintelligible African song: 'Eh! eh! Bomba, hen! hen! / Canga, bafio té.' "[50] Cuvelier instantly recognizes it as a Congolese chant "dedicated to the snake Mbumba (Bomba)," which he renders in the orthography then current and translates into French:

Eh, eh, Mbumba,
Kanga bafioti
Kanga mundele
Kanga ndoki (la)
Kanga (li)

Eh, serpent Mbumba
Arretez les noirs
Arretez le blanc
Arretez le ndoki
Arretez-les.[51]

In a separate development, the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz came to question the by-then-widespread assumption that the areíto de Anacaona was of Indian origin. Already in 1934 he was expressing his opinion that it was "an African-derived song of the Negroes of Haiti."[52] Thirteen years later, he would support this claim with a close reading of sources, including a phonetic analysis of the chants recorded by Moreau de Saint-Méry and Drouin de Bercy. Their close resemblance to the Afro-Cuban incantations with which he had

firsthand acquaintance led Ortiz to conclude they must be of Congo origin, and he arrives at the following translation into Spanish:

¡Eh!¡Eh! ¡Bomba! ¡Eh! ¡Eh!
¡Conjuro a los negros!
¡Conjuro a los blancos!
¡Conjuro a los espiritus! ¡Allá!
¡Conjúralos![53]

Ortiz did not come across Cuvelier's work until he came to revise his article, which became the first chapter of his monograph *La africanía de la música folkórica de Cuba* (1950), but he is sufficiently confident of his own translation to insert a passage that takes issue with the Belgian's confused rendition of Mbumba as "snake," insisting that the term signifies "image, fetish" and also "secret and mysterious."[54]

Aimé Césaire offers both translations in his major study *Toussaint Louverture* (1960), which, somewhat fancifully, has the chant sung at the famous Bois Caïman ceremony that launched the slave rebellion in August 1791. Césaire breaks his study into three parts. The chant marks the entrance of the slaves in his narrative near the beginning of the third part, after the extensively documented debates in the French National Assembly concerning the revolt first of the white colonists and then of the mulattoes, which make up the first two. The invocation of "African gods" could not be more different from the parliamentary speeches quoted earlier at great length, and if its appearance conveys the sudden change of pace of historical events, it also signals a shift in the style of Césaire's commentary. Previously limited to terse summaries and perfunctory link passages, it suddenly becomes more expansive and oratorical, making use of the same rhythmic repetitions found in the chant itself. The anaphoric "canga" (which appears five times, because, as in James, the fourth line is printed twice) echoes the incantatory quality of the chapter's opening paragraph: "The Negroes were ready, always ready; one could even say that in colonial society it was only they who were really ready, only they who were able to fully comprehend the revolution."[55]

But in order to prepare for the imminent appearance of Toussaint, Césaire is anxious to stress the limitations of this first phase of the rebellion, as it is Toussaint's historical role to move beyond it. For all that it is "touching and picturesque," the vaudou ceremony of August 22 was nothing more than a shot of rum to boost a fighter's courage. "It could not sustain the energy of a military campaign."[56] More specifically, the "feverish inspiration and prophe-

tism" of the insurrection needed to give way to the "cold reflection" that would convert it into a revolution.[57]

Césaire's book prompted a response from René Bourgeois, formerly a colonial administrator in the Belgian Congo. His "open letter"—printed in *Présence Africaine* in 1969—outlines the shortcomings of the translations Césaire uses. That of Ortiz he abruptly dismisses as "the product purely of his imagination," while Cuvelier's apparently demands more serious consideration.

First, he argues, Mbumba is not a snake but rather a good-luck name traditionally given to the surviving children of families who have suffered heavily from infant mortality; indeed, snake worship is unknown in the areas where the language of the chant is spoken. Second, *canga* or *kanga* has several meanings, depending on the inflection of the first vowel, and while it may mean "stop or exterminate," it may also mean to "open the mind" of someone.

This allows Bourgeois to render the chant more consistent not only with what he knows of vaudou (for him, evidently not a snake cult but rather an animistic religion), but also with its role in the revolution (inspiring the black slaves to revolt against their white masters). If "stop the European" makes sense in this context, "stop the blacks" does not, suggesting that the intended meaning here is rather to "open their minds." Thus he offers the following alternative:

> Eh, eh esprit benefique / Mbumba, hen hen.
> Ouvre l'intelligence aux Noirs.
> Arrete / extermine l'Europeen.
> Arrete / extermine ce sorcier.
> Arrete / extermine lui.[58]

Césaire incorporates the full text of this letter in a footnote added to the next edition of his book (adding, incidentally, yet more iterations of the chant, making six in total), hoping that it would "put an end . . . to the controversy."[59] But, of course, it does no such thing. At least three scholars have since made further attempts to make sense of the chant, and there is considerable disagreement among them.

In her study of the revolution, *The Making of Haiti*, Carolyn Fick argues that "voodoo," being "one of the first collective forms of resistance, . . . was both a cultural and, in its practical applications, a politically ideological force."[60] She makes much of what she claims is an eyewitness report that suggests that the chant (described as "a sacramental voodoo hymn") did

indeed form part of the ceremony at Bois Caïman in August 1791.[61] Advised by the Kongo expert John Janzen, she provides the following translation:

Eh! eh! Mbumba [rainbow spirit = serpent]
Tie up the BaFioti [a coastal African slave-trading people]
Tie up the whites [i.e., Europeans]
Tie up the witches
Tie them.[62]

David Geggus, in an article on "Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century," casts doubt on the authenticity of the source used by Fick, which was not published until 1898. And in general he is rather skeptical of the widespread tendency to romanticize Vodou—in other words, to identify it as a major inspirational force for the revolution—when there is very little evidence either way.[63] He reviews previous attempts to make sense of the chant (e.g., Cuvelier, Bourgeois) before offering his own:

Oh! Mbumba, oh!
Render harmless the blacks
Render harmless the European
Render harmless the witch[es]
Render them harmless.[64]

He explains that Mbùmba was an old Kongo deity in the form of "both a rainbow and a great snake that lived near the water's edge,"[65] while the "basic meaning of *kànga* is 'to bind or tie,' " but "in the context of sorcery it would seem best translated as 'to bewitch, keep at bay, or render harmless.' "[66]

Two years later, John Thornton reinstates Cuvelier's translation, which he renders in English as follows:

Eh! Eh! Mbomba [Rainbow] hen! hen!
Hold back the black men
Hold back the white man
Hold back that witch
Hold them.[67]

A Kongo expert himself, he discusses previous interpretations of the chant, marking his distance from both those (such as Bourgeois and Fick) who urge a translation that stresses "its place as the anthem of the Haitian rebels," and those (such as Geggus) who insist that its meaning is not primarily political but rather "simply a part of initiation into a Voodoo society in which the sec-

tarian hoped to find personal protection against the witchcraft, often worked by fellow slaves."[68]

Those in the first camp tend to register a certain unease about the apparent equivalence of "black" and "white" in the chant: why would slave rebels appeal to Mbumba to restrain or otherwise limit themselves as well as their enemies? Bourgeois resolves the contradiction by applying different senses of kanga in each case, while Fick does so by suggesting that BaFioti does not refer to blacks in general but rather to a particular group despised by the rest.

Thornton is not convinced by these maneuvers, but nor is he content (as Geggus seems to be) to limit the significance of the chant to the local realm of sorcery:

> Its general terms of address, to blacks (*bafiote*) and whites (*mundele*) alike, and the invocation of *Mbumba* suggest that it had a social as much as a personal significance. Furthermore, the invocation of *Mbumba* also suggests that it expressed the spirit of harmony and peace as an alternative to personal greed and witchcraft that was rampant in prerevolutionary Haiti. As such it could serve as a sort of shorthand expression of a particular revolutionary creed that sought to restore justice and harmony to all, as expressed in Kongo politico-religious ideology. The fact that the verb *kanga* can mean to save and deliver, combined with the Christian context of the verb in Kikongo, might mean that it had a more universalistic message than simply one of murder or revenge.[69]

LOWERING THE TONE

Let me try and step back a little and consider these new interpretations in a broader context. There seems to be general agreement that the chant is in the Kongo (or Kikongo) language and is readily understood by current speakers of this language. So Moreau de Saint-Méry did not make it up; indeed, the accuracy of his transcription testifies to the reliability of his account, and reminds us that not all colonial sources are to be dismissed as self-serving fictions. It also suggests that by the late eighteenth century, different African cultures—and languages—were already fusing together in various ways. At this stage the vaudoux sect, as described by Moreau de Saint-Méry, was probably not dominant in the colony, since its followers were primarily *nègres aradas*, slaves, and descendants of slaves, from the Fon-speaking region of West Africa (who at the time made up less than 20 percent of the slave population); but it is significant that its rituals were beginning to incorporate elements from other parts of the continent.[70]

There is also fairly general (but not unanimous) agreement that the chant

invokes Mbumba, a deity or spirit that takes the form of a snake (or rainbow-snake). This fits in well with Moreau de Saint-Méry's understanding of vaudoux as a snake-cult. If he was right, it suggests how much vaudoux has changed, and that it was only during the course of the nineteenth century that vaudoux became the dominant Afro-Haitian religion—embracing other forms under its ecumenical umbrella—a process that seems to have been accompanied by a diminution of the role of the snake. Certainly by the twentieth century—when reliable ethnographic studies began to appear—the snake enjoyed only a relatively minor role, associated with just one of the *lwa* in the Haitian pantheon, Damballah, who is regularly represented by Catholic lithographs of Moses and St. Patrick. The possibility that the religion has changed over time does not seem to occur to René Bourgeois, who does not recognize that if vaudoux was not a snake cult when he was making his remarks in the 1960s, it may yet have been one in the eighteenth century.[71]

But perhaps we should question such an exclusive focus on the *meaning* of the chant. Certainly the revelations of Cuvelier and Ortiz and their successors have done little to dispel the existing associations that make it—and Vodou more generally—answer questions about the level of political development of the slaves and their descendants. This is not just because this debate over the finer points of translation remains the province of specialized scholars, but also because these historically accumulated connotations structure the debates themselves, predisposing them to one version rather than another.

James's mistranslation and Césaire's multiple translations (and their later refinements) share a good deal of common ground with their perplexed predecessors—not least in the way the chant is conceived as a privileged signifier that captures a whole culture in miniature or condenses fundamental social forces. Either way, it is assumed that large generalizations may be derived from it—and further, generalizations that tend to figure the chant (and the culture it has been made to symbolize) as emphatically not (or not yet) of the modern world, standing outside it, whether submissively or defiantly.

We might also consider that if those singing the chant were nègres aradas, then they would probably not have known what the words meant. And indeed this may have been one reason favoring their adoption, since the power of ritual invocations such as prayers or curses are often enhanced by their unintelligibility. A semantic analysis of a chant, then, cannot tell us much about what it does for those who actually give voice to it: we are not any closer to appreciating it as part of an absorbing physical activity that emotionally binds the participants together but does not necessarily "communicate" anything at all.

To help us think about Moreau de Saint-Méry's chant in this way, we could

do worse than to turn, after James and Césaire, to that third great Caribbean reconstruction of the Haitian Revolution, Edouard Glissant's play *Monsieur Toussaint* (1961). Although "Eh! Bomba!" does not appear in the script, it may yet in performance, as the closing stage direction calls for "a Haitian chant in the distance."[72] In the context of a work whose inclusion of chants and incantations (according to the preface to the second edition) "signal above all the unbridled pleasure of finally writing a language *as it is heard*,"[73] this might help restore to "Eh! Bomba!" a certain irreducible materiality or (to use Glissant's key term) opacity. Having grown used to imagining that the familiar syllables were entirely transparent, opening onto an entire culture or mentality that observers had convinced themselves they fully comprehended, could its listeners be persuaded to attend to them as pure sound?

We have seen how white modernists (Lindsay, Seabrook, Loederer) habitually slipped into the language of "the primitive," mimicking the voice and intonation of African religious and musical forms, in order to challenge prevailing orthodoxies. To the extent that this is a somewhat cynical, mercenary gesture (projecting onto *other* cultures impulses one dare not fully acknowledge as one's own), it is not surprising that their black counterparts developed alternative strategies. As Michael North has argued, primitivism may have been liberating for whites, but for black modernists it was a trap they worked hard to avoid.[74]

Rachel DuPlessis briefly mentions the response of Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes to "The Congo," the one parodying its simplicity, the other inverting its valuation of blackness.[75] W. E. B. Du Bois—who was among those who publicly denounced the racism of Lindsay's poem—had himself earlier in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) transcribed a "heathen melody," passed down in his family from his grandfather's grandmother, "seized by an evil Dutch slave trader two centuries ago":

> Do bana coba gene me, gene me!
> Do bana coba gene me, gene me!
> Ben d'nuli, nuli, nuli, nuli, ben d'le.

"And we sing it to our children," he writes, "knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music."[76] The domestic setting here makes all the difference: the chant is not a curious sound heard in the distance in a foreign land (as it is in Lindsay's work), but one the writer is accustomed to singing at home. It forms a link in a genealogical chain, pointing back four generations to slavery and forward to the Harvard-educated scholar who honors it in print. The emphasis is not on its semantics,

but on the more obscure emotional effect of its "music," alluding to a history of change and transformation rather than a fixed culture or mentality.

If this may suggest an unexpected affinity between Du Bois and Glissant, it may also invite us to reconsider the deployment of "Eh! Bomba!" in the works of James and Césaire, who, for all the various translations (spurious or otherwise) they provide for the chant, do not place the same importance on its meaning as did the academic debates over its translation in the 1990s.

We have seen how James uses the chant as a poetic device to suggest a certain symbiotic relationship between "Voodoo" and Enlightenment, a hypothesis that does not stand or fall on the authenticity of the chant. And for Césaire, what matters is the spontaneous recourse to the theological or prophetic language of the chant (rather than the detail of what it says), and especially the way this contrasts with the considered, secular, political discourse of Toussaint that emerges in its wake. That they choose to reproduce—and repeat—the original chant (rather than simply describe or paraphrase it) implies that what attracts them is the pleasure of the sounds themselves. Uttered less as an illustrative quotation than as a way of introducing a marked change in the narrative voice, the strange syllables and insistent rhythms of the chant herald an unexpected change of pace of both historical events and the manner in which they are presented.

Understood in this way, James and Césaire are more than a match for Lindsay's sonic booming. For they, too, share a modernist delight in provocation and bad taste, forcing the chant's unreadability to loudly interrupt the more formal, measured tone of their accounts. But rather than serving a primitivism that locates "Eh! Bomba!" elsewhere, in a disappearing world of undisciplined satisfactions that industrial capitalism has all but displaced, their performances insist on the distinctly modern project it makes possible: citizenship for all.

In the end, however, we must still ask, do these two studies of the revolution dispel the colonial accretions of "Eh! Bomba!"? Their realignment of the chant introduces a certain dissonance that may weaken the apparent obviousness with which, for two centuries, it has disclosed the persistent condition of a race or a population. Nevertheless, this approach still runs the risk of exaggerating the importance of the chant by having it mark an irrevocable historical rupture through which a nation of citizens comes into being. The words continue to bear a colossal symbolic weight.[77]

As Du Bois's example suggests, however, there is another way of responding to the power of the chant, one that turns down its volume rather than adds to

its noise. In the first section of this chapter I referred to Frédéric Marcelin's exasperation at the lazy reliance on "Eh! Bomba!" by travel writers in search of exotic mystification. In his first novel, *Thémistocle-Epaminondas Labasterre* (1901), there is a passage in which his young protagonist, enjoying a walk in the country, is mesmerized by the sight of young women washing clothes by the riverbank. In an erotically charged reverie, he hears them singing. While one of them tells the story of a scandalous pregnancy, the others respond, every two lines, with "Bombé, manzai Calistra, bombé."

Marcelin does not let Epaminondas persist in his fantasy for long, as the narrator reverses perspective. "Mostly," he writes, "it's only a jumble of words which mean little, lacking finesse and originality. What they cherish is the sound and the laughter that helps take their mind off the dreary task, their feet submerged in water the whole day."[78]

Like the chants we have been considering, and whose phonemes turn up again here, mangled but not beyond recognition, this refrain is not allowed to meet the demand for cheap exoticism. In what I like to think of as a kind of allegory of Bomba interpretation, Marcelin sends up the pretensions of the male onlooker, who only too easily fixes the women in a *tableau vivant* designed for his entertainment, by juxtaposing them with the point of view of the women he objectifies. Marcelin does not disclose the meaning of the chant (which he implies would be impossible and irrelevant in any case), but he hints—rather more prosaically—how it helps them bear the physical toil of their labors. From this rediscovery of the ordinary,[79] students of "Eh! Bomba!" still perhaps have much to learn.

NOTES

1. In this chapter, I am especially indebted to the analysis of this chant and its citational history by Fernando Ortiz, *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (Havana: Ediciones Cardenas y Cia, 1950), 61–87; David Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century: Language, Culture, Resistance," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft LateinAmerikas* 28 (1991): 21–51; and Stephan Palmié, "Conventionalization, Distortion, and Plagiarism in the Historiography of Afro-Caribbean Religion in New Orleans," in *Creoles and Cajuns: French Louisiana*, ed. Wolfgang Binder (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1998), 315–44. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine.

2. M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie Française de l'isle Saint-Domingue*, ed. Blanche Maurel and Etienne Taillemite (1797; Paris: Société de l'histoire des Colonies Françaises, 1958), 1:67.

3. In this chapter I adopt the spelling of "vaudoux"/"vaudou"/"voodoo"/"Vodou" (etc.) used by the text under discussion. When I need to refer to the religion more generally, I use the now widely accepted "Vodou." For a discussion of the historical and orthographic issues involved here, see Alasdair Pettinger, "From Vaudoux to Voodoo," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40, no. 4 (2004): 415–25.

4. Théophile Guérin, *Biographie de l'empereur Soulouque: Solution de la question haïtienne* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1856), 27.

5. Gustave d'Alaux, *L'empereur Soulouque et son empire* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1856), 63. The book grew out of a series of articles the author wrote for *Revue des deux Mondes* in 1850/51.

6. Ibid., 64, 68. The African American abolitionist James McCune Smith expressed the opinion that the chant—which he found in Alaux—was the basis for the famous lines of Tennyson ("Cannon to the right of them, / Cannon to the left of them, / Cannon in front of them / Volley'd and thunder'd") in "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854). See "The Critic at Chess," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, January 12, 1855, reprinted in *The Works of James McCune Smith*, ed. John Stauffer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 109–11.

7. Moreau de Saint-Méry already associated vaudoux with "disgusting prostitution" and warned that the power of its leaders meant that there was "nothing more dangerous . . . than the cult of vaudoux." *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie Française de l'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1:68.

8. Edward Bean Underhill, *The West Indies: Their Social and Religious Condition* (London: Jackson, Walford and Hodder, 1862), 159–61.

9. Ibid., 109.

10. Ibid., 176.

11. *Free Negroism; or, Results of Emancipation in the North and West India Islands* (New York: Van Evrie, Horton, 1862), 12–13.

12. George Washington Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," *Century Magazine* 21, no. 6 (1886): 818–20.

13. Charles Dudley Warner, *Studies in the South and West, with Comments on Canada* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890), 71.

14. Henry C. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life* (1895; Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1990), 90–95; [Hélène d'Aquin Allain], *Souvenirs d'Amérique et de France par une créole* (Paris: Bourguet-Calas, 1883), 149.

15. It is precisely this "plagiarism" that preoccupies Palmié in "Conventionalization, Distortion, and Plagiarism in the Historiography of Afro-Caribbean Religion in New Orleans."

16. Frédéric Marcelin, *Au gré du souvenir* (1913; Port-au-Prince: Editions Fardin, 1978), 15–17.

17. [Louis Marie César Auguste] Drouin de Bercy, *De Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Chez Hocquet, 1814), 176.

18. Ibid., 177–78.

19. Hamilton W. Pierson, "Anacoana," in *Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, ed. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1853), 2:309.

20. Ibid., 2:312. For a survey of the literature on the *areíto*, see Donald Thompson, "The 'Cronistas de Indias' Revisited: Historical Reports, Archaeological Evidence, and Literary and Artistic Traces of Indigenous Music and Dance in the Greater Antilles at the Time of the 'Conquista,'" *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 14, no. 2 (1993): 181–201.

21. Emile Nau, *Histoire des caciques d'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: T. Bouchereau, 1855), 334.

22. José Joaquín Pérez, *Fantasías indígenas, y otros poemas* (1878; ed. José Alcántara Almánzar, Santo Domingo: Ediciones de la Fundacion Corripo, 1989), 35.

23. Antonio Bachiller y Morales, *Cuba primitiva: Origen, lenguas, tradiciones e historia de los Indios de las Antillas y las Lucayas*, 2nd ed. (Havana, 1883), 44–45.

24. See Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 155–68.

25. See David Patrick Geggus, "The Naming of Haiti," in *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 207–20.

26. Nau, *Histoire des caciques d'Haïti*, 334.

27. See Arsène Chevry, *Areytos: Poésies indiennes* (Port-au-Prince: Maison Athanase Laforest, 1892), vii, 23–25, 61; Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle: Essais d'ethnographie* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de Compiégne, 1928), 116–17; Jacques-Stéphen Alexis, "Dit de la fleur d'or," in *Romancero aux étoiles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 161; Jean Metellus, *Anacaona* (Paris: Hatier, 1986), 114–15; and Berthony Dupont, *Jean-Jacques Dessalines: Itinéraire d'un revolutionnaire* (Paris: Harmattan, 2006), 22–24. *Aya Bombé* was also the name of a Haitian literary journal published between 1946 and 1948, whose title Léon-François Hoffman explained as follows: "Supposedly 'Liberty or Death' in the pre-Columbian dialect of the first inhabitants of Haiti." See "The Climate of Haitian Poetry," *Phylon* 22, no. 1 (1961): 66.

28. Pierre de Vaissière, *Saint-Domingue: La société et la vie créoles sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Perrin, 1909), 179; Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, 116–17.

29. Louis Elie, *Histoire d'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, 1945), 2:184. I have not seen this claim made elsewhere. Jean Fouchard, in *Les marrons de la liberté* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole, 1972), makes reference to both Telemaque (508, 522) and the "Eh! Bomba!" chant (536) but does not suggest any connection between them.

30. William B. Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (London: Harrap, 1929), 304.

31. Richard Loederer, *Voodoo Fire in Haiti*, trans. Desmond Ivo Vesey (1935; Gretna, La.: Pelican, 2005), 272–73.

32. According to at least one source, a reference to the chant was implied in Pat Robertson's notorious remarks about the Haitian "pact with the devil," made in the

immediate aftermath of the January 12, 2010, earthquake. See Jonathan Turley, "Pat Robertson: Haitians Were Punished by God for 'Pact with the Devil,'" *Jonathan Turley*, January 14, 2010, http://jonathanturley.org/.

33. On the *chants nègres*, see Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 28–32.

34. Vachel Lindsay, "The Congo: A Study of the Negro Race," in *Collected Poems*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 178–84.

35. On the controversy, see Ann Massa, *Vachel Lindsay: Fieldworker for the American Dream* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 167–70.

36. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 81–105, esp. 84, 93, 105.

37. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, rev. ed. (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 18, 85.

38. Ibid., 18.

39. Vaissière, *Saint-Domingue*, 179.

40. Paul Foot, "Man's Unconquerable Mind," *Socialist Worker Review* 144 (1991): 18.

41. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 365.

42. Ibid., 76, 136, 197.

43. Ibid., 18.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 18n.

46. Ibid., 86.

47. James's error was first identified in Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century," 24.

48. George Lamming, "Caliban Orders History," in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960; London: Allison and Busby, 1984), 124, 149.

49. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983), 386; Darcus Howe, "Revolutionary Threads of Slavery," *New Statesman*, March 26, 2007, 22.

50. H. Op-Hey, *Haiti: De parel der Antillen*, 2nd ed. (Antwerp: De Paters Montfortanen Te Kontich-Kazernen, 1937), 260.

51. "Eh, serpent Mbumba / Stop the blacks / Stop the whites / Stop the *ndoki* / Stop them." Jean Cuvelier, *L'Ancien royaume du Congo* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1946), 290; brackets in the original.

52. Fernando Ortiz, *De la música afrocubana: Un estímulo para su estudio* (Havana, 1934), 6.

53. "Eh! Eh! Bomba! Eh! Eh! / Cast out the blacks! / Cast out the whites! / Cast out the spirits! Go! / Cast them out." Fernando Ortiz, "Preludios étnicos de la música afrocubana," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 59, nos. 1–3 (1947): 100.

54. Ortiz, *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba*, 83.

55. Aimé Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture: La révolution Française et le problème colonial*, rev. ed. (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981), 191.

56. Ibid., 196–97.

57. Ibid., 195.

58. "Eh, eh, kind spirit / Open the minds of the Blacks / Stop (or exterminate) the European / Stop (or exterminate) this witch / Stop (or exterminate) him." R. Bourgeois, "Lettre à Aimé Césaire," *Présence Africaine* 70 (1969): 209.

59. Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture*, 192.

60. Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 57.

61. Ibid., 265–66.

62. Ibid., 290n, 58; brackets in the original. Although the translation is different, one finds a similar reading of the chant by Ned Sublette, who finds in it an example of the ways that one "transmits secrets in order to accomplish a revolution." See Sasha Frere-Jones, "Roundtable: Haitian Music, Part 2: 'What Does Revolution Sound Like?,' " *New Yorker* blog, July 13, 2009, http://www.newyorker.com/.

63. Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century," 44–50.

64. Ibid., 26; brackets in the original.

65. Ibid., 27.

66. Ibid., 28. Incidentally, Geggus also offers a translation of the "Aya Bombé" chant: this, too, appears to be in the Kikongo language and turns out to mean something quite different from that claimed by Drouin de Bercy.

67. John K. Thornton, "'I am the subject of the king of Kongo': African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (1993): 210; brackets in the original. He refers elsewhere in his article to "Mbumba," so we may assume the spelling "Mbomba" here is a misprint.

68. Ibid., 211.

69. Ibid., 213.

70. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie Française de l'isle Saint-Domingue*, 1:64; Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century," 36.

71. On the changing role of the snake in Vodou, see Hénock Trouillot, *Introduction à une histoire du vaudou*, 2nd ed. (Port-au-Prince: Editions Fardin, 1983), 44–51. The assumption that Vodou has remained fixed over time is made by Madison Smartt Bell, who transposes twentieth-century versions of Vodou in his fictionalization of the 1791 rebellion—which, incidentally, does not forget to include the chant (untranslated) in its account of the famous ceremony at Bois Caïman. See Madison Smartt Bell, *All Souls Rising* (London: Granta, 1995), esp. 118.

72. Edouard Glissant, *Monsieur Toussaint*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 160.

73. Ibid., 12.

74. North, *The Dialect of Modernism*, 11.

75. DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry*, 93–95.

76. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1986), 538–39. The chant also appears in his subsequent autobiographical writings. See Du Bois's *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921), 5; and *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, in *Writings*, 638.

77. I thus share the skepticism toward supposedly revolutionary chants and anthems voiced by Michel Beaujour in "Flight out of Time: Poetic Language and the Revolution," *Yale French Studies* 39 (1967): 29–49. But Beaujour, in questioning their revolutionary value, then goes too far the other way, I think, and exaggerates their danger and threat as reactionary diversions.

78. Frédéric Marcelin, *Thémistocle-Epaminondas Labasterre* (1901; Port-au-Prince: Editions Presses Nationales d'Haiti, 2005), 45–46.

79. I borrow this expression from Njabulo S. Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa," in *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 41–59.