Beyond the Imperial Metropole:
Queer Anglophone Representations of the Haitian Revolution

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Abstract

This article uses a queer lens to analyze textual-visual representations of the Haitian Revolution. Anglophone texts and their accompanying images often characterize Saint-Domingue's transformation into Haiti through disaggregated bodies and extreme violence. Focusing on two Anglophone texts as case studies, this article shows how Leonora Sansay's *Secret History; or The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808) and Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805) elicit a desire to escape empire's regulation of metropolitan normativity through spectacles of bodily disaggregation. Neither Rainsford nor Sansay were queer authors. But both works feature characters who forged queer relationships to the ground-level tumult they allegedly witnessed. Recognizing a lesser-studied tenant of queer theory known as the deformative, this essay examines how both authors' representations of the Haitian Revolution attest to the allure of escaping from patriarchal power and white dominion. At stake is a reparative reading of Anglophone texts regarding Haiti's establishment in which the collapse of normative social order became erotic and even desirable.

Keywords

Deformative; Haitian Revolution; Leonara Sansay; Marcus Rainsford; Queer.

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Focusing on two Anglophone representations of the Haitian Revolution, this essay employs queer epistemology to enrich our understanding of English representations of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). Scholars have long grappled with the ways European writers addressed the first successful uprising of enslaved persons that yielded an independent nation. Susan Buck-Morss's attention to the absence of Haiti in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's understanding of the relationship between the lord and bondsman, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's analysis of archival silences, and Sibylle Fischer's concept of disavowal are amongst the most well-known examples. However, Anglophone representations of Haiti's establishment have received less attention. This might be attributed to a frequent positioning of Haitian independence as the French Revolution's double. Of course, Britain's failure to exploit Saint-Domingue's tumult and attempt to seize the colony from France (1793-1798) are also among the most under-studied aspects of the Age of Revolutions.[1] This essay shows how the Haitian Revolution registered as a queer aesthetic in Anglophone visual culture. Queerness in the case studies I explore functioned as an anti-metropolitan longing that sparked white readers' desire to escape from normative relationships and complicated the relationship between rural and urban environments. Attending to queerness in English textual-visual representations of the Haitian Revolution reveals the profound ways the first successful uprising of enslaved people shaped Anglophone understandings of the entanglements between place, sexuality, and gender.

The two works I have in mind are Leonora Sansay's *Secret History: or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808) and Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805). These genre-defying texts combine elements of the sentimental novel, travel writing, and romanticism to narrate what the authors experienced as Saint-Domingue became Haiti. Although Sansay and Rainsford were heterosexual authors, queerness does a whole lot more than merely serve as a synonym for gay identity. While the term "queer" originally functioned to challenge normalized genders and sexualities, it has since grown to recognize empire, globalization, and sovereignty (Halberstam et al.). Queer epistemology divulges how hegemonic social structures define normativity and produce "perverse" others. The expansive inquiries about normalization and intersectionality at the center of queer thought help analyze a representational problem at the cores of *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*. As much as Sansay and Rainsford described the Haitian Revolution through deviations from normativity to epitomize its grotesque horrors, their textual and visual representations did not characterize the new Black Republic as uncivil, violent, or worthy of disavowal. The deviant sexualities and departures from normative constructions of gender these authors described also bolstered the erotic appeal of absconding from empire's social order.

In my readings of *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*, the demise of imperial power in Saint-Domingue is entwined with the beckoning allure of experiencing non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality. *Secret History* is grounded in a "dalliance" between an American woman named Mary Hassel and Aaron Burr (Dillon). Mary and her sister Clara are based on the author's own experiences in Haiti (Drexler). Organized around fictional letters written to the third Vice President of the United States, *Secret History* divulges the experiences of a female traveler to Saint-Domingue who escapes her abusive husband by fleeing to the rural mountains. *An Historical Account* combines elements of history, natural history, and autobiography to chronicle Rainsford's experiences as a British soldier who arrived in Saint-Domingue (1797) with aims of seizing the French colony for Britain. Little is known of his personal life.[2] Beyond loose historical facts and fictitious elements, *An Historical Account* catalyzes around Rainsford's longing for an eroticized Black woman he encountered while escaping from condemnation to death. Both authors discovered the allure of absconding from normative understandings of sexuality, gender, and race through the Haitian Revolution's violence.

Sansay's and Rainsford's works conform to broader representational patterns about Haiti during the early nineteenth century. Because the Haitian Revolution did not easily conform to the glorification of whiteness and heterosexual reproduction foundational to global dominion, European writers struggled to chronicle its key events and principal actors.[3] Language impeded contemporaries from understanding revolt in its own terms. As Michel-Ralph Trouillot famously argued, the Haitian Revolution "entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened" (73). Trouillot elaborated that "[t]hey could read the news only with their ready-made categories, and these categories were incompatible with the idea of a slave revolution" (73). Europeans neglected Black revolutionaries because they did not easily conform to particular categories of gender and race needed to define normative Man. The events also unfolded in a location where the division between rural and urban zones did not easily hold. However, Black revolutionaries complicated these understandings of normativity predicated on imperial power. Black forces not only agentively contested imperialism by taking up arms in ground-level combat but also by unsettling the very terms Europeans employed to describe and geographically position themselves. Like other writers, Sansay and Rainsford tied Black Revolution to contestations of the patriarchal and heterosexual power integral to imperial dominion. But their works differ from a broader visual repertoire. Their attention to sexual promiscuity and deviations from heterosexual performances of gender, which signal a failure to understand revolution through its own terms, becomes appealing and even erotic. Ultimately, these authors' textual-visual

descriptions of departures from normativity can be read in the reparative. They gesture toward an erotic desire to flee the metropole as a material place and as an embodiment of colonial ideology.

This essay does not neglect the ways authors, including Sansay and Rainsford, employed divergent sexualities to downplay colonial loss and represent imperial contestations. Like Moreau de Saint-Méry's famous *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1797-98), Sansay and Rainsford employed portrayals of promiscuity to assert white dominion and solidify imperial power. Yet closer scrutiny of deviations from normativity brings palpability to histories of colonial resistance and Black agency.[4] For Doris Garraway, legible libidinal dynamics on the surface of colonial relationships are linked to displacements, wishes, and fears in the white colonial unconscious (32). Sexuality may express unsayable anxieties about the loss of hegemonic power and interracial sex. As much as colonial sexual fantasies constituted white European subjects by blocking shameful memories about imperial losses or asserting white patriarchy, sexual relations also led to resistance. Enslaved women and free women of color used their sexuality to obtain advantages and, quite possibly, their freedom (Geggus, "Saint Domingue" 259-78). Of course, Michael Drexler has compellingly demonstrated that sexual dominion and spectacles of gore "drained" the political and historical importance of rebellion (Drexler 10-37). However, Drexler refuses to let go of the contention that sexual economies helped articulate struggles for political and caste status in Saint-Domingue (10-37).

Some readers would have undoubtedly been disturbed by Sansay's and Rainsford's gruesome descriptions of disaggregated bodies. One might argue that their extreme foci on violence functioned to justify imperial power. Indeed, Edward Long is a particularly well-known example (Burnard 202-23). He advocated for Jamaican planters to follow Saint-Domingue as an example of a more cohesive social structure. Unity around a shared understanding of Britishness and imperial rule curtailed the complete breakdown of a desired social order. Printed fifteen years before Dutty Boukman's 1791 Bois Caïman ceremony in which the Haitian Revolution's first revolt was planned, Long could not have predicted the events that would undermine his claim. However, *Secret History* and *An Historical Account* were printed after Jean-Jacques Dessalines's announcement of Haitian independence on January 1, 1804.[5] Imperial power failed to thwart the debauchery and corruption Europeans associated with the Caribbean by the time Sansay's and Rainsford's works were printed. Sexuality and gender could no longer be understood in relationship to uncontestable imperial power. As Europeans confronted the spectacle of losing Saint-Domingue, the relationship between deviations

from normativity and Black revolutionaries assumed richer, stranger, and more complex meanings. I contend that the authors' gruesome depictions of disaggregated bodies become erotically alluring because they became wrapped up in an unspoken desire to abscond from metropolitan ideologies as empire collapsed.

Secret History and *An Historical Account*'s scenes that obscure revolution through extreme violence also transformed Haiti into a place outside the divide between rural and urban environments where Euro-Americans could imagine their own escapes from empire's regulation of normativity. A queer vantage point reveals how Sansay and Rainsford's depictions of the annihilated colony signaled a fascination with departing from white heteronormativity. Both authors unwittingly instigated pleasures only accessible beyond the performances of metropolitan understandings of whiteness and masculinity. While helping to unpack a moment when understandings of Black and white bodies failed to hold, queer epistemology also helps analyze a crucial paradox. Euro-American audiences began to embrace the supposed abhorrent sexualities and perverse genders that Black Revolutionaries opened up. Queerness affords a reparative reading in which hyperbolic tumult functioned as a mode of escaping from possessive governance (Halberstam 10-12). The collapse of rigid social structures gave way to the erotic desire for "perverse" sexualities available outside the imperial metropole.

Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the authors' experimentations with alternative ways of chronicling their experiences. The organization of selective retellings of their experiences through letters and printed images divulges how Sansay and Rainsford attempted to reconcile the desire for colonial power with the desire for intimacies only available beyond empire's regulation of normativity. By using letters, Sansay emphasized the extreme sentiments surrounding the carnal breakdown of differences between Black and white Creole women. Rainsford drew on printed images to articulate an erotic desire for the annihilation of normativity through imagined scenes of violence. After addressing specific terms from queer theory, I turn to *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*'s illustrations. Their textual-visual representations of the Haitian Revolution transcend scenes of extreme violence and demonstrate how the Revolution's instigation of "perverse" genders and sexualities became desirable.

The Deformative and Creative Shame

To analyze the complex relationship between the allurement of "perverse" sexualities and empire's demise in *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*, I draw on one of the lesser-studied tenants of queer epistemology—the deformative. Scholars of gender studies are familiar with Judith Butler's

landmark contention that gender is produced through juridical systems of power (*Gender Trouble*). Instead of being natural or innate, gender is performatively produced through reiterated utterances. However, Butler's emphasis on the instabilities and variations that can also be generated through the performative has received substantially less attention. She refers to these unpredictable and uncontrollable processes as the deformative. Butler explains the deformative in the inaugural issue of *GLQ*, "If the performative operates as the sanction that performs the heterosexualization of the social bond, perhaps it also comes into play precisely as the shaming taboo which 'queers' those who resist or oppose that social form as well as those who occupy it without hegemonic social sanction" ("Critically Queer" 18). The deformative signals a "queering" misappropriation of the performative power of gender. This queer appropriation of the performative "mimes and exposes both the binding power of the heterosexualizing law *and its expropriability*" ("Critically Queer" 22). In the central example of drag, the very norms meant to be obeyed are twisted or "queered." It reveals the disavowed attachments or identifications that ground normativity. The deformative operates through the very terms of the performative that govern regulation to destabilize power. At the base level, what propagates a normal social field can also be misappropriated or deformed. This is exactly what happens in *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*. White heterosexuality unravels through performances of gender.

In the same edition of *GLQ*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick considers the deformative in relationship to shame and its creative pleasures ("Queer Performativity"). Sedgwick modifies J.L. Austin's well-known "I do" statement at the center of his analysis of performativity to "shame on you." This statement enables her to elaborate on those whose subjectivities are lodged in refusals or deflections of the heterosexual marriage, which is integral to Austin's formulation. Grammatically, there is a "you" but no "I." The "I" is withdrawn, but "shame on you" records the place of an "I" who projects shame onto another pronoun. By hurling shame onto another subject and recirculating it through interpersonal figurations, shame becomes a "near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy" ("Queer Performativity" 4). Shame becomes the most potent affect through which a sense of self develops. Moreover, shame is contagious. Someone else's embarrassment, debility, blame, or pain can "so readily flood me" ("Queer Performativity" 5). This contagiousness is facilitated by the susceptibility to new grammatical expressions.

Of course, the deformative and its links to shame may seem unrelated to *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*. Leonora Sansay and Marcus Rainsford were not really minoritarian subjects. Leonora Sansay was well-known by distinguished gentlemen as a coquette, but she was certainly not a celebrity. Upon Aaron Burr's suggestion, Leonora married Louis Sansay,

who sold his plantation in Saint-Domingue to Toussaint Louverture. Louis and Leonora Sansay returned to Saint-Domingue in 1802 as France appeared poised to recapture the colony.[6] Marcus Rainsford was also an idiosyncratic figure (Youngquist and Pierrot xxiv-xxx). For their political loyalty, the Rainsford family was gifted a considerable tract of land. Marcus joined the fight to protect Britain's North American colonies during the American War for Independence after attending Trinity College in Dublin. He relocated to Jamaica when his regiment was moved to Fort Augusta near Kingston in 1781. Before resuming active military service in Saint-Domingue, he returned to England, where he was indicted and began pursuing a career as a celebrity poet.

But the deformative can help to investigate how the Haitian Revolution instigated other ways of understanding normative sexualities and genders. As Jill Casid has shown, queer theory offers a critical vantage point to look into the Black revolutionaries who contested the heterosexual and patriarchal power integral to empire (xvi-xvii). Queerness divulges the imaginings and longings for countering the master's plantation with counter-normative relationships and desires. Of particular importance are those who were forcibly displaced through the Middle Passage and enslaved. For them, longing registers as an inextinguishable desire to destabilize the heteronormativity of imperial power and imagine an anticolonial social order. Thinking with Sedgwick's analysis, I show how diasporic Africans' colonial resistance at the ground level that instigated Europeans' depictions of the Haitian Revolution as extreme violence also transformed these same representational practices. Sansay and Rainsford's descriptions of the Black revolutionaries who longed for Haiti's establishment ended up obfuscating the authors' own longings for colonial dominion. This created space for European audiences to find certain aspects of the dream of a free Black nation, namely the departure from heteronormative relationships in the metropole, to be erotic and alluring. *Secret History* and *An Historical Account* offer compelling examples of the intersections between diasporic Africans who dreamed of freedom from European power and Euro-Americans who dreamed of living outside empire's sphere of influence in a rural terrain.

Sedgwick's recognition of the complexity of queerness in her analysis of the deformative helps attend to this precarious intersectionality. Turning to Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*, Sedgwick considers the sticky relationship between queerness and sexual difference by focusing on the author's shame ("Queer Performativity" 6-8). Queerness is not merely a synonym for "gay" or James's sexuality. Instead, James's queerness is generated through shame. Shame in *The Art of the Novel* functions as a disruptive moment in a circuit of identificatory communication. Sedgwick takes James's performance

of blushing (the externalized image of shame) as a desire to reconstitute interpersonal bridges. James's dramatization of shame becomes narratively, emotionally, and performatively productive. For Sedgwick, "the flush of shame becomes an affecting and eroticized form of mutual display" ("Queer Performativity" 11). James's attempts to articulate his blush strengthen the relationship between the writer of the present and the writer of the past. Readable shame is recirculated through intimate interpersonal figurations and produces meaning. By focusing on the triangulation between shame, sexuality, and gender, I unpack how shame rearticulated the relationships between Euro-Americans and diasporic Africans.

Secret History and *An Historical Account* thematize the coupling between shame and departures from normativity while transcending categories of racial difference. Shame is even further inextricably linked to the colonial losses Europeans struggled to articulate. In *Secret History*, one letter fully displays the embarrassment of European military generals whose incompetence led to the deaths of their soldiers at the hands of Black forces (Sansay 17). Another letter dramatizes Clara's shame for prompting her abusive husband's anxiety (Sansay 55). Later, she flees to the mountains, where she finds herself alongside diasporic Africans. Clara's embarrassing loss and humiliation for failing to serve her husband position Clara outside empire's governance of metropolitan normativity. In *An Historical Account*, Rainsford displays the shame he experienced as a Black tribunal condemned him to death for alleged spying. He exclaimed his "contemplation of the shame, rather than the terror of an ignominious death" (Rainsford 231). Rainsford's imprisonment intensifies his shame even further, but a Black female visitor interrupts and even spurs a recirculation of his intense sentiments. By analyzing the dramatization of shame in both authors' works, I reveal the complex ways diasporic Africans as both real and fictitious actors challenged Anglophones to depart from normativity and even made "perverse" or "shameful" relationships erotically appealing.

Although the diasporic Africans in *Secret History* and *An Historical Account* were based on the authors' ground-level experiences, Sansay and Rainsford undoubtedly re-imagined and represented them as part of the effort to obscure histories of colonial loss. Authors from this period often used romance to disguise colonial conquest and exploitation. John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative, of a five years' expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796) is one of the most well-known examples. Like *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*, *Narrative* delineates the first-hand experiences of a white traveler to the colonial periphery. A defining moment in the illustrated text is Stedman's marriage to the mulatta Joanna, which arguably evidences her subjugation to hegemonic rule. However, recent scholarship

has complicated understandings of Stedman's fetishizations of Joanna's sexuality and bondage (Pratt 94-95; Wood 92-94). Of particular importance are William Blake's accompanying illustrations of disaggregated and open bodies (see Figures 1 and 2). Indeed, these illustrations are striking because they point towards a fascination with bodily vulnerability and even shame. They challenge sentimental fantasies in which a corpus remains impervious and cannot become imbricated with an outside (Allewaert 18-19). Blake "gets blood everywhere" and consequently sentimental fantasies disguising imperial relationalities break down (Gurton-Wachter 126-49). Spilled blood is evidence of severe social disorder (Festa 5-6).

Figure 1: William Blake, *Flagellation of a Female Sambre Slave* in John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative*, 1793, John Carter Brown Library, D796 S812n /1-SIZE, 12.9 x 29cm.

Figure 2: William Blake, *The Execution of Breaking on the Rack* in John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative*, 1793, John Carter Brown Library, D796 S812n /1-SIZE, 17.7cm x 13cm.

In my close readings of *Secret History* and *An Historical Account*, I emphasize how scenes of disaggregated bodies unsettle conventions of traditional romances. Bloodshed paradoxically slips into a different kind of sentimental fantasy associated with a distinctly anti-metropolitan ideology. Bodily fragmentation is a complex manifestation of the beckoning allure of absconding from normative sexualities and genders. Because spilled blood becomes wrapped up with the deformative, the shame associated with sexuality is an articulation of the shame associated with profound imperial losses. Attention to the ways in which sex helped convey colonial loss discloses how Black forces also performed revolutionary work by dampening urban appeal and its respective understandings of normativity. Ultimately, Sansay's and Rainsford's texts evoke a different kind of romance about the collapse of patriarchal relationships and white hegemony.

Secret History

Mary's first letter describes Saint-Domingue as a "heap of ruins" and a "terrible picture of desolation" (Sansay 3). Conditions do not significantly ameliorate throughout the thirty-one other letters. From enslaved persons who were burnt alive for setting fires to plantations to Frenchmen who were "dragged" around by mulattos, the French colony resembled a site of savage destruction. No wonder *Secret History* is often approached as a meditation on Black violence and white death. However, violence and destruction are also productive because they facilitate the unraveling of normativity. These horrors are complexly linked to Mary and Clara's liberations from patriarchal relationships.[7] As Drexler pointed out, "the black revolution on Saint Domingue triggers Clara's escape from her jealous and increasingly abusive husband" (33). I suggest that this complex coupling of flights from patriarchal relationships and the Haitian Revolution's threats of corporeal disaggregation is a queer problem. The Haitian Revolution's destruction is entangled with the destruction of normative relationships. In this messy intersectionality between the sisters and the Black revolutionaries, shame facilitates the expression of corporeal disaggregation as an alluring way of being outside empire's regulation of normativity.

At one level, shame divulges another way of knowing white masculinity. Attributing the failure to curtail Black forces to General Leclerc's cockiness, *Secret History*'s second letter delineates Black revolutionaries who overwhelmed the European guards, entered town, and massacred all the white inhabitants (Sansay 16). The author continues by exclaiming, "the pusillanimous General Leclerc, shrinking from danger of which his own imprudence had been the cause, thought only of saving himself" (Sansay 16). Leclerc ultimately dies of a fever that Sansay associates with being "ashamed of the weakness which

had led to this disastrous event" (16). While fully displaying the embarrassment of Leclerc's humiliating defeats, Sansay also attends to the sufferings of white Creole women through shame. Napoleon's failure to reclaim Saint-Domingue further underscores Mary's vulnerable position. Tying unmanageable Black populations to the failure of white masculinity, the letter transforms the Haitian Revolution into a story beyond "barbarous" Black forces versus "sophisticated" colonial planters. Haiti's establishment also creates space to critique the white normative masculinity and heterosexuality that Euro-Americans used to describe Haiti's establishment and to supposedly safeguard a desired social order.

At a second level, shame uncovers another way of knowing white femininity. Mary characterizes white women as envious. She asks whether "the rage of the white ladies still pursued them with redoubled fury, for what is so violent as female jealousy" (Sansay 79). While cutting across customary representations of "decorous" white women and "savage" Black revolutionaries, Mary also indicates that white women experienced and even grappled with "abnormal" or unacceptable sentiments. Mary even surprisingly positions the mulatto women as the "successful rivals of the Creole ladies" (Sansay 79). Elaborating on the mulatto women, she exclaims, "[m]any of them are extremely beautiful; and, being destined from their birth to a life of pleasure, they are taught to heighten the power of their charms by all the aids of art, and to express in every look and gesture all the refinements of voluptuousness" (Sansay 79). Mary's descriptions blur the distinctions between white and Black creole women. She opens up the possibility that Black creole women might become more beautiful and charming than white women. Between jealous white women and sensualized mulatto women, the embarrassing possibility that mulatto women could perform whiteness better than their European counterparts underpins the jumbling up of racialized distinctions.

Such muddying of race-based differences leads to spectacular scenes of destruction. In the first letter, Mary concentrates on white women who flee from Cap-Français to the surrounding mountains where runaway slaves hid and revolted. They climbed over "rocks covered with brambles, no path had ever been beat, their feet were torn to pieces and their steps marked with blood" (Sansay 4). With the town in flames and exploding powder magazines repleting the scene, the collapse of corporeal boundaries becomes enthralling. Mary recounts how "[l]arge masses of rock were detached by the shock, which, rolling down the sides of the mountain, many of these hapless fugitives were killed" (Sansay 4). Fugitives appear to refer to these white women as much as the island's Black population.

Literary scholars often approach this scene as a stunning example of the complex parallels between white women and diasporic Africans (Dayan 174–75).

As Monique Allewaert has asserted, Clara's flight from her abusive husband to the El Cobre mountains is symptomatic of how white femininity reconstituted itself through Afro-American political and cultural forms (Allewaert 155-60). Clara mimed diasporic Africans by putting herself in their positions in the mountains while also working to disavow these relations. Far from a cross-racial alliance or utopian communitarianism, *Secret History* foregrounds the plight of Anglo-American women and puts Black revolutionaries in the background. But Allewaert also shows how the author strains to maintain these separations. The text can be read against authorial intent. Consider the following line: "when a woman, like Clara, can fascinate, intoxicate, transport, and whilst unhappy is surrounded by seductive objects, she will become entangled, and be borne away by the rapidity of her own sensations, happy if she can stop short on the brink of destruction" (Sansay 224). This potential for annihilation indicates how imaginatively putting herself in the positions of diasporic Africans opens her up to exteriorities that challenge her stability and coherence as an impervious body. Building on Allewaert's analysis, I argue that Clara's incoherence and instability become a queer problem concerning the relationship between shame and carnality.

Clara's miming of diasporic Africans yields a queer and erotic corporeal form. Emerging from the mountains after her escape as a disaggregated body, Clara demonstrates Sedgwick's central contention that shame is "available for the work of metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, *trans*figuration, affective and symbolic loading and deformation" ("Queer Performativity" 13). Shame is found in Clara's lack of decorum and the loss of control in a tumultuous environment. In *Secret History*, the author remarks that "I was bare-headed, without stockings:—my shoes were torn to pieces by the ruggedness of the road, and I had no other covering than a thin muslin morning gown" (Sansay 192). Clara's full corporeal display helps articulate how shame simultaneously binds Clara to her husband and to diasporic African cultural practices. On the one hand, Clara blamed herself for her husband's abuses. The letter explains how, "Clara, affected by his pain, or ashamed of having so tormented him, — or fatigued with their eternal broils, leaned over him, and mingled her tears with his" (Sansay 192). On the other hand, shame constitutes Clara's identity through her own misconstrual and misrecognition. Closing the space between white and Black Creole women, Clara noted her close proximity in the mountains to inhabitants who were "little better than a horde of banditti" (Sansay 190). Clara's disaggregated appearance articulates her position as a victim of a patriarchal relationship while resembling the diasporic Africans more than a "proper" white woman. However, this incredibly carnal illustration of Clara's body is erotic because her liberation in Saint-Domingue's mountains marks a departure from normative understandings of white femininity.

Secret History ends with the return to Philadelphia. However, this repudiation of Saint-Domingue's unsuitability for the sisters' habituation is inseparably linked to the contagion of Clara's corporeal form. *Secret History* concludes with the following line: "if I can only infuse into your bosom those sentiments for my sister which glow so warmly in my own" (Sansay 225). It is difficult to ignore how playful sentimental promiscuity disguises a powerful affective charge that can no longer be bound to a single figure and may even spread to other subjects. Recalling Butler and Sedgwick, the disaggregated subject hurls shame onto another subject who is anamorphically susceptible to being moved or altered by extremely potent affects. This signals a desire for a different social order that is generated through the deformative. Although the sisters absconded from the island, the shame associated with the Haitian Revolution's powerfully disaggregating affects still lingered as an unrestrainable and generative force. An extremely contagious and powerful affect tied Clara, Mary, and Aaron Burr together more than a shared sense of white dominion or exceptionalism.

Sansay's decision to organize *Secret History* around letters might be understood as an attempt to control or mitigate the effects of shame to uphold the white dominion that helped preserve normativity. Letters separate *Secret History*'s different figures and enable them to appear to control their own affective performances. The fifth letter opens with the following passage: "Three of your letters arriving at the same time, my dear friend, have made me blush for my impatience, and force me to acknowledge that I have wronged you. But your friendship is so necessary to my happiness that the idea of losing it is insupportable" (Sansay 39). Clara's blush is spurred by the multiple letters rather than Colonel Burr himself. The letters distance the "I" of the letter writer while also providing a vehicle to project her elicited shame towards another subject. Blushing, to borrow Sedgwick's terms, is dramatized and becomes productive because it prompts an erotic "way of coming into loving relation to queer or 'compromising' youth" ("Queer Performativity" 8). The shame circulating between letter writer and letter recipient prompts the author's meditation on a former manifestation of her white femininity that becomes undone in Haiti. Clara continues by remarking that she has been "[c]ast on the world without an asylum, without resource, I met you:—you raised me—soothed me—whispered peace into my lacerated breast" (Sansay 40). Although Clara never self-effaces her "I," she hurls shame from her disaggregated body onto another "you" whose presence can only be felt through the letter. Her eagerness to recognize and even "spectacularize" the link between "lacerated breast" and blushing provides an important analytical clue into the queer uncanniness surrounding Clara's corporeal disaggregation derived from her escape to the mountains.

In the complex "intersectionality" between white women and diasporic Africans, certain understandings of white femininity needed to uphold the patriarchal power central to the imperial enterprise are evoked to then be undone or at least complicated. Her disaggregated breast is not a harbinger of a fuller disaggregation as much as a fragment of a sentiment that becomes less controllable in the mountains alongside diasporic Africans. Sansay's hyperbolic dramatization of cultural representations of white women as too emotional and too erotic, as Clara blushed, indicates how diasporic Africans played a crucial role in unsettling Clara's performance and recirculation of shame. By the time Clara returned, powerful sentiments could no longer be confined to her breast. Clara's openly available and carnal corpus spread shame to other subjects. Shame gets everywhere. Besides making Clara's unbounded identity erotically desirable, the text implies that Haiti's establishment became wrapped up with the desire to escape imperial understandings of normative genders and sexualities. This is the central issue of Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account*.

An Historical Account

Like *Secret History*, *An Historical Account* demonstrates how Black figures agentively interrupted white protagonists' abilities to control and manage their performances of shame. Rainsford's illustrated book catalyzes the complete usurpation of the author's power. After his vessel springs a leak, Rainsford is forced to land ashore. He is then confronted and arrested by Black soldiers who suspect him of being a spy. Rainsford is kept in a prison cell while awaiting trial and awaiting his condemnation to death. In short, the laudable Toussaint Louverture rescues Rainsford. But the shame associated with Rainsford's tumultuous experiences also created space for Black subjects to intervene within and modify Rainsford's understanding of normativity. Black forces appear to make "perverse" sexual relationships desirable in Rainsford's representations of his experiences in Saint-Domingue. As I will show, their interventions prompted another mode of being at odds with empire's regulation of normative understandings of sexuality and gender. Black figures instigated other ways of knowing uncontrolled and unmanageable sentiments or passions that transformed into erotically beckoning instances of becoming undone through the deformative.

In one of *An Historical Account*'s tensest moments, an unnamed Black woman visits Rainsford as he awaits death. She interrupts his third-person meditation on his impoverished state and impending annihilation:

> After lying two nights on a couch, formed of dried sugarcanes, with a very slender supply of food, the prisoner had resigned himself to the

> vacuity of despair; he was stretched out in silent agony, when, as the night closed in, and the mirthful troops had progressively retired, a gentle female voice, with the tenderest accents, aroused his attention. How long the benign object had been there, he could not ascertain; but, when he looked up, and beheld her, his feelings were indescribable: she was a fine figure, rather tall, and slender, with a face most beautiful, and a form of symmetry, improved by the melancholy air which the scene had given her. She was dressed in a superior style, and possessed all the elegance of European manners, improved by the most expressive carriage. She held a basket, containing the most delicate food, with the finest fruits: she entreated him to receive them silently, and to destroy any remnants as a discovery would be fatal to her, and prejudicial to himself. He was about to reply with the ardour of gratitude, when, in an instant, she was gone! (Rainsford 234-35)

Comparisons to European mannerisms and dress help render the Black woman with visual palpability. Crossing race-based categories of difference, she becomes visible through defining characteristics of stereotypically beautiful white femininity, including symmetry, tenderness, and gentleness. But the Black woman's specter-like presence and immediate disappearance belie Rainsford's ability to possess her, while also emphasizing a failure to understand her form through ready-made categories. Furthermore, Rainsford loses the powerful ability to express his autonomous sovereignty by creating disinterested observations based on "scientific" principles of taxonomy.[8] The boundaries between "objective" descriptions of the woman's physical appearance and Rainsford's "indescribable feelings" collapse. Struggling to articulate the "shame" of his imprisonment and impending death next to an ostensibly free Black woman, Rainsford entangles contemplation of his annihilation with the allure of a figure who was located on the cusp of empire's regulation of normativity (231).

When Toussaint frees Rainsford, the latter does not celebrate his liberation as much as mourn the absence of his visitor. In an extended passage, Rainsford remains enraptured by the Black woman even though he no longer needs her company and she even functions as a reminder of his extreme anguish:

> To describe his feelings on such an unexpected reverse, would be difficult and useless. Reversed to himself once more, he did not long remain on a part of the island where his sufferings would have tended to efface the agreeable impressions received at Cape François. Once he tried to trace the haunts of his benevolent incognita, but in vain.

> She was impervious. He again bade adieu to this interesting soil, and at length reached his long desired destination, the island of Martinique. (237)

Rainsford succumbs to the shame of inarticulable feelings as the Black woman visitor becomes even more erotic by remaining outside the scope of his possessive power. Rainsford's inability to let go of his desire for the Black woman becomes a queer representational problem elsewhere in *An Historical Account*. As I will show, Rainsford's encounter with the woman is symptomatic of a desire to experience modes of being outside of empire's regulation of normativity. Her introjection in Rainsford's meditation on his shame of being sentenced to death by Black forces instigated other ways of seeing the extreme corporeal disaggregation associated with the Haitian Revolution.

Like Sansay, Rainsford aimed to uphold the differences between white and Black bodies central to imperial dominion. He went to extraordinary lengths to downplay his involvement in Britain's disastrous attempt to seize Saint-Domingue.[9] As literary scholars Paul Youngquist and Grégory Pierrot note, *An Historical Account* cannot be understood as an unadulterated or eyewitness account of what Rainsford experienced at the ground level (xxxiv). Rainsford intentionally changed the date of his arrival to place himself in Saint-Domingue after British General Thomas Maitland's surrender to Toussaint Louverture in 1798. Moreover, Youngquist and Pierrot suggest that these changes index a mode of "Britishizing" the Haitian Revolution. Rainsford's changes make Haiti the "heir of British liberty and Britain the executor of Haitian freedom" (Youngquist and Pierrot xxxix). Focusing on the glory of the Haitian Revolution tricks readers into thinking Rainsford and the British Empire supported Haiti's establishment despite Britain's failed attempt to seize the French colony and nineteenth-century Britons' mixed opinions about it.[10] However, Rainsford strained to uphold the powerful masculine dominion central to empire's regulation of normativity. Succumbing to the erotic allure of the Black woman, which is sparked while contemplating the shame of his impending death, and being unable to let go of his desire for her points toward the limits of these efforts.

Scholars have been particularly attentive to Rainsford's employment of violent imagery in the text because they appear to cement white dominion by transforming Haiti into an obfuscation of extreme horror (see Figures 3 and 4). Yet ostensible acts of incivility may not be so easily synonymous with ideas of colonial power. For Jeremy Teow, these images ask readers to consider whether Haiti could truly be a civil nation. Although the pictures shade closely to an illustration of Saint-Domingue's unsuitability for white habituation, they also indicate how Europeans perpetuated the real incivility.

Teow contrasts the Black soldiers' "controlled form of violence" with the white soldiers' lack of restraint (Teow 92-95). Others have seen violence as what minimizes Black agency. As Laurence Brown has argued, violence erases the Black revolutionaries' actual actions. Describing the Haitian Revolution solely through violence helped foreground Rainsford's plight while putting Haiti's establishment in the background. However, a queer lens divulges another way of reading Rainsford's textual-visual illustrations. Violence is not easily reducible to the colonial logic of a dichotomy between savage diasporic Africans and civil white Europeans. Recognizing Rainsford's encounter with the Black woman and efforts to downplay his involvement in General Maitland's defeat, spectacular scenes of corporeal disaggregation signal a pleasurable bewilderment only accessible outside the scope of empire's regulation of normativity. *An Historical Account*'s textual-visual representations of racialized violence slip into fantastical imaginings.

Figure 3: Inigo Barlow, *Revenge Taken by the Black Army for the Cruelties practised on them by the French* in Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, 1805, engraving, John Carter Brown Library, D805 R158h /1-SIZE, 20.6 cm x 17.9 cm.

Figure 4: Inigo Barlow, *The Mode of exterminating the Black Army, as practised by the French* in Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, 1805, engraving, John Carter Brown Library, D805 R158h /1-SIZE, 20.9 cm x 18cm.

According to the illustrations' accompanying text, the scenes represent the "barbarous methods" Frenchmen employed during a final attempt to curtail the Black revolutionaries (Rainsford 327). This included bloodhounds. Two bloodhounds in the latter print's foreground are even seen devouring floating Black corpses at sea. The text continues by explaining how the "miserable cargoes were discharged into the sea in such quantities that, at length the tide (as if the mighty Arbiter of all, meant to hold their shame before them) brought the corpses into the bay, and rolled them on the very beach" (Rainsford 328). Shame generated through the corpses helps dramatize the scene and make it productive by spurring complex intimacies that cross racial categories of difference and deviate from Euro-American understandings of normativity. Indeed, Rainsford's text continues by describing struggles to identify the victims who washed ashore "under the dark concealment of night" (328). These open and disaggregated corpses raise a serious question about the body's incoherent or unstable relationship to an extreme sentiment. As I will show, these spectacles of disaggregated corpora become powerfully beckoning scenes of absconding from metropolitan normativity.

Hounds reappear in one of *An Historical Account*'s most complex images (see Figure 5). With a backgrounded mountain and breadfruit tree growing from the right side, the landscape frames hounds devouring a Black woman and her infant. A Black Man's torso flails immediately behind the Black woman and her infant, while a hound has almost entirely consumed a different corpus. Furthermore, another hound, which maintains a closer resemblance to a fantastical monster, eats a three-armed Black man. But

no bloodhounds were ever used to attack diasporic Africans in Saint-Domingue. If the bloodhounds' deformities and unequivocal departures from physiological precision were not enough to signal how ground-level violence slipped into the European imaginary, Rainsford admits that he conjured up the entire spectacle. Rainsford confesses that the hounds were a "successful, yet [. . .] dangerous experiment" tried by British soldiers on Jamaica during the Second Maroon War (327). Moreover, he admits that bloodhounds are included in the text as a way of bolstering *An Historical Account*'s appeal to British audiences. He explains how "[s]trange as it may appear to those who had an opportunity of knowing the fact, the public mind [. . .] has never been satisfied that the Maroons were not really hunted down, and destroyed by blood-hounds" (Rainsford 327). Pleasures from viewing taxonomically inspired representations of bodies slip into fantasies about the deformative here.

Figure 5: Inigo Barlow, *Blood hounds attacking a Black Family in the Woods* in Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, 1805, engraving, John Carter Brown Library, D805 R158h /1-SIZE, 20.9 cm x 17.9 cm.

This thematization of beastly hounds indicates how Rainsford's representations of the Haitian Revolution held on to and even amplified the imagining of other ways of being that the Black female visitor instigated. Like her interruption of Rainsford's meditation on his impending death, these hounds interrupt descriptions of the Haitian Revolution through more familiar categories of white dominion, Black savagery, or patriarchal power. The bloodhounds are salient reminders of the inability to comprehend the Haitian Revolution through existing categories. However, they also signal a struggle to fix or secure normativity.[11] Rainsford could not let go of his erotic attachments to deviant figures who unsettled his powerful position as a white

male Anglophone writer. Ultimately, the desire to uphold colonial power by preserving white dominion through violence became too wrapped up with the beckoning allure of the deformative. The corporeal disaggregation associated with the Haitian Revolution made it possible to imagine bloodhounds and forge erotic attachments by creating space for Euro-American audiences to access the breakdown of normativity.

Coda

This article examined how two different Anglophone works situate the Haitian Revolution's events as an erotic departure from the normative relationships that constituted metropolitan identity while imperial power waned. Problematizing a simple disparagement of Haiti's establishment as an isolated series of events that were unconnected to the metropole, Clara's flight from her husband and Rainsford's erotic desire for a Black woman are inextricably linked to Black revolutionaries' ground-level efforts to contest white dominion. *Secret History*'s concluding letter about Clara's corporeal openness and *An Historical Account*'s final engravings about imaginary bloodhounds signal a pleasurable detachment from the normativity associated with the imperial metropole. Both works highlight how queerness in the colonial periphery was experienced through relationships that oriented bodies in bewildering ways. In short, Anglophone textual-visual representations of the Haitian Revolution show how queerness took on stranger forms and tropes as colonials clung to imperial power in the periphery.

For scholars seeking to overcome the metropolitan bias in queer epistemology, *Secret History* and *An Historical Account* show how queerness in the Caribbean unsettles the bifurcated relation between rural and urban environments. The pleasurable bewilderment Anglophones experienced in Saint-Domingue indicates that yearnings to escape the hegemony of the metropole did not immediately or easily result in attachments to the quiet or tranquil pleasures of rural life. Anglophones were often enthralled by the Haitian Revolution's more tumultuous instabilities that questioned defining features of metropolitan normativity and transcended investments in specific geographical terrains. Perhaps Sansay's and Rainsford's voyages to places outside the metropole demonstrate the necessity of grappling with queerness as a spatially unmappable longing. The authors and their audiences wanted to go beyond the very binary frameworks of heterosexuality versus homosexuality, masculinity versus femininity, and urbanism versus ruralism.

Notes

[1] To date, Patrick David Geggus's *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Dominque, 1793-1798*, written over forty years ago, is the only historical study of Britain's attempt to conquer Saint-Domingue.

[2] For more on Marcus Rainsford's biography see Paul Youngquist & Grégory Pierrot, "Introduction."

[3] See Marlene Daut's reading of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's understanding of "silence" as that which was only made available through more complex forms of narration (1-19).

[4] See Doris Garraway's understanding of libertinage (xiii-xiv). Moreover, see Marcus Wood's understanding of pornography (12).

[5] Bryan Edwards's *An Historical Survey of the Island of Saint Domingo, Together with an Account of the Maroon Negroes in the Island of Jamaica* is an example of an illustrated book about Saint-Domingue composed by another Anglophone writer. However, his work was published as the Haitian Revolution's events unfolded and before the Declaration of Haitian Independence.

[6] For more information about the plantation, see Michael J. Drexler, "Introduction," pp. 27-28.

[7] See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "The Secret History of the Early American Novel: Leonora Sansay and the Revolution in Saint Domingue" and Tessie P. Liu, "The Secret beyond White Patriarchal Power: Race, Gender, and Freedom in the Last Days of Colonial Saint- Domingue."

[8] One might consider Mary Louise Pratt's understanding of the British travel narrative.

[9] For a historical account of Britain's failure to colonize Saint-Domingue, see David Patrick Geggus's *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Dominque, 1793-1798*.

[10] For historian David Patrick Geggus, Britons possessed a wide range of opinions about Haiti's establishment (123-49). Some were pleased to see Black forces drive out Frenchmen, while others experienced the chagrin of recalling Britain's own failure to seize the French colony.

[11] I am thinking with Kathrine McKittrick's understanding of the "demonic ground" to consider the problems of depicting bodies that were understood as "ungeographic" (xxiv).

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Biography

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