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## **How to cite this publication**

Please cite the final published version:

Kjærgård, J. R. (2018). What Are Robespierre and Télémaque Doing in Saint-Domingue? Humanness, Revolutionary Legitimacy, and Political Order in Charles Pigault-Lebrun's *Le blanc et le noir* (1795). *Orbis Litterarum*, 73(2), 186-212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12157>

## Publication metadata

<b>Title:</b>	What Are Robespierre and Télémaque Doing in Saint-Domingue? Humanness, Revolutionary Legitimacy, and Political Order in Charles Pigault-Lebrun's <i>Le blanc et le noir</i> (1795)
<b>Author(s):</b>	Jonas Ross Kjærgård
<b>Journal:</b>	Orbis Litterarum
<b>DOI/Link:</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12157">10.1111/oli.12157</a>
<b>Document version:</b>	Accepted manuscript (post-print)

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Kjærgård, J. R. (2018). What Are Robespierre and Télémaque Doing in Saint-Domingue? Humanness, Revolutionary Legitimacy, and Political Order in Charles Pigault-Lebrun's *Le blanc et le noir* (1795). *Orbis Litterarum*, 73(2), 186-212.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12157>, which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12157>.

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## What Are Robespierre and Telemachus Doing in Saint-Domingue?

Humanness, Revolutionary Legitimacy, and Political Order in Charles Pigault-Lebrun's *Le blanc et le noir* (1795)

Charles Pigault-Lebrun's *Le blanc et le noir* was no success when it was staged at the Parisian Théâtre de la Cité in November 1795. After just three performances the author withdrew the piece, unhappy with the reactions from the audience. The play deserves our attention, however, because it is one of only a handful of French theatrical plays from the revolutionary decade to portray the Saint-Domingue rebellion; a rebellion that became a revolution, that ended French colonial rule in what was known as the *perle des Antilles*, and that paved the way for declaring Haiti an independent state in 1804.<sup>1</sup> The play thus offers a rare chance to understand the relation between metropole and colony from the perspective of revolutionary theater.

In one of the play's important scenes, the black rebel leader, Télémaque, approaches his white friend, Beauval *fils*, to warn him of a coming revolt. The warning triggers strong objections from Beauval *fils*, not because he is opposed to the cause of the rebels, but because he rightly fears for the life of his father who is the plantation owner. To quell these objections, Télémaque says:

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<sup>1</sup> The other plays that I know of are Olympe de Gouges: *L'esclavage des noirs, ou l'heureux naufrage* (1792), staged in 1789 but republished with a new preface after news of the insurrection reached France; Citoyen B: *La liberté générale ou les colons à Paris: Comédie en un acte et en prose* (1796), staged in Cap Français but not in Paris; Beraud de la Rochelle & Rosny, Joseph. *Adonis, ou le bon nègre, Mélodrama, en quatre actes, avec Danses, Chansons, Décors et Costumes Créoles* (1798), initially published as a novel by Jean-Baptiste Piquenard also in 1798; Benoît Joseph Marsollier des Vivetières: *La mort du colonel Maudit, ou les anarchistes au Port-au-Prince; fait historique, En un Acte, et en Prose* (1799). For a still expanding list of literary works on the Haitian revolution, see Marlene Daut's helpful webpage <http://www.haitianrevolutionaryfictions.com> [page last visited 17 November 2016].

Laissez les considerations personnelles. Le veritable parricide est celui qui tue la liberte des nations. Consultez votre probite, les droits de hommes, la justice eternelle; interrogez votre conscience : voilà le juge incorruptible qu'il faut seul écouter. (3.6).<sup>2</sup>

Leave aside your personal considerations. True parricide is to kill the liberty of nations. Consult your probity, the rights of man, and the eternal justice; interrogate your conscience: there you have the incorruptible judge, the only one you should ever listen to.

Télémaque's line is rich with the rhetoric and concerns that dominate much French revolutionary theater: the problem of balancing the male citizen's personal sentiments with his national obligations; the theme of parricide, especially prevalent in 1795 just two years after the execution of Louis XVI; the popular rhetoric of human rights, liberty, and justice; and the idea of the "incorruptible judge" which refers to Maximilien de Robespierre (1758-1794) and his popular byname *the incorruptible*. All these decisively French revolutionary concerns are invoked by a character named Télémaque, not only the mythological son of Ulysses but also the protagonist of François de Fénelon's influential didactic novel *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1699). The basis of this article is the deceptively simple question: what are these French figures and Parisian concerns doing in a play about the Haitian revolution?

Let me begin by retelling the plot of the play. *Le blanc et le noir* is structured around two key conflicts, one centering on the right organization of the colonial plantation and the other seeking to determine the legitimate ways of moving towards the right organization of plantation life. The first deals with the right *ordering of the colonial society* and the second with the right *means of bringing about* the right colonial order. The first conflict is played out in the confrontation between the colonist Beauval *père* and his son Beauval *fils*. Both men believe in paternal authority but while the son has embraced enlightenment ideals of liberty, rights, and equality, the father trusts the hierarchical and strict principles of his plantation manager, Mathieu. The relation between father and son is here both personal and symbolic because finding the proper relation between father and son is equivalent to finding the right power balance between colonial master and enslaved subjects. The play's second conflict is personified by the enslaved Télémaque. Even though Beauval *fils* has managed to improve his condition on the plantation, Télémaque feels a great desire to avenge the wrongs of the white planters and this desire is fueled by the unwarranted corporal punishment of his mistress Zamé. The question raised by the play is not whether the traditional form of slavery is legitimate or not – because clearly, it's not – but rather if Télémaque is justified in murdering the whites to reach the

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<sup>2</sup> References in the running text are to Pigault-Lebrun's *Le blanc et le noir* (act.scene).

goal of a justly organized plantation society. After Télémaque and the rebels have killed most whites on the plantation, the play ends with Télémaque forgiving Beauval *père* who on his side regrets his deeds and becomes reunited with his son.

Rather than a successful work of art, I consider Pigault-Lebrun's play a theatrical thought experiment that works to simultaneously intervene in two political discussions.<sup>3</sup> The first is a colonial one, dealing with the legitimacy of slavery and colonialism, the second is a metropolitan discussion, centered on defining French revolutionary sensibility and ideology. Like other dramatists from this period, Pigault-Lebrun explicitly aims to develop a moral theater capable of educating spectators on current issues.<sup>4</sup> In the preface to the published version of the play, Pigault-Lebrun explicitly situates it within the colonial discussion, emphasizing the inspiration he found in Abbé Raynal's multi-authored work *Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes* (1770, 1774, 1780): "J'ai lu Raynal, et j'ai écrit cet ouvrage"(7).<sup>5</sup> Based on his avowed allegiance to the abolitionist *philosophe*, he explains the morals or the "donnée générale" of his play (14):

[Les blancs] font des êtres atroces, que la crainte seule peut contenir; des hommes bruts, sans intelligence, sans sensibilité. Hé! quel blanc conserverait les facultés de son ame, réduit à la vie déplorable des nègres? Quel blanc n'éprouverait pas la soif de la vengeance, avec les mêmes motifs de haine et de fureur? (10)

[The whites] create atrocious beings that can be contained only through fear; violent men without intelligence and without sensibility. Oh! What white man would conserve the faculties of his soul if he was reduced to the deplorable life of the Negroes? What white man would not feel the thirst for vengeance with the same motives of hatred and fury?

There is no reason to question the sincerity of Pigault-Lebrun's engagement in the questions of slavery and colonialism. The play genuinely tries to understand the Saint-Domingue insurrection but that only re-actualizes the question of why he transports Telemachus and Robespierre to the Caribbean? I argue that Pigault-Lebrun sees the Haitian revolution through a Parisian filter. Because of a lack of knowledge about the specificities of the Saint-Domingue situation he is only able to

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<sup>3</sup> Even though I disagree with his reading of the play's abolitionism, I am close to Léon-François Hoffmann in his estimation of the character and importance of the work: "La plus significative des pièces 'noires' de l'époque est sans contre-dit celle que Pigault-Lebrun a intitulée *Le Blanc et le Noir* [...]. Il serait trop facile d'ironiser sur les faiblesses de la pièce. Qu'elle constitue un document sociologique bien plus qu'une réussite littéraire est indiscutable." (Hoffmann 1973, 111-113).

<sup>4</sup> For literature on the politics of French revolutionary theater, see e.g. Friedland 2002, Maslan 2005, and AUTHOR 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "I read Raynal and I wrote this piece."

make sense of it by using the figures and concerns he knows from the Parisian context. In the 1792 play *L'esclavage des noirs*, author and political activist Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) demonstrates a similar unfamiliarity with colonial realities and presents herself as a “témoin auriculaire des récits désastreux des maux de l'Amérique” (Gouges 1792, 1).<sup>6</sup> This lack of first-hand knowledge about slavery and colonial revolt help explain the reductive depictions of enslaved Africans in these plays. The French colonial setting, however, has different consequences for the artistic investigation of revolutionary politics. Just as Parisian politics frame Pigault-Lebrun's understanding of colonial events, the colonial questions of race, slavery, and submission add a particular poignancy to his intervention in metropolitan politics.

To demonstrate the significance of the play's blend of metropole and colony, I analyze three aspects of *Le blanc et le noir*. 1) Its conception of *humanness* by which I mean the play's consideration of who count as humans and who don't. 2) Its examination of *revolutionary legitimacy*. I here wish to draw attention to the suggested ways of bringing about political change. 3) Its presentation of sentimental paternalism as the best possible kind of *political order*. All three problems are central to the play and I recurrently use them to investigate the consequences of the play's blended metropole/colony perspective. I conclude by returning to my initial question: What are Robespierre and Telemachus doing in Saint-Domingue?

## Humanness

The question of what it means to be human is crucial in the present human rights interest within the humanities. Humanness has received attention because, in the words of Sharon Sliwinski, “to be human, these [declarations of rights] resoundingly declare, is *to be* free and equal in dignity and rights” (Sliwinski 2011, 18). In the human rights philosophy and legislation, humanness is a qualifier for rights and the linkage between the two has made it necessary to analyze our historically shifting conceptions of what it means to belong wholly and fully to the “community called humanity” (Ibid., 17). Some eighteenth century observers presented the connection between humanness and political rights as unproblematic. Thus, French revolutionary philosopher and mathematician, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), used the humanness/rights-connection to unhesitatingly defend the political rights of everyone despite their religion, color, and sex:

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<sup>6</sup> “Earwitness to the disastrous stories of the American morals”. For a reading of this passage and of Gouges' geographical confusion see Miller 2008, 109-140.

Or, les droits des hommes résultent uniquement de ce qu'ils sont des êtres sensibles, susceptibles d'acquérir des idées morales, et de raisonner sur ces idées. Ainsi les femmes ayant ces mêmes qualités, ont nécessairement des droits égaux. Ou aucun individu de l'espèce humaine n'a de véritables droits, ou tous ont les mêmes; et celui qui vote contre le droit d'un autre, quels que soient sa religion, sa couleur ou son sexe, a dès lors abjuré les siens. (Condorcet 1847, 122)

The rights of man stem exclusively from the fact that they are sentient beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning upon them. Since women have the same qualities, they necessarily also have the same rights. Either no member of the human race has any true rights, or else they all have the same ones; and anyone who votes against the rights of another, whatever his religion, colour or sex, automatically forfeits his own. (Condorcet 2012, 156-157)

The quote's irrefutable logic clouds the magnitude of problems Condorcet here proposes to solve. Is it really an ahistorical "fact" that man is a "sentient being, capable of acquiring *moral* ideas and of reasoning upon them"? If rights necessarily follow from such a definition of man, why have they historically most often belonged to "particular people – freeborn English men, for example" (Hunt 2007, 21-22) – and what could be done to change that unequal distribution of rights? In a number of interconnected articles literary scholar Susan Maslan has argued that the linkage of humanity and political rights, apparent in Condorcet as well as in the 1789 human rights legislation, was an attempt to overcome a centuries old division between the universal man and the nationally specific citizen (Maslan 2004; Maslan 2006; Maslan 2009; Maslan 2016). The most important French revolutionary document is tellingly entitled Declaration of the Rights of *Man and of the Citizen*. The deputies debating this document, Maslan argues, strove to bridge the division between *oikos* and *polis*, emotion and reason, universalism and national specificity. Early modern authors such as Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) and Pierre de Marivaux (1688-1763) had problematized the separation of emotional and political man in literature but with the double man/citizen subject of the 1789 Declaration of rights, revolutionaries too began to envision the ideal "feeling citizen" (Maslan 2006).

In *Le blanc et le noir* humanness is presented as a qualitative question with quantitative implications. By this I mean that the play, much like Condorcet, invites its spectators to consider what it means to be human and then use these anthropological considerations to judge who belongs to the "community called humanity". "Toujours prêt à se livrer à la sensibilité, à l'amitié, à la reconnaissance," Beuval *fils* says, "le bon Télémaque prouve aux détracteurs des noirs que les vertus sont de tous les climats et de toutes les couleurs" (1.2). Humans are defined neither by their color

nor, as Montesquieu had influentially claimed, by the climate they inhabit but by their sensibility and their ability to feel with their fellow human beings. When these qualities define the human, Télémaque must be counted as a member of humanity. The same logic applies for Zamé, Télémaque's lover, whose virtues and specifically *human* qualities physically overwhelm Beauval *père* towards the end of the play: "Sensibilité, bienfaisance, générosité, tout ce qui honore les hommes, tu le réunis en toi. Tant de grandeur m'accable, tant de vertu me confond" (4.5). The physical presence of *human* virtue is what ultimately turns the plantation owner towards the good.

In bringing this understanding of humanness to bear upon the events of the Haitian revolution, Pigault-Lebrun brings a metropolitan conception of the human to the Caribbean case. After all, the humanity of the enslaved workers could have been proven with a reference to, say, their religion, aspects of their former customs, or their political agency rather than their ability to feel empathy. In choosing sentiments as proof of the enslaved population's humanity, Pigault-Lebrun uses a metropolitan frame to present the Saint-Domingue rebellion. The humanness of the enslaved comes to rely upon their ability to act according to metropolitan behavioral criteria. Following the reading of Marlene Daut (2015, 161) we may therefore argue that Pigault-Lebrun draws upon the trope of "le bon nègre"; a figure defined by Léon-François Hoffmann as "le serviteur fidèle et reconnaissant du maître qui a su se montrer humain envers lui" (Hofmann 1973, 138).<sup>7</sup> As long as the black person acts according to European standards, blackness is no disqualifier for humanness. This rhetorical figure is frequent in the period, notably so in the title of one of the other Haitian revolutionary plays: Beraud de la Rochelle & Joseph Rosny's *Adonis, ou le bon nègre* (1798).<sup>8</sup>

Without contradicting Hoffmann and Daut's point, it is important to note that there is also an opposite traffic of influence. The specifically colonial case also changes the contours of the metropolitan discussion of humanness, rights, and citizenship, something which is apparent in the figure of the villain. In some of the most popular French revolutionary plays – *Les victimes cloîtrées* (1791, staged 109 times) by Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel (1745-1812) or *Fénelon ou les religieuses de Cambrai* (1793, staged 141 times) by Marie-Joseph Chénier (1764-1811) – the villains are either old regime aristocrats or conservative monks.<sup>9</sup> At a time when the commoners of the Third Estate struggled successfully for greater political influence, it is understandable that their political antagonists from the first and second estates would also embody the villains in their favored plays.

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<sup>7</sup> "The master's faithful and grateful servant whom he treats humanely".

<sup>8</sup> This play was based on the novel *Adonis, ou le bon nègre* (1798) by Jean-Baptiste Piquenard (1771-1826). The novel enjoyed some success and was republished in 1817 and 1836.

<sup>9</sup> Number of representations is taken from Kennedy et. al. (eds.) 1996, 118; 125.

In *Le blanc et le noir* the question of humanness and villainy is especially pertinent in act 2, scene 7 when the plantation manager Mathieu tries to calm the increasingly anxious atmosphere of the plantation by selling the rebellious Télémaque:

Barthélemi: Un nègre soixante-dix portugaises?

Mathieu: Il y a nègre et nègre.

Barthélemi: J'aurais pour ce prix le meilleur cuisinier de la colonie [...].

Mathieu: Il faut voir la marchandise, M. Barthélemi, avant de se récrier sur le prix. Télémaque, ici (*Télémaque s'approche.*) Examinez cette structure. Epaules larges, poitrine ouverte, jarret tendu, gras de jambe fourni, la force d'Hercule et la beauté d'Adonis, à la couleur près.

Barthélemi: Tout cela est bel et bon. Mais, soixante-dix portugaises, M. Mathieu...

Télémaque: Ciel! qu'entends-je!

Mathieu: Par considération pour vous, je pourrai rabattre quelque chose.

Barthélemi: J'en donne soixante, et vous lâcherez la négresse par-dessus le marché.

Mathieu: Non pas, non.

Télémaque, indigné: Quel opprobre! Ne se laisseront-ils jamais de traiter des hommes comme le plus vil bétail? (2.7)

Barthélemi: A negro for seventy Reis?

Mathieu: There are different kinds of negroes.

Barthélemi: At that price I could have the best chef in the colony [...].

Mathieu: Before complaining of the price, you have to consider the merchandise, M.

Barthélemi. Télémaque, here (*Télémaque approaches.*) Examine the structure: Broad shoulders, protruding chest, the strength of Hercules, and the beauty of Adonis – except for the color.

Barthélemi: All this is good and well. But seventy Reis, M. Mathieu...

Télémaque: Heaven! What is it I hear!

Mathieu: I could do a special price for you.

Barthélemi: I'll give you sixty for him and you let that negress enter into the bargain.

Mathieu: No, absolutely not.

Télémaque, indignant: What a disgrace! Will they never stop treating human beings as mere cattle? (2.7)

What the spectator is here meant to experience is a variation of what Lynn Festa has called the “readerly vertigo” produced by eighteenth century literature of the slave trade (Festa 2006, 153). This literature, she writes, “shift[s] precipitously from descriptions of slave families torn asunder to the banal catalogues of objects exchanged in the trade, from testimony about the incalculable suffering of the Middle Passage to the capacious abstractions that describe the global balance of trade [...]” (Ibid.). In the play, the humanness of the enslaved Télémaque was established early on by Beauval *fils* but here humanity is threatened by the mercantile logics of Mathieu. To the distress of Télémaque, the human person is reduced to mere merchandise, whereby the opposition noticed

by Festa is made manifest. The villainy of Mathieu consists in his inability to acknowledge the humanness of the enslaved workers. Humanness for him is nothing but empty principles proclaimed in expensive books “relié en maroquin” (1.3).<sup>10</sup> Instead of seeing the humanness of the enslaved, he has “calculé ce que doit rapporter un nègre, par an, par mois, par jour. Il faut, de gré ou de force, qu’il remplisse sa destination, et, quand il est usé, un autre le remplace” (Ibid.).<sup>11</sup> Contrary to Beauval *père* who was physically overwhelmed by the human qualities of Zamé, Mathieu remains inflexible in his calculative and unsentimental attitude towards the enslaved.

The failure to recognize humanness when he sees it is what makes Mathieu a villain on a par with the aristocrats and monks of other French revolutionary plays. As Festa notes in her analysis of British parliamentary abolitionist debates, the anti-abolitionist of this period “does not *disagree* with a political position – he displays his want of humanity,” meaning that he is “monstrous by default, marked as unfit for civil society” (Festa, 189). To return to the human rights philosophy of Condorcet, the anti-abolitionists – whether in the British parliament or the French play – demonstrate a lack of that humanity which was the prerequisite for acquiring political rights. To define the human as a “sentient being, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning upon them” is not necessarily a universalist politics but can, as in this case, be used to create a community “for the happy few” (Festa, 187). As Mathieu aims to exclude the enslaved from the community of humanity, he effectively forfeits his own membership.

The exclusivity of sentimentalism could be used to develop a critique of the non-universalist French revolutionary human rights thought akin to the one mounted by Dan Edelstein (2014, esp. 545-546). After all, how universal are these rights if some are considered monstrous by default? But what is equally clear is that the image of the villain in French revolutionary theater gains a particular facet when the play is set in the colonial context. The buying and selling of human beings and the readiness to use bodily punishments to increase the productivity of workers are elements from the colonial reality that give the theatrical villain a face different from the one he has in playwrights such as Monvel or Chénier. Pigault-Lebrun invites his spectators to take part in a sentimental community which excludes anyone who fails to recognize and act upon the humanity of the blacks, whereas Monvel and Chénier seek to banish Old Regime aristocrats and monks from the community called humanity. While the metropole vision of the ‘feeling citizen’ celebrates the humanity of the blacks in

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<sup>10</sup> “leather bound”.

<sup>11</sup> “I have calculated what a negro should bring in per year, per month, per day. He needs to bring in his amount whether freely or by force and when he is used up, another will replace him.”

a way that tends to reduce them to the trope of “le bon nègre,” the cynical self-interest of the plantation manager Mathieu adds significantly to the revolutionary drama’s figure of the villain.

## Revolutionary Legitimacy

If the humanness of the enslaved is sufficient proof that slavery is wrong, how can the institution of slavery be brought to an end? By posing and attempting to answer that question *Le blanc et le noir* intervenes in the question of revolutionary legitimacy which was acute in 1795, a year after the execution of Robespierre. In this the period of The Directory, ordinarily considered the conservative phase of the French revolution, Frenchmen asked themselves whether the execution of tens of thousands across France had been too steep a price to pay for overthrowing the *ancien régime*. A few years earlier Robespierre had mounted the rostrum of the National Convention and addressed this question of a revolutionary zeal gone too far. “Citizens,” he rhetorically asked, “did you want a revolution without a revolution?” (Robespierre 2007, 43). His point, as emphasized by Edelstein, was not that no misdeeds were performed in the uprising of August 10, 1792 but rather that these deeds could not be judged with a rule book predating the revolution (Edelstein 2012, 271). The *ancien régime* laws had produced the situation that made the uprisings necessary and therefore they could not be used to pass judgement on these events. They, the old laws themselves, were the problem. They had created the situation that the revolution was bringing to an end and the revolution itself had instituted a wholly different set of laws that was now becoming, to use a variety of the Jacobin quip, the order of the day.<sup>12</sup> Pigault-Lebrun’s intervention in the question of revolutionary legitimacy should be seen against this backdrop.

In *Le blanc et le noir*, the question of revolutionary legitimacy is raised through the figure of Télémaque. The emphasized humanness of the enslaved workers lays the foundation for the play’s general critique of slavery but the question of how to end that miserable practice is another matter. Acutely feeling the wrongs of slavery, Télémaque experiences a recurring revenge crave, sometimes termed a “besoin de venger mon sang” (1.1) and at others a “soif de [...] sang” (2.9). As he assumes leadership of the rebellion, the other insurgents follow this cry of vengeance “sans paddon” (3.3), as their shout is spelled in Pigault-Lebrun’s version of Creole. The bloodthirst is summed up in Télémaque’s order to the rebels: “Écrasons nos tyrans, sacrifions-les à notre sûreté” (3.3). To kill the

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<sup>12</sup> On 5 September 1793, a Jacobin delegation famously asked the Convention to “place Terror on the order of the day” (quoted from Andress 2005, 179).

whites here becomes a security matter. They are “tigres” (4.3) who will strike unless the rebels prevent it by slaughtering them first.

In the presentation of the rebellious bloodthirst, Pigault-Lebrun carefully chooses a vocabulary that will remind his audience of the French revolutionary excess associated with the Terror Regime. “Le juge incorruptible” (3.6) refers unequivocally to Robespierre and to describe the enemies as “tigers” would in 1795 with great probability be understood as a reference to the fifth verse of *La Marseillaise* (1792), which in 1795 became the Republic’s official anthem. This verse asks the French revolutionary soldiers to show no mercy towards “Tous ces tigres qui, sans pitié, / Déchirent le sein de leur mère!” (<http://www.elysee.fr/la-presidence/la-marseillaise-de-rouget-de-lisle/>).<sup>13</sup> But if Robespierre and the Jacobins are one historical reference, another is the figure of the Black Spartacus known from Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s futuristic novel *L’an 2440* (1771) and the 1780 version of Raynal’s *Histoire philosophique et politique*. In a passage, most likely written by Diderot, from the latter work the figure of the Black Spartacus is invoked with these words:

[I]l ne manque aux nègres qu’un chef assez courageux, pour les conduire à la vengeance & au carnage.

Où est-il, ce grand homme, que la nature doit à ses enfans vexés, opprimés, tourmentés ? Où est-il ? Il paroîtra, n’en doutons point, il se montrera, il levera l’étandard sacré de la liberté. Ce signal vénérable rassemblera autour de lui les compagnons de son infortune. Plus impétueux que les torrens, ils laisseront par-tout les traces ineffaçables de leur juste ressentiment. (Raynal 1781, 6: 134-135).<sup>14</sup>

[T]he negroes only need a courageous leader to transport them to vengeance and to carnage. Where is he, this great man whom nature owes to her vexed, oppressed, and tormented children? Where is he?<sup>15</sup> He will appear, have no doubts, he will show himself and raise the sacred flag of liberty. This venerable signal will assemble all his unfortunate companions around him. More impetuous than any flood, they shall spread the indelible traces of their just resentment.

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<sup>13</sup> “All these tigers who, mercilessly, / Rip their mother’s breast!”

<sup>14</sup> The passage of *Histoire philosophique et politique* is heavily inspired by a passage from Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *L’an 2440* in which the narrator is brought to the future and there sees a statue with the inscription “*Au vengeur du nouveau monde!*”. Mercier’s narrative continues: “Il est venu comme l’orage qui s’étend sur une ville criminelle que ses foundres vont écraser. Il a été l’ange exterminateur à qui le Dieu de justice avois remis son glaive: il a donné l’exemple que tôt ou tard la cruauté sera punie, & que la Providence tient en réserve de ses ames fortes qu’elle déchaîne sur la terre pour rétablir l’équilibre que l’iniquité de la féroce ambition a sçu détruire.” (Mercier 1771, 147-148).

<sup>15</sup> In the edition quoted by Marlene Daut this sentence is translated as “Where is he, this new Spartacus” (Daut 2015, 50).

The Black Spartacus has been much commented in the literature about Mercier, Raynal, and Toussaint Louverture (Marcellesi 2011, Daut 2015, 49-55) but what I want to highlight is the degree to which the bloodthirsty Télémaque is modelled not solely upon Robespierre but also upon this figure. Thus, Beauval *fils* at one point warns his father: “Craignez qu’un héros, un grand homme, paraissant tout-à-coup au milieu de ses compatriotes accablés, ne les relève en un instant, et n’écrase enfin l’astuce et la mollesse, par son génie et sa valeur. Le voyez-vous, invincible comme la victoire, implacable comme vous, se baigner à son tour dans des flots de sang humain, inventer des tourmens qui vous sont encore inconnus” (1.7). As Raynal’s “great man,” Télémaque is destined to be at the center of his compatriots and to unleash a flood of human blood. By modelling his protagonist upon Robespierre *and* the Black Spartacus, Pigault-Lebrun again achieves a blended vision of colony and metropole.

In his reading of the play, Hoffmann claims that Pigault-Lebrun “se dresse en accusateur des Blancs, et trouve les esclaves révoltés non seulement excusables mais aussi admirables” (Hoffmann 1973, 112). While the play endorses the abolitionist cause, I don’t think it expresses admiration of the slave insurrection. It expresses quite different ideals of political change. From the beginning, Beauval *fils*, whom Hoffmann considers the “porte-parole de l’auteur” (Ibid.), urges Télémaque: “Sois modéré dans ta conduite” (1.1), “cesse de te livrer à des transports inutiles, et peut-être dangereux” (1.1). Far from being revolutionary in spirit, these lines express an ideal of moderation. These are also the ideals that the young Télémaque struggles to learn in that other important reference point of the play, Fénelon’s *Les aventures de Télémaque*. In book thirteen of Fénelon’s didactic novel, there’s an example of the difficulty of acquiring the true greatness of moderation. After having quarreled with Phalantus over the possession of a number of prisoners of war, Télémaque is derided by Phalantus’ brother, the strong soldier Hippias. Hippias and the young Télémaque begin to fight, and to the surprise of everyone, the seemingly weaker Télémaque, who is secretly assisted by the goddess Minerva, wins. But instead of taking pride in his victory, he laments his rashness and passion:

Pendant qu’on ne pouvoit se lasser de l’admirer, il se retira dans sa tente, honteux de sa faute et ne pouvant plus se supporter lui-même. Il gémissoit de sa promptitude: il reconnoissoit combien il étoit injuste et déraisonnable dans ses emportemens; il trouvoit je ne sais quoi de vain, de foible et de bas dans cette hauteur démesurée et injuste. Il reconnoissoit que la véritable grandeur n’est que dans la modération, la justice, la modestie et l’humanité: il le voyoit; mais il n’osoit espérer de se corriger après tant de rechutes. (Fénelon 1920 [1699], 251-252)

While they could not leave off admiring him, he retired to his tent, ashamed of his fault and no longer able to support himself. He trembled at his promptitude: he recognized how unjust and unreasonable he was in being carried away; he found something vain, weak, and low in this measureless and unjust haughtiness. He recognized that true greatness resided always with moderation, justice, modesty, and humanity: he saw this, but notwithstanding his knowledge he despaired of ever being able to get the better of his foibles, after so many relapses [...]. (Fénelon 1994, 218)

Patience and moderation are difficult to learn because they require an ability to control those passions that provided the strong with his strength in the first place. As opposed to winning a battle against a seemingly superior warrior, to learn moderation requires the ability to conquer oneself. The *Télémaque* of Pigault-Lebrun's play similarly needs to learn this lesson. As the play evolves, the problem of stopping the slave rebellion before it turns into a bloodbath increasingly morphs into a psychological problem of whether *Télémaque* will learn moderation or not. Phrased differently, *Télémaque* is presented with the dilemma of choosing between Robespierre/Black Spartacus and Fénelon. Whereas Robespierre/Black Spartacus represents an uncontrollable, furious passion, Fénelon embodies the struggle to achieve moderation. Both positions work in favor of just social change but whereas Fénelon proposes to achieve justice through moderation and reason, Robespierre/Black Spartacus favor revolutionary violence. In the ninth scene of the third act *Télémaque* insists that Beauval *père* must die for his crimes and that his friend, Beauval *fils*, must reveal the location of his father. This scene reveals how the opposition of fury and humanity becomes a psychological conflict:

*Télémaque, furieux.* Où est ton père? Quelle route a-t-il prise?  
*Beauval fils.* Tu ne le sauras pas... tu ne le sauras pas.  
*Télémaque, en revenant sur lui-même.* Pardon! pardon! je n'ai pas dû le demander. (3.9)

*Télémaque, furious.* Where is your father? What route has he taken?  
*Beauval fils.* You will never know... you will never know.  
*Télémaque, becoming himself again.* I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I should not have asked.

*Télémaque* is a divided character who is split between a furious thirst for revenge and a moderate, sentimental fraternity. The final act pursues this conflict as Zamé strongly advocates moderation and forgiveness. When she learns that Beauval *père* is capable of remorse and when he repents his former actions, Zamé immediately forgives him: "Ce mot [remords] répare tout: tu mérites de vivre [...]" Tu

es homme, tu es malheureux, tu es sacré pour moi”(4.5).<sup>16</sup> Having come to this insight, she asks Télémaque to forgive the plantation owner but as he is incapable of calming his fury, Zamé confronts him: “Va, te dis-je, sois la proie des passions qui te dévorent, des remords qui suivent les forfaits. Le ciel est juste, et tu tomberas un jour victime de tes propres fureurs”(4.8).<sup>17</sup> As he gets the word, Beauval *filz* too invokes the challenge of vanquishing oneself as he says to Télémaque: “Tu as su combattre, vaincre; tu feras plus, tu te vaincras toi-même: ce dernier triomphe est digne de toi”(4.9).<sup>18</sup> Inspired by his friends, Télémaque succeeds in this struggle against his own passions and finally demonstrates “la véritable grandeur” as he lets his opponent live (4.9).<sup>19</sup>

The play's argument vis-à-vis colonial and metropolitan revolution is that it should have been peacefully concluded before passion led it astray. The abolitionist cause as well as the metropolitan struggle for liberty and equality is just but unless ambition is controlled by moderation, passions will take over and lead to excessive violence. This discussion is a timely metropolitan one but Pigault-Lebrun transports it unto the Saint-Domingue uprising and uses it to frame the Caribbean revolt. One consequence of this is that the Haitian revolutionaries become metaphorically linked with Robespierre even though the specificities of their political struggle were considerably different from his. The introduction of the Black Spartacus figure, however, produces an opposite traffic of influence. In 1795, a year after the execution of Robespierre, the Black Spartacus had a degree of moral rectitude which *the incorruptible* lacked. Playing Fénelon's Telemachus out against the blend of Robespierre and the Black Spartacus is to make the complex argument that the cause of the rebels is just despite the wrong means with which they've chosen to promote it. The cause of the revolution is just, but its means are mistaken. The question, then, is: if slavery and rebellion against slavery are equally wrong, what kind of political order might the ideal of sentimental moderation lead to? That is the question I now turn to.

## Political Order

<sup>16</sup> “This word [remorse] fixes everything: you deserve to live [...] You are human, you are unhappy, you are sacred to me”

<sup>17</sup> “Go, I say, be the prey of the passions that devour you, of the remorse that follow upon crime. Heaven is just and one day you will fall victim to your own fury”.

18 “You were able to combat and to vanquish; now you must do more, you must vanquish yourself: this last triumph is worthy of you”.

<sup>19</sup> “true greatness”.

Humanness becomes a political concern in the late eighteenth century human rights philosophy and legislation because it is the prerequisite for political rights. The ideal figure of this period is neither an apolitical emotionalist who stays at home nor is it a rational citizen who leaves aside his personal inclinations when he enters the *agora*. The ideal figure, as Maslan has pointed out, is the feeling citizen who is capable of establishing emotional bonds to his brethren while creating reasonable political structures that can integrate all feeling citizens into the body politic. As is perhaps most obvious from the French revolutionary distinction between active and passive citizens, however, universal political inclusion was not really a legislative goal. Instead French citizens of the New Regime – and they were all men – had to prove their common utility through, among other things, tax-payments, which made political influence dependent not upon humanness but upon work and income. The active/passive-distinction from the French 1791 constitution showcases a complexity of French revolutionary politics that is not immediately apparent from Condorcet’s principled writings on the subject.<sup>20</sup> These real life political intricacies reveal that not only monstrous villains were excluded from political membership, so were a number of others including women and the poor. Ideas of French revolutionary political order were complex and sometimes contradicted principled ideals of universal equality.

In *Le blanc et le noir*, the problem of political order is approached as a question of paternal authority. Paternal authority, as noticed by Lynn Hunt, is addressed from the very first scene of the play (Hunt 1992, 172-174). Greeting Télémaque and commenting on the morning’s fine weather, Beauval *fils* is met with the retort that only the privileged few can enjoy the warmth of the Caribbean island. Beauval *fils* acknowledges this inequality as he looks upon the forced laborers at work and he does so by invoking the paternal theme:

Je n’ai pas fait tout le bien que j’aurais voulu faire. Je depends d’un père, dont les principes ne sont pas les miens. Mais, dans quelques années, peut-être, je vous consolerais des peines que vous aurez endurées; je serai avare de votre sang, économe de vos sueurs, et la mère inquiète et sensible n’arrosera plus de ses pleurs le berceau de son enfant. (1,1)

I haven’t done all the good that I would have liked to. I depend on a father whose principles are different from mine. But in a couple of years maybe I can make up for the griefs that you have suffered; I shall be thrifty with your blood, economical with your sweat, and the worried and sensitive mother shall no longer have to water the child’s cradle with her tears.

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<sup>20</sup> The active/passive schism of French revolutionary ideology and legislation is too complex to fully unfold here but see e.g. Sewell 1988 and AUTHOR 2016.

From a distance of more than two centuries the political sting of Beauval *fils* is difficult to appreciate. He makes no promise to abolish slavery even as he looks into a future where he has inherited his father's plantation. He only promises to be economical with the sweat and blood of the still enslaved workers and, as demonstrated above, repeatedly dissuades Télémaque from taking up arms. Despite such vagaries he does overtly question his father's principles and this is sufficient reason for Mathieu to consider the young man's ideas and speech "évidemment subversifs de l'ordre" (1.3).

Literary historian Jean-Claude Bonnet argues that late eighteenth century French writers were obsessed with the figure of the father. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Denis Diderot (1716-1784), Rétif de la Bretonne (1734-1806), and Madame de Staël (1766-1817) all contributed to the development of a father figure much friendlier and domestically oriented than the authoritative father of the past. This new myth of the sensitive father, peaceful as he seems, came to be united with a militant political project:

La nouvelle image du père, plus familière, paisible, n'est pas seulement destinée à supplanter une ancienne paternité tyrannique, 'gothique' disait-on alors, elle est utilisée dans un projet militant. Dans sa simplicité domestique, et dépouillé de tout autre attribut, le père privé acquiert un surcroît d'intérêt symbolique, car il en vient à représenter la nature : devant elle s'abolissent les distinctions et les privilèges d'une société d'ordres, ce qui ouvre la perspective d'un monde plus homogène et plus égalitaire. À travers la figure du père, on prétend imposer une éthique universaliste et convertir à un nouvel ordre de choses. (Bonnet 2000, 259)

Pigault-Lebrun's suggested form of political order is clothed in this discourse of egalitarian paternalism, with paternalism referring to family and politics alike. Bonnet emphasizes, and I find this important, that the confrontation with tyrannical paternal authority happened not against but *through* the figure of the father ("à travers la figure du père"). This is perhaps most striking in the early French revolutionary figure of the "good king with evil advisors" (Shapiro 2009, 44-57). For many deputies and political observers, Louis XVI was not the problem. The problem was ill-intentioned advisors that managed to dissuade the king from pursuing his naturally benevolent aspirations. Hence, the solution was not to challenge paternal authority but to alter the specific logics that guided its course.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The literature analyzing the relation between French revolutionary politics and family structure is immense. Suffice it to say that my understanding of the two-way traffic between family structure and state politics is influenced by Suzanne Desan who writes: "On the one hand, I argue that the Revolution transformed the most intimate relationships and

Pigault-Lebrun intervenes in this negotiation of paternal authority when he lets Beauval *fils* complain to Mathieu about the latter's wicked influence on the plantation owner: "Songez, monsieur, que je pourrais me souvenir un jour que, sans vos calculs infâmes, sans vos laches suggestions, mon père n'eût jamais suivi que l'impulsion de son caractère, naturellement bon et humain" (1.3). The play is relentless in its critique of Mathieu and his effect on Beauval *père* but it has no problem with paternalism as such. In fact, all the morally just characters respect the idea of paternal authority. In the first act Beauval *fils* says: "Ah ! mon père, mon digne et faible père!" (1.7) and at the very end Zamé's ultimate example of revolutionary excess is parricide: "Tu parlais de vertu, et tu vas massacrer le père de ton ami!" (4.8). The problem is the despotic father who, influenced by a malevolent advisor, imposes silence and utters lines such as: "je le veux, je vous l'ordonne, et si vous résistez, je ne vous connais plus" (2.13).

As its alternative to despotic paternalism, the play proposes *contractualist paternalism*. This form of political order is first outlined in the early organization of the slave rebellion but it finds its apex at the end when Beauval *père* describes the new colonial order. It is in the third act that Télémaque gathers his compatriots around him:

Tous: Li va gouverné, li va commander nous.

Télémaque: C'est moi que vous daignez choisir!

Tous: Vif, vif Télémaque.

Télémaque: Je ne le dissimule pas, je suis flatté de cet honneur, et je saurai le mériter. Vous jurez donc de m'obéir?

Tous: Oui, jusqu'à mourir.

Télémaque: Je reçois vos sermens, recevez aussi les miens. Je jure de combattre, de vaincre et de mourir pour vous; de vous donner l'exemple de la fermeté, de la constance et de la résignation; de m'oublier moi-même pour ne m'occuper que de mes frères, et d'obéir à mon tour quand ils me l'ordonneront. (3.3)

Everyone: He shall govern, he shall command us.

Télémaque: It's me you show the honor of choosing!

Everyone: Long live Télémaque.

Télémaque: I shall not hide it, I am flattered by this honor and I will prove worthy of it. You swear to obey me?

Everyone: Yes, until death.

Télémaque: I accept your pledge, now accept mine. I swear to fight, to conquer, and to die for you; to show you the example of firmness, of constancy, and of fatalism; to forget myself and work only for my brothers, and to obey when they give me an order.

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challenged the patriarchal structure of Old Regime families. [...] On the other hand, I also argue that remaking the family and gender relationships was integral to forging the revolutionary state and politics." (Desan 2004, 3).

The organization of the insurgents is based on a hierarchical, paternal structure with a distinguished leader. In opposition to despotic paternalism, however, the subjects here elect a leader and together they negotiate the rules and obligations of community members. The subjects vow to die for their sovereign and the sovereign promises to abdicate all personal considerations (*oublier moi-même*) and work solely for his brothers. The subjects obey the sovereign whom they have themselves elected, and sovereign power stems from the popular mandate. This political order is manifestly different from the despotic paternalism characterized by the father's inherent authority and absolutist rulings. It is not, however, a political order in full accordance with the politics of the play because the sovereign in this case abandons his individual personhood to become an abstract figure of authority. A political order which is contractualist *and* does justice to the sentimental humanness of all parties is not found until the very end. After Beauval *père* has been spared by the rebels, he says:

Beauval *père*: [...] Tu m'accordes la vie; je l'emploierai tout entière à assurer votre commun bonheur. Oublions qu'il exista sur mon habitation un maître et des esclaves. Venez, mes amis, venez commencer votre fortune en m'aidant à relever la mienne. Mon fils, Télémaque, Zamé, oublions nos malheurs passés, au sein d'une aisance honnête, et d'une confiance réciproque, fondée sur l'estime, la reconnaissance, l'amour et l'amitié. (4.9)

Beauval *père*: [...] You grant me my life; I shall spend it on assuring your happiness. Let us forget that there were slaves and a master on my plantation. Come my friends, come and build your fortune while you help me rebuilding mine. My son, Télémaque, Zamé let us forget our past unhappiness and replace it with an honorable ease and a reciprocal confidence based on esteem, recognition, love, and friendship.

The line contains an ambivalent confrontation with hierarchical order similar to the one described by Bonnet. The plantation owner encourages everyone to forget the master/slave relation and join together as friends instead. But in doing this, he performs the sovereign gesture of deciding the values according to which society should be organized. In urging the ex-slaves to resume their work for his *and* their benefit, Beauval *père* proposes a colonial order similar to the one advocated by Olympe de Gouges in her Haitian revolutionary play. In the words of Madeleine Dobie: "Reform slavery, Gouges seems to say, and colonial rule would be a desirable political arrangement" (Dobie 2010, 276). In Pigault-Lebrun the political ideal is contractualist paternalism with a human sovereign who is capable of inaugurating an amiable relation between all members of society. The production

of the colony may even increase if tyrannical slavery is replaced by benevolent paternalism. Télémaque confirms this ideal in his response to Beauval *père*'s proposal: "L'homme est né pour le travail. Retournons dans la plaine, fertilisons ces champs que nous venons de ravager, et puisse l'exemple de Beauval, en éclairant les Colons sur leurs véritables intérêts" (4.9). The fields that were just ravaged by the rebels are now to be grown again by happy workers who exhibit their humanness in accepting the norms proposed by the sovereign. Beauval *père*'s ideal political order differs from that of the rebelling slaves because it acknowledges friendship and personal interests but also because it significantly downplays the agency of the blacks. They don't need the right to elect their leader it seems because freedom is sufficient reward for continuing to work in the fields as they have done all along.

Paternalism functions as the third and final frame through which Pigault-Lebrun sees the Haitian revolution. This prism is again adopted from a metropolitan context and when transported to the Caribbean it has the consequence of depicting the revolutionaries as seeking primarily order, work, and a benevolent sovereign. While the ideal political order of the play has elements of contractualism, its paternalism seems to trump the necessity of a shared right to shape the *chose public*. While this causes for a reductive understanding of the aspirations of Haitian revolutionaries, it also calls attention to the importance of work in French revolutionary ideology. As in the active/passive distinction, political membership requires not just humanness but also common utility. It is a trade-off stipulating that inclusion in the body politic depends on the will and ability of the individual to act the part of a loyal subject. Paternalism in the Caribbean thus casts the ex-slaves as subjects but it also reminds the Parisian spectator that man, in the words of Télémaque, "is born to work".

## Conclusion

So what *are* Robespierre and Telemachus doing in Saint-Domingue? Basically they function as a frame through which Pigault-Lebrun makes certain aspects of the Haitian revolution visible while omitting others. In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler writes that: "The frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality" (Butler 2009, xiii). Like journalistic representations, a theatrical play about a historically specific event highlights parts of the history and hides others. These choices of what to make visible, whether they are the result of deliberate reflection or determined by limited knowledge,

have political consequences. In a thought experiment such as *Le blanc et le noir*, the metropolitan frame results in a specific determination of humanness, a preference for moderation over revolutionary excess, and in a particular ideal of sentimental paternalism. This framing has the effect that the humanness of the enslaved resides in their ability to act according to metropolitan behavioral ideals. Their political agency is welcomed but only when it takes a moderate, non-violent form. And the commendable political order is one in which the paternalist power distribution of colonialism remains even after slavery has been abolished.

But transporting Robespierre and Telemachus to the Caribbean also has a different effect. The colonial setting with its specificities also changes the contours of the metropolitan concerns that initially functioned to frame the colonial uprising. The setting tests the limits of metropolitan humanness by confronting it with the question of racial difference. The villain of French revolutionary theater gains in complexity as the inability to recognize black people as humans become part of his setup. By fusing Robespierre with the figure of the Black Spartacus, revolution – even in this reformist play – gains a degree of moral legitimacy that it had lost after the fall of the Jacobins. And the tradeoff proposed to the black workers at the end of the play – you can have your freedom if you return to the fields – becomes a timely reminder to metropolitan spectators that the French revolutionary ideology, too, required hard work from its members.

In *Tropics of Haiti* Marlene Daut identifies four main tropes used by writers after the outbreak of the Haitian revolution to represent this event and its protagonists. The “monstrous hybrid”, the “tropical temptress”, the tragic mulatto/a”, and the “colored historian” are all recurring tropes in what she calls the “transatlantic print culture of the Haitian revolution” (Daut 2015, 3). Inspired by Hayden White and others she argues that these tropes operated together as a discursive “system of knowledge” which formed the basis of a pseudoscientific theory of race (Ibid., 36). What she studies is not the objective truth of the revolution but recurring representational patterns that became effectual over time. In her analysis she acknowledges “national distinctions and concerns” in the writings about the Haitian revolution but she deliberately chooses to emphasize the shared “transnational concerns” of these texts (Ibid., 35).

While I share Daut’s belief in the importance of identifying recurring tropes in this material, I have chosen to emphasize the significance of specifically national concerns in my analysis of Pigault-Lebrun. Like the authors of numerous other literary texts about the Haitian revolution, Pigault-Lebrun sees the distant colonial events through a decisively metropolitan lense. His drama belongs to a rich tradition of philosophical genres, fictional and non-fictional, that characterize late

eighteenth century French literature and its reflection on the complex transformation of the humanity, culture, and society that took place in the years both before and after the French revolution. In revolutionary France, theatre gained a prominent position because it excelled in producing and scrutinizing the sentimentality of man and its importance for individual and collective life. Using sharp dichotomies in line with the rising importance of melodrama (Brooks 1995, Prendergast 1978), French revolutionary theatre exploited emotion on the level of theme, character and action and at the same time embedded the political, ethical and ideological message in an aesthetic form with a strong emotional appeal to the audience.

To analyze Pigault-Lebrun's blend of the colonial setting and the metropolitan themes and generic traits thus presents an opportunity to grasp discursive and imaginary parts of the complex connections between Europe and the colonies in this historical period. Such a global historical approach, which acknowledges colonial *and* metropolitan characteristics, allows us to analyze what European authors have “counted as reality”, something which opens for an understanding of the ways in which ideas about colonial life have affected the discussions about domestic politics. We may thus begin to see how the colonies affected not just the material lives of millions of Europeans but also influenced crucial questions of humanness, societal change, and political order.

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