CHAPTER 14

At the Crossroads of History: The Cohabitation of Past and Present in Kettly Mars's *L'Ange du patriarche*

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In his essay "White Man's Guilt," James Baldwin (1985) asserts that the past is an actively lived experience continually informing our present (410). For Baldwin, confronting this history is particularly difficult for white Americans since, "What they see is a disastrous, continuing, present condition which menaces them, and for which they bear an inescapable responsibility" (409). The ease with which some would slough off a responsibility to the past heightens the danger of such a gesture since the simplicity of the act may have deleterious, though unintended, consequences. While Baldwin's essay addresses the history of racism and white supremacy in the United States, Haitian writer Kettly Mars (2018a) echoes the idea that history lives in the present as an inescapable responsibility in her novel *L'Ange du Patriarche*. As the novel explains: "Le présent n'est que la continuation des actes posés dans un autrefois qui revient frapper à nos portes souvent avec violence" (94) [The present is merely the

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O. Ferly, T. Zimmerman (eds.), *Chronotropics*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32111-5_14

continuation of acts from another time that return to knock on our door, often violently]. For authors like Baldwin and Mars, living in the present means facing up to and being responsible for the past. Exposing the past's empire over the daily lives of contemporary Haitians, Mars's text underlines the potentially tyrannical power of history and the danger of allowing history to serve as a single source of identity. In the novel, Mars turns to face an event in Haiti's past that has taken on mythical proportions: the Bois-Caïman ceremony. This founding event has served both those who vilify and those who glorify the Haitian Revolution. Understanding this event, for Mars, requires an openness to history, a spirit of cohabitation that she elaborates through the development of her protagonist, Emmanuela, as she comes to terms with the actual ghosts of her family's past.

Working within the framework of the Caribbean author's presumed quarrel with history, I propose a reading of *L'Ange du patriarche* in which Mars develops a notion of cohabitation through the figure of Emmanuela as a means of transcending the lost dialectic between inhabitants of the Caribbean and their past. As opposed to other characters, Emmanuela epitomizes a willingness to stand at the crossroads of the empirical and the mythical, the material and the ideal, to be cohabitated by seemingly incongruous ideas. Emmanuela seeks to understand the tumultuous impact of a past event, an unfulfilled pact made with an evil spirit by her great-grandfather, on her present life. Her efforts to own up to a responsibility to the past precipitate a burgeoning openness toward what she sees as the contradictory positions of Christianity and Vodou. Depicting Emmanuela as cohabitated by seemingly conflicting ideas allows Mars to explore and transcend the presumed binaries of past and present. Ultimately, the attitude toward history embodied by Emmanuela is one in which the present is imbued with but not dominated by the past.

Writing Nonhistory

Edward Baugh's essay "The Western Indian Writer and His Quarrel with History" ([1977] 2012) traces Nobel laureate Derek Walcott's varying engagements with history to understand what Walcott means when he says, "In the Caribbean history is irrelevant" (Walcott cited in Baugh 37). For Baugh, "It is really not history with which he quarrels so much as the way in which men (and in this context West Indians more particularly) have tended to use or abuse history" (73). Walcott (1998) affirms the

confluence of past and present on the Caribbean writer: "It is not," he says, "the pressure of the past which torments great poets, but the weight of the present" (40). In response to Baugh's text, Edouard Glissant (1989) describes the sense of "nonhistory" that occurs in the Caribbean. Like Walcott and Baldwin, Glissant understands the importance of the past as an experience lived in the present. He says, "The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present" (63). Yet, despite this obsession, the connection to history remains elusive. According to Glissant, a collective consciousness cannot be formed due to a severed connection between nature and culture: "The French Caribbean people did not relate even a mythical chronology of this land to their knowledge of this country, and so nature and culture have not formed a dialectical whole that informs a people's consciousness" (63). For Glissant, this ruptured dialectic might be restored through fiction: "the writer must contribute to reconstituting its tormented chronology: that is, to reveal the creative energy of a dialectic reestablished between nature and culture in the Caribbean" (65). In *L'Ange du patriarche*, Mars evokes a past that is actively lived in the present in an effort to reestablish the lost dialectic that Glissant observes. In Mars's text, the dialectic takes on many polarities: rich/poor, dream/reality, man/woman, angel/devil, fact/fiction. In this way, the text foregrounds openness to ambivalence. Furthermore, one might read Glissant's polarities as space (the world which one comes into and precedes being) and time (culture: the world in which one takes part). Through the description of Emmanuela's transformation, discussed further below, Mars contracts spacetime to push the discourse beyond binary restrictions of past and present.

Perhaps, Glissant's long-held view of an inaccessible Caribbean history does not apply to Haiti. Martin Munro (2006) suggests that unlike other Caribbean authors, and contrary to the view that the Caribbean is a "historyless" place, Haitian authors reveal a historical consciousness within the Haitian imagination that expresses an abundance of history (23). For Munro, it is the Haitian Revolution that sets Haiti outside of a Glissantian conception of the past and that has exorcised the void left by the Middle Passage (24). Munro explains, "however much modern Haitian fiction tries to exorcize the ghosts of history, it remains 'haunted,' it cannot 'conjure up' a new ontology" (28). In *L'Ange du patriarche*, Mars brings the ghosts of history to the fore.

While both Glissant and Baugh elaborate a pan-Caribbean struggle with the past, Myriam J. A. Chancy's early work brings into focus the engagement with Haitian history by Haitian women. In *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (1997), Chancy posits that, rather than depend on the official, hegemonic understanding of Haitian culture to write their narratives, Haitian women writers redefine the writing of history. According to Chancy, these women offer a feminized version of Haitian history where fiction serves as a conduit for historical discourse that either silences women or refuses to tell their story. As she explains, "What Haitian women writers demonstrate is that the project of recovering Haitian women's lives must begin with the re-composition of history and nationality" (13). Indeed, consciously or otherwise, many Haitian women writers have taken up Chancy's call to write against androcentric national histories and uncover the feminine voice in Haiti's past.

And while Mars herself affirms that *L'Ange du patriarche* and the vision of female solidarity it depicts is, among other things, a feminist novel,[1] her approach seems less concerned with uncovering the lost female voices of history[2] or challenging androcentric versions of the past through the redefining of the writing of history that Chancy sees at work in other texts. Instead, as with previous novels (*L'heure hybride*, *Fado* and *Aux frontières de la soif*), in *L'Ange du patriarche*, Mars frames broader questions, in this case the incessant resurgence of the past in the present and the reconciliation of the ancestral in the modern, within the context of struggles and triumphs of daily life in contemporary Port-au-Prince.

Family History

Mars's intrigue offers a reading of contemporary Haitians' lived encounter with history through the lens of the present. The impetus of the narrative is the relentless menace of an evil spirit, L'Ange Yvo, who reclaims an unpaid debt from Emmanuela's family. Horacius Melfort, Emmanuela's great-grandfather and the eponymous patriarch, agrees to sacrifice a child of his own line to L'Ange Yvo in exchange for wealth and political power. Though Horacius does kill a child, it is not from his family; the pact is broken. Consequently, the spirit seeks vengeance on Melfort's family to atone for the blood that was not shed. The story Emmanuela hears about her family from her cousin Paula, affectionately known as Couz, the demon chaser, and the haunting that ensues directly disrupt the order of

her life (paintings found askew in her house, the noise of the back gate opening when no one is there, a presence that she can sense).

Initially, Emmanuela does not disregard the story as pure fantasy. Rather, she expresses the frustration of its impact on her life emphasizing the fact that it had nothing to do with her and that she had no hand in the decision. She underscores the distance, not so much the temporal span but the economic gap, that separates her from her great-grandfather saying, "Il a été très riche et très puissant en effet. Mais aujourd'hui il n'en reste plus rien […] Et je devrais payer pour une fortune dont je n'ai pas profité, un pouvoir que je n'ai pas choisi, une décision que je n'ai pas prise?" (Mars 2018a, 52–53) [He had been rich and powerful but today there is nothing left […] And yet I should have to pay for a legacy from which I never gained a penny, a power I did not choose, and a decision I did not make?]. When she asks why she is being punished for a decision that was not her own and why she must atone for the sins of the (great-grand) father, Emmanuela's frustration with this story is understandable since she had no previous knowledge of it and no personal involvement with it. Yet, through the optic of historical materialism, a reading emerges that suggests that even though Emmanuela claims to experience no direct benefit from Melfort's pact with this evil spirit, the wealth acquired by her ancestor is passed from generation to generation and ultimately establishes the material basis for her economic position.[3] The text confirms this both in how the impoverished citizens of Port-au-Prince perceive Emmanuela and how she sees them. Emmanuela's socio-economic status, while far from affluent, sets her beyond the misery of Port-au-Prince. She works as a manager in a branch of Secobank in the Bon Repos neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, owns her own house in a middle-class neighborhood and drives a car to work. In a scene that describes her morning commute, the reader gets a sense of her class status as she attempts to pass through the barricade of burning tires set up by protesters: "Elle avait été flagellée d'injures, traitée de sale putain de bourgeoise, ménacée d'être flambée avec sa sale voiture de sale putain de bourgeoise achetée avec l'argent du peuple" (42) [She had been insulted, called a dirty bourgeois whore, threatened to be burned alive in her bourgeois whore car bought with the people's money]. While driving through the barricade, Emmanuela looks down with pity on the disenfranchised of Port-au-Prince whom she calls: "Ces pauvres gens, ces éternels résignés n'avaient que ces moments d'effervescence politique et la folie du carnaval pour se défouler […] depuis deux siècles qu'on les faisait jouer aux petits soldats des mêmes

guerres"(42) [The poor, these eternally resigned who only have these effervescent moments of political turmoil and the madness of the carnival to unwind […] for two centuries they have been made to play as cannon fodder in the same wars]. Here, in a scene that reflects the frequent protests of present-day Haiti, Emmanuela evokes an oppressive cycle of history that binds these *pauvres gens* to their social class.

Interestingly, though the number is vague (two centuries), Mars makes a point in the previous citation to tie the present misery of the majority of Haitians, not to the slave trade, nor to enslavement, but to the span of time including and following the Haitian revolution. Here and throughout the novel, Mars links the present to Haitian history, to a moment that would come to define Haiti, the first Black Republic, as it was becoming a reality. In this way, she offers an engagement with history that might, as Glissant understands, restore the dialectic between nature and culture. The citation suggests that both Emmanuela and *ces pauvres gens* are bound by the same yoke of history, that indeed the past is "obsessively present" and is lived as a burden.

The family history of a deal with the devil parallels a moment in Haitian history that has taken on mythical status both for those who seek to trace Haiti's current misery to an inauspicious origin and for those whom it is a predominant source of identity: the Bois-Caïman ceremony. Though details of the event itself are hard to corroborate as fact, it is widely held that many enslaved people of St. Domingue met in August of 1791, just before the insurrection, at a plantation between Gallifet and Le Cap for a religious ceremony (Dubois 2004, 30). During this religious ceremony, officiated by Boukman, an early leader of the insurrection, and a woman,[4] a proclamation is made, distinguishing the god of the colonists from the god of the enslaved. Afterward, those in attendance swore an oath of secrecy and vengeance, a pact that was sealed by drinking the blood of a sacrificed black pig.

For scholars like Laurent Dubois (2004) and Colin Dayan (1995), this event underscores the significance of religion in the Haitian Revolution and marks the moment in which Haitian Vodou enters the historical record. As Dayan explains in her seminal study on Vodou in Haitian culture *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, "Vodou enters written history as a weird set piece: the ceremony of Bois-Caïman. The story is retold by nearly every historian, especially those outsiders who enjoyed linking the first successful slave revolt to a gothic scene of blood drinking and abandon" (1995, 29). For example, in the earliest written account of Bois-Caïman

(published in 1814), Antoine Dalmas, a former surgeon at the Gallifet plantation who survived and fled to the United States, says: "it was natural for such an ignorant and stupid class to take part in the superstitious rituals of an absurd and bloody religion before taking part in the most horrible of assassinations" (Dalmas in Dubois 2004, 30). So, while for some Bois-Caïman is a source of national pride and religious identity, it has, from the first accounts, served "outsiders" as a source of criticism of the insurgents' cruelty and savagery offering, for some, a justification for enslavement and critique of the revolution. Dayan underscores the underlying contradiction of this event as a source of identity: "what matters is how necessary the story remains to Haitians who continue to construct their identity not only by turning to the revolution of 1791 but by seeking its origins in a service quite possibly imagined by those who disdain it" (29).

It is not haphazard that *L'Ange du patriarche* should be driven by a broken deal with an evil spirit. Emmanuela's own struggle with history parallels the ambivalent rapport with the Bois-Caïman ceremony that Dayan understands. The oblique reference to Bois-Caïman in the pact that her great-grandfather made is further corroborated by the fact that L'Ange Yvo enlists the help of a *lwa* named Marinette *pye chèch*. This particular *lwa* is believed to be the woman who officiated the ceremony with Boukman; it was she who slit the black pig's throat. She is ruthless and unpredictable, a force of both vengeance and liberation. Indeed, twice in the novel female characters, under the power of Marinette, kill someone by slitting the victim's throat. Though Dayan does not directly equate this *lwa* with the woman who sacrificed the black pig, she does underline the ferocity of her feminine force and offers more insight into the revolutionary strength of this *lwa*:

> The feared Marinète-bwa-chèche (Marinète-dry-bones, dry-wood, brittle or skinny arms) said to *mange moun* (eat people) is also called Marinèt-limen-difé (light-the-fire). Served with kerosene, pimiento, and fire, she is the *lwa* who put the fire to the cannons used by Dessalines against the French. Marinèt, with the possible subtext of the French Marianne, as a national image of revolution and republican fervor, also reconstitutes legends of ferocity distinctly associated with black women. (1995, 35)

In the novel, Mars taps into a force that is both liberating and vengeful but insists that it was Marinette who assisted in the Bois-Caïman ceremony. When Couz explains to Emmanuela that Marinette sacrificed the

black pig at Bois-Caïman, she also identifies this moment as both the beginning of the Haitian Revolution and, according to the West, the origin of Haiti's misfortunes (Mars 2018a, 97). Couz evokes the ambivalence of this event and, as with Dayan before, the danger of the outsiders' narrative. It is the moment that would set off the revolution and, to some, the source of Haiti's present economic struggles.

Like Couz, two other characters in the novel evoke the danger of drawing identity from a history elaborated by an outsider. Both Patricia (Emmanuela's friend and a vodouisante from Nouailles, an area outside of Port-au-Prince) and Serge (Emmanuela's lover) pick up on the reference to Bois-Caïman upon hearing what afflicts Emmanuela's family, and both, despite their oppositional beliefs, rebuff the claims that Bois-Caïman had anything to do with a spiritual pact.

Though Patricia serves the *lwa* and helps Emmanuela to understand the nature of the spirits afflicting her, she balks at the narrative that depicts that Bois-Caïman as a deal with the devil that ceaselessly condemns Haiti. She says, "Oh, please, Emmanuela! … Je ne crois pas en cette théorie de pacte avec le diable qu'on nous réchauffe à chaque fois qu'un malheur frappe Haïti. Et le pire est que nous aussi nous avons fini par l'intérioriser, cette théorie" (102) [Oh, please, Emmanuela!... I don't believe in this pact with the devil theory that they cook up each time a catastrophe hits Haiti. Worse still, we have internalized this theory]. Here, Patricia highlights the fact that Bois-Caïman is frequently evoked as a source for Haiti's woes and that many Haitians have come to believe this theory. Furthermore, Patricia laments the fact that people are more inclined to believe that the enslaved of St. Domingue were helped to freedom by celestial powers rather than through their own force and a determination of the human spirit. "Beaucoup disent que des esprits démoniaques ont aidé les esclaves à gagner la guerre. Évidemment, c'est plus facile de dire que les démons nous ont aidés que de reconnaître que des femmes et des hommes noirs en esclavage ont gagné cette guerre sauvage" (101 ellipses in original) [Many say that these demonic spirits helped the Enslaved to win the war. Evidently, it is easier to say that demons helped us rather than to recognize that enslaved women and men won this savage war]. Patricia's comment reveals a further misuse of the Bois-Caïman ceremony: not only does it attempt to explain Haiti's current struggle, but it also serves as a denial of the humanity of the enslaved who fought for and won their freedom since it would have been, in the words of Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990), "unthinkable" that they might be able to conceptualize the notion of

freedom let alone to win it without the help of dark celestial powers. Again, that racist vision of Antoine Dalmas, who gives the first written account of Bois-Caïman, comes back as an echo from the past.

The second character to identify and rebuff the Bois-Caïman narrative in Emmanuela's family history is her lover, the stern and severe Serge Destin.[5] Serge counters Emmanuela's story of spirits with a rational, materialist view of history. In fact, in describing their initial meeting, the text emphasizes Serge's interest in Haitian history. She comes to his office as a representative of the bank hoping to interest him, a successful entrepreneur, in new services. While there, she notices volumes by Thomas Madiou, Anténor Firmin, and Placide David on his shelf. These, as opposed to the outsiders like Dalmas, are Haitians writing the history of Haiti. Of particular interest is Firmin, who strongly advocated for the validity of Vodou as a source of Haitian identity, writing against the notion, held by the Haitian elite, that Vodou, and its source in African religions, propagated a negative view of Haiti.

Serge approaches history from a fact-based, rational explanation, citing economic, political, and environmental factors to understand what circumstances contributed to the enslaved people's victory. Knowing this, Emmanuela has put off telling him that a vengeful angel haunts her family due to her great-grandfather's pact. Instinctively, Serge reads the deal with the devil narrative as a joke and offers his own explanation of the circumstances which contributed to the success of the insurrection (112). He cites the rivalry between France, the United States, and England as a big advantage to the enslaved people and their revolt. He also mentions the impact of Yellow Fever on the troops sent by Napoleon to reconquer and re-enslave the Haitians. As he explains, "Ce sont les circonstances qui mènent l'histoire, mon amour. Les circonstances que l'on subit, celles que l'on crée et celles dont on profite. Alors, il vaut mieux les créer et en profiter" (113) [Circumstances make history, my love. The circumstances which one must suffer, those that are created and those from which one profits. Better to create circumstances and gain from them]. Though more feasible than the support of a demonic horde, these circumstances cited by Serge, in their own way, lessen the great sacrifice and determination of the enslaved people's insurrection. In all his examples, he emphasizes outside influences rather than focusing on the internal forces of the Haitian Revolution.

His appreciation for the circumstances of history has allowed Serge to exploit the present. As he says, it is better to create circumstances and

profit from them. His use of the term *subir* in the above citation reveals how these circumstances, while giving an edge to some, disadvantage others. This close reading of Serge's language might seem contrite if the reader were not aware of his penchant for sadomasochism and bondage.

Serge and Submission

Though reserved and austere in public, in the bedroom Serge introduces Emmanuela to sadomasochistic games of submission. Emmanuela's role as a submissive partner, in the bedroom but also at Serge's disposition whenever his schedule allows (she is "the other woman"), reveals an unequal partnership in which the power lies with Serge. Consequently, in explaining to Serge that spirits are influencing her life, Emmanuela asserts her independence. She knows what his reaction will be, yet she does it anyway. Furthermore, she explains that they cannot have intimate relations because she has just completed a *lavé tèt* (vodou spiritual cleansing) and must remain abstinent for the next few days. That she would use Vodou to deny him is the ultimate insult to Serge's rationalism and, for Serge, creates an irreparable schism between the two. Still, in the moment when she asserts her independence, he aggressively tries to regain dominance through a sexual act. Responding to "un impérieux désir de la voir agenouillée devant lui […] livrée à sa volonté," Serge orders her, "Tu vas te mettre à genoux … et maintenant" (113–114) [an imperious desire to see her on knees before him […] subject to his will, Serge orders her, 'You will kneel...right now']. Emmanuela, uncharacteristically, refuses. Discussed in more detail below, this refusal marks a crucial transition in Emmanuela, allowing herself to be cohabitated, to sit at the crossroads of two contradictory ideas.

The text invites a reading of Serge as the incarnation of certain oppressive powers of historical facts or as he might say, circumstances. In submitting to Serge's sexual games, Emmanuela submits to an exclusive vision of history based on recordable, archived facts. This not only limits one's view of history but also reveals the manipulative force of whoever is dominating the narrative.

Reflecting on their relationship, Emmanuela affirms that, while Serge provided material needs, something intangible was lacking (119). Similarly, returning to the Caribbean writers' quarrel with history, Baugh cites Mexican writer Octavio Paz, who suggests that there may be more at play than the circumstances of history. According to Paz, "A historical event is

not the sum of its component factors but an indissoluble reality. Historical circumstances explain our character to the extent that our character explains those circumstances. Both are the same. Thus, any purely historical explanation is insufficient...which is not to say it is false" (cited in Baugh 2012, 65). Likewise, Serge and the circumstances of history that he espouses are experienced as rigid, oppressive, and insufficient in the novel. While Serge offers a rational discourse, presumably backed by Haitian historians, the text seems to subvert such an adherence to the facts of history.

Emmanuela's break with Serge marks a crucial moment in her development. Early in the text she is dubious of Couz's claims of a spirit haunting her family. Speaking of Emmanuela, the text says that the irrational unsettles her (Mars 2018a, 94). Confessing her belief in the story, allowing herself to undergo the *lavé tèt* (cleansing), and refusing to submit to Serge, Emmanuela displays an openness to multiple histories, a cohabitation of ambivalence.

Cohabitation: Restoring the Dialectic

What I am calling cohabitation is, simply put, the ability to embrace multiple, conflicting beliefs at once, to embrace ambivalence. Dayan explains how our notion of contradiction expands within the Vodou tradition:

> The history told by these traditions defies our notions of *identity* and *contradiction*. A person or thing can be two or more things simultaneously. A word can be double, two-sided, and duplicitous. In this broadening and multiplying of a word's meaning, repeated in rituals of devotion and vengeance, we begin to see that what becomes more and more vague also becomes more distinct: it may mean *this*, but *that* too (1995, 33)

The novel contains several such instances of cohabitation. For example, Couz believes that the Archangel Michael will save her from the spirits attacking her. Yet, in the moment she knows she is under attack by the spirits, she reaches for a vial of nitroglycerine to save her life since she also knows that she has already undergone three bypass surgeries. If, as Dayan insists, we must set aside our notion of contradiction, then it is possible that both the incantation and the vial of nitroglycerine are essential to saving Couz's life. Believing in both, doubting neither is the refrain of cohabitation that runs throughout Mars's text.

The term "cohabitation" is taken from the text's description of Couz's neighborhood and reflects the juxtaposition of affluence and misery at work in present day Port-au-Prince: "Jalousie est un paysage de troglodytes. Des milliers de cubes en béton au flanc des mornes, avec une ou deux fenêtres en façade et des escaliers abrupts pour y circuler. La rue de Couz est une passerelle entre deux mondes, entre deux univers qui *cohabitent* sans se connaître" (Mars 2018a, 223; emphasis added) [Jalousie is a land of troglodytes. Thousands of concrete cubes line the hillside each with a couple of windows in front and crude stairs to navigate the slum. Couz's street is a gateway between the two worlds, between to universes that co-exist without interacting]. The text offers several such examples: for instance, the character of J-M-B, whose existence mirrors the life of the Haitian-American painter Jean-Michel Basquiat, and his relationship with Vanika in which each oscillates on a spectrum of masculine and feminine (200 and 201). The text is replete with other such examples, but the domain in which this cohabitation seems the strongest is in that of the religious syncretism and the mutability of spirits in the novel. For instance, toward the end of the novel, Vanika, the young woman who is the illegitimate child of Emmanuela's husband and who now seeks vengeance on the family, sees a vision of a *lwa*, *Bouk kabri*, in the stained-glass window of *l'Eglise St. Pierre* in Port-au-Prince. The image in the stained glass is *at once* a flaming bird (symbol of the Holy Spirit in Christian iconography) and *Bouk kabri*, *lwa* of fertility and, in the novel, a promoter of incestuous impulses (266). That Vanika perceives the latter evokes the vulnerability of cohabitation reminiscent of the abuses and misuses of the Bois-Caïman narrative.

The very nature of the haunting that takes place in the novel is emblematic of cohabitation. For instance, the text indicates that L'Ange Yvo is a *zanj* (52). This Kreyòl term may be read as a synonym for *lwa*, the spirits with whom Vodouisants interact, and, as Dayan explains, derives from an internalization of Christian language: "The practitioner [of Vodou] has internalized the language of Christian demonization, taught to him by the priest or pastor in order to wean him from belief, but usually reinforcing the presence of the gods" (1995, 104). Dayan goes on to list other terms that might be used as synonyms for the lwa: "The devotee refers to his lwa not only as angels (*zanj*), mysteries (*mistè*), saints (*sens*), or the invisibles (*envizih*), but also as devils (*djab*). As we have seen, the crossing of languages and terms is very much a part of the transformative and adaptive processes of vodou" (104). This reinforces the notion that, within the

context of Vodou, many words can mean a single thing and, conversely, a single word can mean both demon and angel.

However, it would seem the pantheon of *lwa* is not so homogeneous. While Dayan emphasizes the mutability of the term *lwa*, regional difference may occur. As Mimerose Beaubrun (2013) explains in *Nan Domi: An Initiates Journey into Haitian Vodou*, "In the north of Haiti, especially, Vodouisants tend to distinguish between *lwa* and *zanj*" (19). She explains that *lwa* are more malevolent forces people call on for help with money, power, and love. Her explanation of *lwa* in Northern Haiti evokes the pact made by Emmanuela's great-grandfather: "These transactions do tend to involve harm to others, an exercise of force and constraint on the assisting *lwa*, and a resemblance to deals with the Devil as they appear in the Judeo-Christian tradition" (Beaubrun 19). Beaubrun explains that *zanj* have a more benevolent role and occur spontaneously (19). While Beaubrun asserts a distinction between *zanj* and *lwa* that resembles the angel/devil division traditionally associated with Judeo-Christian beliefs, Mars employs the more syncretic vision of spirits that Dayan observes. In fact, it may be that Mars intentionally uses the term *zanj* instead of *lwa* to get away from a "deal with the devil" example that planes over the Bois-Caïman ceremony.

Emmanuela's Transformation

To understand the significance of the rupture with Serge, one must first consider Emmanuela's initial attitude toward spirits. Early on, she disdains the spiritual activity of those close to her making a point to never get involved with Couz's demon-chasing (Mars 2018a, 45). Even as her life is being altered by spirits, she attributes the effects to possibly having Zika (46).

Yet, she cannot deny the changes taking place in her life: "[…] elle a le sentiment d'un déplacement subtil dans l'ordre physique des choses, comme si chaque objet autour d'elle bougeait, se déplaçait ou penchait juste un peu, un centimètre ou deux, lui enlevant le sentiment de sécurité que lui prodigue le fait de savoir chaque chose strictement à la place qu'elle lui a assignée" (43) [[…]She senses a subtle displacement in the physical order of things, as if each object around her were moving, shifting or leaning just a little, a centimeter or two, removing all sense of security she felt from knowing each thing was in its assigned place]. Not knowing that things are in their proper place is what, according to the citation, affects Emmanuela. This initial resistance invokes the rational circumstance of

history to which Serge adheres. As the novel progresses, Emmanuela learns to be inhabited by this inability to categorize, an openness to ambiguity, that is cohabitation. Initially, amid characters like Couz and Patricia (adherents to Christianity and Vodou respectively) and, on the other side, Serge (secularism), Emmanuela exists within a dialectic of idealism and materialism. But cohabitation does not mean being at ease with all sides. For Emmanuela, the transition is full of tension. As she explains, while she was raised as a Christian and can cite passages from the Bible, Vodou is a strong part of her as well. Hearing drums from a distant peristyle, she feels at home: "dans une résonance qui lui est naturelle et instinctive" (98) [in a resonance that is natural and instinctive to her]. Yet, her Christian background creates a rift in this cohabitation. She reminds herself that, according to the book of Matthew, one cannot serve both God and Baal (98). For Emmanuela, existing at the crossroads of Vodou and Christianity does not mean embracing them equally but thoroughly questioning both. Even after the rupture with Serge, Emmanuela remains skeptical of the story of demons and *lwa* that Couz tries to tell her: "Elle commence à accepter cette Paula [Couz] qu'elle découvre même si son esprit reçoit ses mots avec encore un certain scepticisme" (141) [She slowly accepts what Paula tells her even though her mind receives the words with a certain skepticism]. As her encounters with spirits become more profound, Emmanuela inhabits a space beyond time, between dream and reality (211). At one point, when confronted by a spirit, Emmanuela slides into what she calls an intermediary space (213).

As the demonic presence in her life grows stronger, Emmanuela's experience of spacetime is altered. After a particularly visceral scene of possession, she loses all sense of time: "Elle ignore combien de temps elle a perdu, combien de temps ils l'ont retenue dans la maison pour tenter de boire son lait, voler sa sève et son âme" (292) [She has no idea how much time has passed, how long they kept her in the house in order to drink her milk, to steal her essence and her soul]. As she opens herself up to Couz's view of spirit, so her perception of spacetime, her awareness of time passing, deteriorates to the point that it becomes illusory. The disruption of spacetime, caused by possession that Emmanuela experiences late in the novel, mirrors an earlier scene in which Couz is simultaneously having a heart attack and under attack by evil spirits. Lying on the floor of her house, she asks, "Combien de temps s'est-il écoulé depuis qu'elle est tombée? Trois minutes, quatre, cinq peut-être. Une éternité" (39) [How much time had passed since she fell? Three minutes, four, five perhaps. An

eternity]. Now, it would seem, Emmanuela has attained an openness to spirits that Couz previously embodied. In both instances, the proximity to spirits (both women are under attack by L'Ange Yvo) provokes an alteration in the perception of spacetime in which the borders of past and present are porous, if not altogether absent. Interestingly, for Emmanuela this contraction of spacetime only serves to heighten her awareness of its impact on her life: "Chaque seconde, chaque minute qui passe trace leur histoire avec le fil d'un rasoir, un rasoir qui peut les saigner à mort ou bien détacher de leurs corps la gangrène du passé, elle en est persuadée" (299) [Each second, each minute that passes traces their story like a razor's edge, a razor that can bleed them to death or expunge from their bodies the gangrenous past, of that she is sure]. As she embraces the idea of spirits from the past influencing her present, she becomes acutely aware of each moment's significance for her future. This cohabitation of contradictions and contraction of spacetime occurs not only as Emmanuela alters her stance toward history. In the last scene, Emmanuela, in full conversion as she prepares to take on the role Couz has left vacant, speaks to Patricia evoking the nature of cohabitation in the novel. She tells Patricia that she will enter Couz's sanctuary, the representation of the church in Jerusalem she had built in her basement, to which Patricia says: "Ginen yo avè w" (303), which roughly translates, "the *lwa* and those who serve the *lwa* are with you."[6] The idea that, as she enters this place that for Couz, a practicing Christian, was sacred, she carries with her the supernatural realm of the *lwa* is emblematic of the cohabitation that Emmanuela represents. Even at the apotheosis of her transformation, Emmanuela is at the crossroads.

Guarding the Mystery

Kettly Mars understands the power of the past. Yet, *L'Ange du patriarche* is squarely situated in the present. Like James Baldwin, she recognizes that the history we make in the present is just as important as the history that we allow to define us. Insisting on the present as a lens through which to see the past, not tracing spirits directly back to an African ancestor,[7] but binding them to present-day Haiti in time and space, Mars envisions a means of transcending the ruptured dialectic of nature and culture that Glissant describes.

Furthermore, the same vengeful spirit is not limited to Haiti, but reaches family living in Chicago. Under possession of the *lwa* Marinette *pye chèch*, Couz's granddaughter, Samantha, kills her own twin sister,

cutting her throat like the black pig at the Bois-Caiman ceremony. The fact that Couz senses the death before hearing about it offers a depiction of the Haitian Diaspora in which space and time are contracted. Neither the distance in time nor space can protect family members from the vengeful spirit of L'Ange Yvo. Using spirits, Mars conceives of the diaspora as an extension of the homeland that, despite distance in time and space, continues to haunt those who left. Through the character of Emmanuela, existing at the crossroads of past and present, Mars offers a means by which Haitians today might learn to live with the ghosts of the past: a skeptical acceptance of events like the Bois-Caiman ceremony that individuals may simultaneously doubt and accept as truth.

Reading Emmanuela at the crossroads of the mythical and the empirical offers a sharp contrast to the character of Serge, whose adherence to the provable facts of history and penchant for sexual domination offer a critique of a certain, oppressive, androcentric vision of history (all the historians Serge reads are men) that, as Myriam Chancy has observed, silences women. Citing the pioneering work of Dayan and more recent work by Karen Richman, Mimrose Beaubrun, and Karen McCarthy Brown, who foreground the role of women in the formation of Haitian society and history, Laurent Dubois (2016) affirms that "to write the history and anthropology of Haiti is necessarily to write a woman's history" (2016, 88).

Likewise, Mars foregrounds the role of women in Haitian history, shifting the emphasis of Bois-Caïman from Boukman to the lesser-known woman said to have assisted at the ritual. She names her and renders her so ferocious that at least two characters are murdered by individuals under her control. But also, through the figure of Emmanuela, Mars offers a praxis through which one might overcome the dominant imposition of history that Serge represents. Likewise, the eponymous patriarchal angel underscores the oppressive, inescapable aspect of history against which Emmanuela positions herself. Cohabitation, for Emmanuela, means resistance. Through the figure of Emmanuela and other examples of cohabitation, the text allows the dialectic to retain the tension of its ambivalence, maintaining the mystery. This is epitomized in the novel's conclusion.

From the beginning, Couz has told Emmanuela that to stop L'Ange Yvo she must recover a lost message from the Archangel Michael. Finally, in a dispatch from beyond the grave, Couz recovers the lost text and transmits it to Emmanuela. Yet, this message, the only force that can stand up to the evil spirits, is withheld from the reader. In guarding the mystery, Mars leaves the story, much like the understanding of the Bois-Caïman ceremony, beyond the finality of history. Ending the novel in this way,

intentionally withholding the message that the reader craves, may be read as Emmanuela's own approach to history, an equal appreciation for what is known and what is unknown, what is provable and what is speculative. Like Emmanuela, Mars is comfortable guarding the mystery.

Notes

1. "C'est aussi un roman féministe, qui parle de trois femmes, de leur complicité pour se donner de la force dans une épreuve" (Le Point January 26, 2018) [It is also a feminist novel that disucusses three women and their complicity in strengthening each other during a crisis]*; all translation are my own.
2. For a more thorough discussion of uncovering silenced voices from the past in contemporary Haitian authors Marie-Célie Agnant and Yanick Lahens, see Sapp (2019).
3. Marx writes in The German Ideology, "History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials […] handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other hand, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity" (in Tucker 1989, 172).
4. "Various accounts describe him officiating alongside an old African woman 'with strange eyes and bristling hair' or else a green-eyed woman of African and Corsican descent named Cécile Fatiman" (Dubois 29–30).
5. Ironically, despite his materialist reading of the circumstances of history, Serge's family name, Destin, suggests a fatalistic view of the future.
6. Further examination of the term Ginen reveals the mutable aspect of certain terms understood by Vodouisants that Dayan originally cites (1995, 33). The term itself derives from the French word for Guinée, which, in the seventeenth century, referred to the coastal region of Africa from where many men, women, and children were taken to be enslaved in St. Domingue. Yet, for a vodouisant it also refers the underwater realm of the spirits (the *lwas* as well as the souls of those who have died). So, *Ginen* evokes at once, the severed past with continental Africa, a present engagement with spirits of the dead, and the hope of reconciliation in a future where souls reside. It may refer to this realm but also to a single Vodouisant. The term *fran ginen*, for example, refers to a "Vodouisant pratiquant dans la tradition familiale et rejetant la sorcellerie" (Mars 2018a 50n2).
7. Here, Mars distinguishes herself from the works of other contemporary Haitian women authors. Consider, for example, Lahens's *Bain de Lune* and Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* in which a direct lineage with an African ancestor is established.

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