

## Unthinkable Duvalier

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*Abstract: This article begins by referring to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s idea that the Haitian Revolution was a largely “unthinkable” event. I then adapt this idea to representations of François Duvalier, or rather non-representations of the former president, in Haitian literature and in Raoul Peck’s film, L’Homme sur les quais. Reflecting on issues of memory and redemption, the main part of the article analyzes a recent novel by Évelyne Trouillot, and finishes with a discussion of the painting by Édouard Duval Carrié, Mardi Gras au Fort Dimanche. The article argues that Duvalier was, and remains largely, an unrepresentable and unthinkable figure in literature and film.*

*Keywords: Haiti, Duvalier, memory*

Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s most widely quoted idea is no doubt that the Haitian Revolution “entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened” (Trouillot 1995, 73). This was so, Trouillot says, as it was not generally believed by Europeans that enslaved Africans and their descendants could envision freedom, “let alone formulate strategies for gaining and securing such freedom” (Trouillot 1995, 73). Foreign commentators read the news of the revolution “only with their ready-made categories,” which were “incompatible with the idea of a slave revolution” (Trouillot 1995, 73). The key element for Trouillot is the “discursive context” in which the revolution took place, and the questions it raises for Haitian historiography: “If some events cannot be accepted even as they occur, how can they be assessed later? In other words, can historical narratives convey plots that are unthinkable in the world within which these narratives take place? How does one write a history of the impossible?” (Trouillot 1995, 73). Nick Nesbitt challenges Trouillot’s claim that the Haitian Revolution was unthinkable and argues that “Kant’s defense of the French Revolution and Jacobinism renders the Haitian sequence eminently thinkable, if one only considers the slaves of Saint-Domingue as a priori human” (Nesbitt 2013, 274).

In this article, I borrow and adapt Trouillot’s idea of the unthinkable event and apply it to representations of François Duvalier, or rather non-representations of the former president, in literature, film, and in a painting by Édouard Duval Carrié. I suggest that Duvalier was, and remains largely, an unrepresentable and unthinkable figure in literature and film. Rather than a strict conceptual and critical framework for the study of Duvalier, Trouillot’s idea of the unthinkable is used rather loosely as a bridge into the theme of the difficulty of representing in art a period in Haitian history as it happens or even nearly fifty years later. Clearly, the Haitian Revolution was “unthinkable” in ways different to the Duvalier period. Although both were seen and experienced as historical aberrations, the revolution was as much an epistemological anomaly, a challenge to European thinkers who, as Susan Buck-Morrs says, were in fact thinking about the revolution, “precisely because it challenged the racism of many of their preconceptions” (Buck-Morrs 2009, 51).

The Duvalier period, by contrast, was unthinkable in the sense that to survive its violence and human rights abuses involved for many a kind of silencing, a fear of addressing, and certainly of challenging in writing or other arts the unspeakable acts that characterized the regimes. There is therefore no simple, direct conceptual continuum between the unthinkable revolution and the unwritten, unrepresented Duvalier, though in both cases historical silence creates a sense of haunting, of unfinished history that is paradoxically forgotten or ignored, but discernible and present in every aspect of contemporary reality.

As Michael Dash has argued, unlike many Latin American literary traditions, Haitian literature has arguably not produced a great dictator novel. Dash writes: “*Haitian novelists never managed to produce outstanding treatments of political dictatorship. This subgenre produced far more accomplished novels in Spanish, as we see in the work of Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez and Miguel Angel Asturias*” (Dash 1994, 458). Indeed, the best-known novel of the Duvalier dictatorship is probably Graham Greene’s *The Comedians* (1966). When they have addressed the Duvalier years, Haitian authors have tended to do so allegorically, as in René Depestre’s *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979) and Frankétienne’s *Ultravocal* (1972) or by other indirect means, such as Marie Vieux-Chauvet’s *Amour, Colère, Folie* (1969), setting her trilogy in 1939. More recently, novels by Kettly Mars, Edwidge Danticat, Marie-Célie Agnant, and Evelyne Trouillot have revisited the Duvalier era, without representing directly François Duvalier himself.

Unlike his later, allegorical depiction of the end of the Jean-Bertrand Aristide presidency in *Moloch Tropical* (2009), Raoul Peck’s *L’homme sur les quais* (1993) offers a markedly realist representation of the early 1960s. The film is set in a provincial town, and evokes the sense of terror of the early Duvalier years, notably in the effects on a bourgeois family that is torn apart when the father and mother are forced to leave Haiti for Cuba. The absence of the father in particular is keenly felt by his youngest daughter, Sarah, and she is drawn to various other male figures to fill that void. Although the film opens with the sound of one of Duvalier’s best-known speeches, the president remains as he does in many works dealing with this era, invisible, out of sight, a phantom even as he lived. At the same time, one also senses that his every word and action seep into every home, spreading terror to all parts of the country.

The unthinkable nature of Duvalier can perhaps be related to the theme of masculinity and the narrator Sarah’s confusion over father figures in particular. In Sarah’s memories of her father he is always in uniform, an *aide-mémoire* for her that she caresses in the attic, as she does the gun. The two objects appear in one key scene, in which Sarah recalls her uniformed father’s lesson to her on how to use the gun. As she pulls the trigger, Sarah looks away and the camera, in a series of rapid reverse shots, zooms in on both Sarah and her father, who are now apart, the effect of which is to create uncertainty over whom the gun is now aimed at. The memory closes with the father holding the gun, apparently aiming it at Sarah. It seems that this aspect of the memory is based not so much on what actually happened as on the way in which Sarah’s memory has processed it. In this distorted but symbolic representation of the past event, the father becomes at once Sarah’s protector and her potential assassin, something like Duvalier one might say, the deadly paterfamilias.

The confusion she feels about her father is most directly related to his betrayal of Sorel, who is accused by the macoute or Duvalierist militia man Janvier of painting anti-macoute graffiti on a wall in the town. As the “*Trois feuilles*” song plays on a radio, Sarah and her father come across Janvier, who is holding a gun to Sorel’s head in the middle of the street. In the conversation between the two militia men, the father pleads that proper procedure be followed, but Janvier prevails and the father is forced to hand Sorel over to the macoutes. As the father explains why he must pass Sorel over to Janvier, Sorel and Sarah sit together on the back seat of the car, symbolically side by side as the father betrays both of them. “*Act like a man*”, the father tells Sorel, thereby referencing the key theme of competing masculinities, which confuses Sarah and by extension the entire nation so profoundly. One is left to wonder who is a man, and what constitutes a man in such a distorted, apocalyptic reality.

Sarah’s confusion over issues of masculinity and paternity is figured in her complex relations with the three men: her father, her uncle Sorel, and the macoute Janvier. In their different ways, the three men are products of Duvalier, who remains throughout the film shadowy and apparently unrepresentable. Even in Sarah’s nightmares, Duvalier’s presence is indirect, represented again in images of the three men. When the grandmother comforts her with the words that the rape scene she witnesses is “*nothing but a bad dream*”, she suggests something of the difficulty of understanding and accepting Duvalierism as it occurred. Instant amnesia and repression of the memory appear as ways of surviving the traumatic present time for all but the broken, psychologically traumatized man, Sorel, who refuses to forget that there was a different reality before the Duvalierist disaster. “*Do you remember me?*” he asks Sarah in one moving scene, at the end of which she gently kisses him on the cheek in an act of vindication and recognition. He is also the only one who questions the apocalyptic present that the rest of society has fallen into, largely without protest. As the rest of the community celebrates a mass commemorating Duvalier’s “*Haitianization*” of the Catholic Church, Sorel is on the deserted street, drinking and offering his own fragmented critique of Duvalier. “*Who invented the macoutes?*” he asks himself, as if struck by a moment of clarity, “*And what about Duvalier?*”. Throwing his rum bottle against the wall, he walks down the middle of the street, his arms raised as if he were Jack Palance carrying his Winchester. Perhaps tellingly, it is only in a drunken state that he raises this question, as if it is only in an altered state of mind that one could accept the horror of the present. The other characters, something like future authors and filmmakers, are left with, to refer again to Trouillot, a discursive context in which events are not accepted as they occur and that creates something of a history of the impossible, and in Duvalier himself an unknowable, unthinkable figure.

### *Reconciliation and redemption*

One of the fundamental problems in addressing the memory of the Duvalier period is that there has been no sustained official attempt to address the human rights abuses that were a primary feature of the regime. While there was a National Truth and Justice Commission set up by Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the mid 1990s to investigate the human rights violations that took place during Raoul Cedras’ military regime (1991-94) (Caple James 2010, 99-100; 200-204), there has been to date no similar initiative to investigate the Duvalier era. Given that more than 5,500 people provided

testimonies to the Aristide commission, which identified 8,667 victims and 18,629 violations of human rights (<http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-haiti>), one can only imagine what those figures would be in relation to the 29-year Duvalier era. Perhaps the sheer scale of human rights abuses by the Duvaliers and the fact that virtually no family was left unaffected by those abuses would make the work of such a commission almost impossible to undertake and execute. Perhaps, too, there is no real political will to set up a commission on the Duvalier years, based on a feeling that revisiting the past in this way would create more problems politically and socially than it would resolve. And yet, in cases such as Guatemala and South Africa, such commissions have had a degree of success, and have helped considerably in the recuperation of traumatic memory, by recognizing the existence of abuse and validating the experiences of the abused (Hayner 2011, 82-83; Christie 2000). The aims, generally speaking, of truth commissions may include “*to reach out to victims, to document and corroborate cases for reparations, to come to firm and irrefutable conclusions on controversial cases and patterns of abuse, to engage the country in a process of national healing, to contribute to justice*” (Hayner 2011, 82).

In the absence of such a commission on the Duvalier era, Haitian arts and especially literature take on important memorial and testimonial functions. Novels in particular, such as Kettly Mars’s *Saisons sauvages* (2010), become means of testifying to individual and general suffering, and of keeping memories alive and thereby validating experiences that would otherwise be never spoken about and consigned to the recesses of memory in the form of unresolved trauma. This seems to be because literature is “*interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing*” (Caruth 1996, 3), between a memory that is real, but which is often denied and lived as untrue in order for the traumatized subject to survive in the present. Crucially, too, in Haitian literature, works of fiction at times become forums in which themes of forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation are addressed in ways that rarely happen in public and political discourse. In the next section, I will analyze one recent novel that addresses the legacy and the memory of the Duvalier era, that foregrounds in particular the themes of redemption and reconciliation, and that as such begins to suggest a means of ending the apocalyptic cycle of history.

#### La Mémoire aux abois

The relationship between victim and torturer, and the question of forgiveness are explored in Evelyne Trouillot’s *La Mémoire aux abois* (2010). The title foregrounds the importance of memory and suggests that to remember is potentially a fraught, perilous act. Memory, the title suggests, is something to be kept at bay, lest it overtake completely the present and the future. In contrast to the Duvalier-related works by Peck, Mars and Danticat, Trouillot’s novel is written in an allegorical mode, so that Haiti is referred to as Quisqueya (the Taino name for the island of Hispaniola), and the names of the major figures of the Duvalier era are altered; for example, François Duvalier becomes Fabien Doréval. In this sense, the novel recalls René Depestre’s *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979), both in its treatment of history and in the allegorical mode used to remember and critique the dictatorship. In both cases, allegory seems to destabilize the concept of history as a “*fixed monument*”, by showing it

to be always the product of “*discursive practice*”. As such, allegory allows “*the possibility of transformation*” of historical discourse (Suk 2001, 6).

The possibility of transformation in the understanding of history seems to be one of Trouillot’s prime motivations in writing this novel. Indeed, and somewhat paradoxically, this allegorical novel is also perhaps the most historically accurate of the works on the dictatorship analyzed in this chapter. The novel is a medium through which historical facts and key, though in many cases little known, events are evoked, while the allegorical style saves it from being a straightforward narrative list of past events. The historical facts and anecdotes are communicated in the allegorical mode so that the reader is encouraged to rethink history and to consider the particular, rarely heard perspectives presented in the novel. The most striking and original feature of her work in this regard is the way that she focuses not on the dictator himself, but on his wife, Simone, or as she is named in the novel, Odile. The same instrument is used by Marie-Célie Agnant in her novel *Un alligator nommé Rosa* (2007), that also focuses on a figure based on Simone Duvalier, and is largely set in a hospital.

Immediately, this shifts attention away from the issues of masculinity and fatherhood that are centrally important to the Duvalier-related works of Peck, Mars, and Danticat, and on to questions of femininity, motherhood, and the ways in which women experienced and remember the dictatorship. Although the dictatorship is connected most directly in the popular memory to male figures—Duvalier himself, his chiefly male entourage, the mainly male *macoutes*, the prominently male rebels and insurgents—the novel shows that Duvalier’s wife was an absolutely essential part of the regime, and that she carefully cultivated a certain image of femininity and motherhood that complemented in many ways her husband’s public persona.

The novel specifically sets up a potentially antagonistic and troubling relationship between Odile, who lies dying in a Parisian hospital (Simone Duvalier actually died in a Paris hospital in December 1997), and her nurse, a young Haitian-born woman, whose mother was forced to leave Haiti during the Duvalier period, and who carries the full weight of that history. The novel alternates between the nurse’s first-person narration and a third-person narrator who communicates the thoughts and memories of the dictator’s wife. As in Mars’s *Saisons sauvages*, the perspective of the figure most closely related to the dictatorship is narrated in the third person, as if the author hesitates to adopt the voice of the oppressive figure, or as if there is finally something impenetrable and unknowable about such a figure. The novel is therefore a kind of silent dialogue between the two figures, and thus between the past and the present, between the apparent cause of the historical trauma and someone who lives with it every day.

Odile seems initially to the nurse to be a figure of abjection: she writes of how she would return home after work with the odor of Odile’s “*decrepit flesh*” on her hands and the image of her almost lifeless body in her mind (Trouillot 2010, 7). The visual image of the dictator’s wife is something that has been with her all of her life, as one aspect of the “*horrors*” of the *Dorévaliste* period that have haunted her existence and that of her mother. “*How could one forget it?*” she asks (Trouillot 2010, 8). The nurse has inherited from her mother the history of the dictatorship years, and the broader history of the country, which was related to her by her mother in a tone “*at once belligerent, sad and dignified*” (Trouillot 2010, 12). As in Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker* (2004), the emphasis is placed

largely on the generation that did not experience the dictatorship directly, but which now lives it as a legacy of history. As the nurse says, she has “*lived the dictatorship through a third party*”, and it is “*stuck to her skin*” as a kind of brand, marking her and determining her existence (Trouillot 2010, 99). The nurse says her childhood was “*contaminated*” by her mother’s stories of Haiti (Trouillot 2010, 17), and that her mother would not listen to her everyday concerns, which were “*anodine*” compared to the horrors that the mother had experienced (Trouillot 2010, 23). One of the effects of this history is that the nurse thinks of death constantly, and of her own suicide: the sidewalk below the hospital window “*taunts her desire to jump*” (Trouillot 2010, 9). As such, the novel suggests there is in the nurse a form of the “*fidelity to trauma*”, that La Capra writes of, “*a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it*” (La Capra 2001, 22). “*One’s bond with the dead*”, La Capra writes, “*especially with dead intimates, may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound*” (La Capra 2001, 22).

Bound in this sense to the traumatic past, and exiled in Martinique at the age of four, the nurse carries Haiti with her in her “*injured look*”, and in the way she is taunted at school through perceived associations with poverty and the boat people (Trouillot 2010, 22). The mother and child are forced to change their names and to speak French, which to the mother seems like an “*invasion*” of her independent, Creole-speaking self (Trouillot 2010, 25). The mother’s whole existence is related to Haiti and to the terrors of the dictatorship, which she recounts endlessly to her daughter. The nurse’s narrative serves to recount in some detail the everyday horrors of the dictatorship, the lived experience that is perhaps lost in much historiography of the period. For instance, the paranoia and mistrust created by the dictatorship is suggested through the memory of schoolchildren who arrived late at school and were suspected of doing so to avoid repeating the vow of allegiance to the leader and the revolution. Immediately, the late arrival would be sure to pronounce the vow louder than the rest to avoid suspicion, not just of the child, but their entire family. In such a totalitarian society, parents sought to “*Instill fear in children to avoid any mistakes. To inculcate in them the cult of silence*” (Trouillot 2010, 54). Also, echoing Danticat’s novel, the narrator writes that many families contained victims or torturers, or both. “*Monsters and heroes, good and evil*”, she writes, “*were sometimes found together in the same family*” (Trouillot 2010, 109).

At times, the two narratives relate the same events, albeit from starkly different perspectives. For instance, following the attempted kidnapping of the dictator’s son, he issued an order for all school students to be held in their schools, and stated that if the son was hurt, the other children would all be killed. In Odile’s narrative this act is presented as a necessary show of strength to an “*ignorant people*” (Trouillot 2010, 23). By contrast, the nurse’s version, inherited from the mother, expresses the horror of parents and children alike, and remains in the narrator’s memory as one of the many “*anxieties*” that constitute her mother’s “*heritage*” (Trouillot 2010, 28). The form that this heritage takes in the present is anger, an emotion that the nurse holds on to, for fear that it might change into sadness and leave her “*with no weapon to fight despair*” (Trouillot 2010, 50).

For all that time and history separate them, the nurse and Odile have much in common, not least the anger that both hold as a heritage from the past, and the fact that Odile was herself a nurse before meeting her future husband. For both, silence is a refuge that allows (or forces) them to live in

memory, cut off from the here and now. For her part, Odile remains in silence in the hospital, and takes refuge in remembrance, a process on which she must impose some “*order*”, so that her thoughts do not “*fray*” or escape her control (Trouillot 2010, 9). She must not, for example, think of the view of the sea she had from the palace windows, or of the sunsets and the bustle of the city. For her “*peace of mind*” she feels compelled to revisit her own history, which begins not with the dead dictator, but with her four children, and her idea of herself as a “*loving and devoted mother*” (Trouillot 2010, 14). Thus, the emphasis is put on her maternal aspects rather than her role as the dictator’s spouse. This goes against her popular perception in Haiti, where she was not generally considered to be a caring mother, no doubt due to the “*austere face*” she wore as part of her public image as First Lady, a “*mask*” that “*supplanted all the others*” (Trouillot 2010, 14).

One of these other, lesser-known “*masks*” is that related to her own childhood, in which she was abandoned by her mother and sent to live in an orphanage. In contrast to the other girls in the orphanage, she would never speak of her mother, maintaining toward her a “*resolute indifference*” (Trouillot 2010, 18). Her desire for order is related to the way in which she began to structure her life in the orphanage, to how in the absence of parental love, she “*ordered her life while waiting to leave that clean and sterile prison*” (Trouillot 2010, 19). The only advantages she inherited from the “*sordid story*” of her mother’s liaison with a prominent intellectual were her light skin and her “*face with the aristocratic contours*” that would attract her future husband and allow her to always look imposing and haughty in photographs (Trouillot 2010, 19).

The further legacy of her childhood is a feeling of injustice, which validates in her mind the revenge that she seeks in adulthood. “*Beyond all other humanitarian or affective consideration*”, the narrator writes, Odile was inhabited by “*the determination to avenge herself for the disappointments of life, and the need to succeed*” (Trouillot 2010, 30). Her marriage to the future president and her position as First Lady are essentially acts of revenge and vindication that she feels justified enjoying “*In compensation for all those uncertain mornings, all the looks of disdain, all the denials signaled by a simple gesture*” (Trouillot 2010, 56). The narrative of her life as First Lady presents her as a close confidante and advisor to her husband, someone implicated fully in the affairs and workings of the president, with whom she shared “*the ecstasy of power*” (Trouillot 2010, 130). As the novel shows, the story of the dictator’s wife is of prime importance in understanding the dictatorship and the motivations of the first couple, specifically the righteous anger that was their historical legacy, and which apparently justified in their eyes the long authoritarian regime. At the same time, however, the dying Odile is liberated to some extent from the principal roles she played, as mother and spouse. She no longer wants to be “*a simple appendix*”, to the dead dictator, “*as if she could not exist independently. As if her own story had no importance in the greater scheme of things*” (Trouillot 2010, 100).

Odile’s life has a cyclical quality, in that she finds herself at the end of it as she was at its beginning: alone. Her solitude and her approaching death render her life’s “*illusions and lies*” useless, like masks that need to be shed (Trouillot 2010, 46-47). Similarly, her memories become increasingly fragmented, “*playing tricks*” on her when she tries to recall her last Christmas with her children (Trouillot 2010, 148). Tellingly, the only memory that comes to her at that time is of herself alone in

the orphanage, a period of loneliness that along with her isolation in the hospital bed serves to frame her life. All her other memories “*seem vain*”, without meaning (Trouillot 2010, 149).

The thought of exacting revenge on Odile is never far from the nurse’s mind. The older woman’s face symbolizes to the nurse “*the sum of all the horrors of a regime that left its mark on my country of origin*” (Trouillot 2010, 76). With the tables turned to some extent, she is excited by the thought of avenging and “*honoring the memory*” of her father, mother, and uncle (Trouillot 2010, 56). Revenge appears to her as a chance to renew her life, to “*make a decisive break with my past*”, she says, “*to assume it and to move beyond it*” (Trouillot 2010, 56-57). The prospect of revenge seems to liberate and rejuvenate her, and she feels young for the first time (Trouillot 2010, 62). She feels a sense of duty, that in killing Odile she would be avenging not only herself and her mother, but all the “*mutilated destinies*” of those who lived through the dictatorship (Trouillot 2010, 113).

The more the nurse thinks about killing Odile, the more she feels liberated. The “*thought of action*” begins to deliver her from her nightmares; and speculation on the best method to carry out the killing replaces hatred and anger (Trouillot 2010, 132). It also seems to free her to some extent from the past that she has inherited: her “*dives into the past*” become less “*destructive*” she says (Trouillot 2010, 132). She thinks first of poisoning Odile, then of asphyxiation (Trouillot 2010, 145).

However, as the two narratives reflect more on loss and death—the nurse mourns silently her mother, while Odile thinks of her husband’s death and her own impending demise—there is a kind of rapprochement between the two. The sight of Christmas lights outside, contrasted with the deathly atmosphere of the hospital, seems to further encourage this coming together. “*More than ever*” the nurse writes at this point, “*the immobile form on the bed seems to call to me*” (Trouillot 2010, 151). As she approaches the bed, she silently summons Odile, demanding that she look in her face, answer her questions, and “*confront justice and her memory*” (Trouillot 2010, 152). The two women share suddenly a “*lucid look*,” and Odile’s hand touches the nurse’s arm, which makes the younger woman recoil and make for the exit (Trouillot 2010, 152). As she is doing so, she hears Odile calling her name—Marie-Ange—which marks the first time that her name is pronounced in the novel. The name itself is loaded with connotations of motherhood, perfect femininity, and the possibility of redemption.

Indeed, Marie-Ange becomes the focus of the dying Odile’s attention, and the older woman seeks in her a kind of salvation. “*Was it the ultimate need to be if not loved at least understood that made her follow Marie-Ange’s footsteps?*” the narrator asks (Trouillot 2010, 154). Odile recognizes that Marie-Ange is also from Quisqueya, and given that she was also a nurse in her younger days and that she sees in Marie-Ange a sense of pride and haughtiness, one senses too that the older woman sees in the young woman a reflection of herself, distorted by time and history (Trouillot 2010, 155). For her part, Marie-Ange questions why she is showing goodwill and kindness to a woman who contributed to so many deaths and destroyed so many families, including her own. “*I must not forget that*”, she writes. However, the largely unspoken bond between the two develops, and Odile holds Marie-Ange’s wrist, the dying woman’s face suddenly alive and animated, as she makes every effort to say to the nurse “*Merci*” (Trouillot 2010, 163). The bond is apparently sealed when Odile is saved from death by the intervention of Marie-Ange, when it would have been possible for the nurse to simply let the older woman die (Trouillot 2010, 181). Questioning her reasons for saving Odile,



Marie-Ange thinks of her mother, and realizes that she could never have left the woman to die, for “*There are already so many deaths around me*” (Trouillot 2010, 182).

While these scenes seem to create a bond between the two women, the effect of this relationship is to finally begin to free Marie-Ange from the history that Odile represents. Her interactions with Odile lead Marie-Ange to a state of mind in which she is able to begin to address and apparently move beyond the nightmares of the past. “*I think*”, she says, “*that it is time for me to say farewell to my phantoms*” (Trouillot 2010, 169), the most notable of which is the murder of her own father (Trouillot 2010, 172). For the first time, too, she is able to contemplate the future in terms other than as an endless repetition of the past. “*I want to live*”, she says, “*Without this oppressive weight that has been handed down to me*” (Trouillot 2010, 180). She will build for herself, she says, “*multiple and generous spaces, intimate and complicit, where sufferings and joy cohabit, where memories and possibilities will find their place*” (Trouillot 2010, 175). It is not therefore finally through revenge that Marie-Ange finds her own salvation. Rather, it is in resisting the urge to avenge the dead that she allows herself to live, freeing herself from the past and thereby creating a sense of a life to come that will not be wholly determined by the past. Beyond the story of personal redemption, the novel stands as a powerful and relevant parable of the importance of forbearance in addressing the unfinished past in Haiti. In this sense, the novel recalls Roumain’s *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944), with the important difference that there is no new martyr in Trouillot’s work. Life and the living will not be saved through death, and a single unnecessary death, the author seems to suggest, is a tragedy that multiplies itself immeasurably over time, tying forever the fates of the killer and the killed.

### *The apocalyptic family portrait*

To conclude the article, I consider briefly a painting (fig. 1) that seems to present in visual form the apocalyptic memory of the Duvaliers that Peck, Mars, Danticat, and Trouillot evoke in their works. Édouard Duval Carrié’s well-known work *Mardigras au Fort Dimanche* (1992/1993) places the Duvalier family in a cell in the notorious Port-au-Prince prison. It may be read as a satirical family portrait, a deliberately grotesque representation of the Duvaliers, created six or seven years after their departure from Haiti. The setting is important: rather than place them for their family portrait in the comfortable surroundings of the National Palace, they are presented in a dark, gangrenous cell in a way that suggests this is their true home, the setting in which their lives and historical legacy should be framed. The cell has a single small window that serves as a smaller internal frame on the outside world, with its azure skies and tropical greenery. These natural colors contrast with the darker hues of the inside of the cell. The walls are a garish green color, which suggests decay and infestation, and which in turn blends in with the green of the military general’s uniform, and with the sickly olive green color of the various figures’ exposed flesh. The walls are scarred and cracked, and adorned with three severed hands, which drip blood onto the walls. The floor is similarly cracked, indeed even more so than the walls, so much so that it almost seems like it might give way beneath them. A dark, earthy color, it may represent the land, which is so scarred and damaged that it seems liable to consume them (and the broader country) at any time.

The specific day is also significant: Mardigras, the final day of Carnival, the day on which the Carnival bands dress up in their finest costumes, and which marks the end of the excesses of the season. It is also traditionally a day of social catharsis, which plays out and to some extent resolves social tensions that have built up over time. The Duvaliers appear in this sense as a macabre Carnival band, marking the apparent end of their apocalyptic reign. All of the characters apart from Baby Doc wear dark glasses reminiscent of those worn by the macoutes, which suggests that each is as guilty of the crimes carried out by the macoutes as the militiamen themselves. Two Duvalier daughters—Marie Denise and Ti Simone—line up in front of the military officer; the middle figure moves her head to the side as if the general is pressing himself against her. Indeed, the officer is Max Dominique, the husband of Marie Denise Duvalier, who was also a lover to all the Duvalier daughters (Nicole is represented on the front left of the painting). On the left, the Archbishop Ligondé (uncle to Jean-Claude's wife Michèle Bennet) stands, his golden cross tucked partly into his waistband, like a weapon. His robes are red only at the top, while the rest of his garment blends in with the dark colors of the rest of the group. The suggestion is that the Church like the military has been co-opted by the Duvaliers and that they must line up with the family before the people, in this portrait that is also a kind of mug shot of the nation's accused.



Fig. 1. Édouard Duval Carrié, *Mardigras au Fort Dimanche*, 1992/1993, oil on canvas, 59 1/16 x 59 1/16 in., Collection of the Bass Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. Sanford A. Rubenstein. Fotografía: Bass Museum of Art, Miami.

The center of the painting is the triangle of Papa Doc, Simone, and their son, Jean-Claude. In this regard, the painting differs from the other works discussed, in that François Duvalier is represented, although again he appears more as an allegory, a symbol, something not quite human. Although dead for more than twenty years, the old dictator is still dressed impeccably in the black suit and fedora that recall the Vodou figure of Bawon Samdi, the guardian of the cemetery. His skull is only half-eaten, which suggests how he continues to haunt Haiti both as one of the dead and as a being who is in some ways still alive. Simone is dressed in widow's clothing, while the picnic basket she carries, with a further severed hand protruding from it, presents her as a folkloric figure, a witch, or a dark-spirited mother of the nation passing out only death to the broader family.

All eyes are focused on the figure of Jean-Claude Duvalier, who stands out in his white wedding dress. Although he is at the front of the painting, he appears smaller than the other figures

and is overshadowed by them. His eyes—the only ones we see—appear nervous and directed to the group behind them, as if he is looking for direction or guidance from them. None is forthcoming from behind the others' sunglasses, and he stands meekly as an absurd parody of a strongman dictator. His cross-dressing is the most direct reference to Carnival, and seems to evoke figures like the *pisse-en-lit* in Trinidad Carnival, or more directly, the *masisi* (gay men), who “*cross dress in long gowns*” during the festival (McAlister 2002, 75). Such Carnival bands come out of Vodou societies with gay congregations, and in this sense Jean-Claude's dress is a reference to rumors of his mother's initiation as a Vodou manbo, and to his own “*reputed sexual confusions*” (Cosentino 2011, 138). In this context, the pistol he holds, close to his crotch, seems all the more a phallic object, an outward marker of virile masculinity that seems to convince no one in the room, least of all himself.

Created in the early 1990s, this work places the dead and living Duvaliers on a more or less equal footing. It seems to matter little if one is dead or alive. The painting seems to suggest that the *dechoukaj*, or uprooting, that followed the departure of the Duvaliers has not done away with them or their memory; the severed hands on the walls and in Simone's basket are still fresh with blood. The family has not been banished. It is still in Haiti, situated in a physical place—the prison—that is the site of a living memory, one that is not fully contained by the walls of the cell, in that the window looks out onto the city and the nation. The cracks on the walls and the floor suggest the relative fragility of the prison, and that over time those cracks are liable to grow until they are large enough for the inmates to escape and to run free again on the apocalyptic landscape that they did so much to create.

The painting seems in this regard to have something of a prophetic quality. The land did finally crack so dramatically on 12 January 2010, and the apocalyptic event was followed just over a year later by the return to Haiti of Jean-Claude Duvalier. Remarkably, he was welcomed at the airport by a crowd of several thousand supporters. On the other hand, long-time opponents such as Michèle Montas, the widow of the radio presenter and activist Jean Dominique, swiftly launched legal cases against him, and he was arrested on charges of theft, corruption, and misappropriation of state funds. His return to Haiti was a remarkable event: he appears as a phantom of the past, a ghostly reminder of the dreadful effects of the Duvalier era, and of the ways in which the past reappears in Haiti, and of how history turns in repetitive cycles. Jonathan Katz writes of Duvalier's return that “*The man was like a ghost, and there were ghosts all around him, in a country full of them*” (2013, 268). As Braziel writes, “*Duvalierism persists post-Duvalier. Within this historical-ideological frame, Duvalierism must be defined as a transnational, ideological, and interinstitutional nexus of force (which does not mean that it is anonymous or that individuals are not part of this State apparatus)*” (2010, 36). Jean-Claude Duvalier's trial, one thought at the time, would no doubt further shake that memory and go some way to determining whether the Duvaliers will be consigned to the collective memory or would continue to plague the Haitian present. All of this reminds us that the original Greek meaning of the word *apocalypsis* is to unveil, or uncover. The physical, material, and human damage that resulted from the earthquake has dramatically unveiled the political and social structures that created the conditions for such a terrible, apocalyptic event. With the legal case against him first being dropped and then dramatically revived (Amnesty International 2012; The Nouvelliste 2012; The Boston Herald

2013), it still seems unclear whether that unveiling and Jean-Claude Duvalier's return and now death will mark the final stage in a brutal historical cycle or will stand as a prophecy, a portent of an even deeper descent into the apocalypse.

### Conclusion

As the article has shown, Duvalier remains very much an “unthinkable” and unrepresentable figure in Haitian literature and film. In each of the instances discussed, Duvalier is a shadowy, haunting presence, a figure of memory and history, but who also in important ways lives still in individual and collective consciences. Even for an artist such as Peck, who has lived much of his life outside of Haiti, Duvalier is a living presence, indeed exile seems to only intensify the memory of the dictatorship and to lead to the kinds of confrontations that one finds in Trouillot's novel. The painting does present an image of the dictator, but again this is a sort of parody, another form of indirect representation that suggests still the difficulty of evoking directly in art this most unthinkable of Haitian political figures.

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