Awakening Evidence:
An Ecotouristic Translation of the Letters of Joseph François Mangin

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ABSTRACT

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Jean-François Méan

The letters of Franco-American architect Joseph François Mangin weathered the turbulent Age of Revolutions. They include eyewitness accounts of key moments in Haitian and American history, and details of his influential work as an architect in New York City. There are also yet unverified claims that testify to his work on the Erie Canal and drawing the plans for the city of Chambly, and its neighboring canals in Quebec, Canada. The letters testify to the transnational existence of a man who played an active role in designing New World structures and to the debates and conflicts that bore upon such activities at the time.

I will use the opportunity of translating the letters to develop an ecotouristic approach geared toward conservation of the foreign past. One that provides an aesthetic experience rooted in the present, and that privileges conservation by endeavoring to work at the crossroads of history and translation.

The recent foregrounding of time in Translation Studies led me to reconsider it as a variable in research foregrounding space. This led me to reconsider the metaphor of travel developed by Susan Bassnett, in order to ponder the ethics of mediating temporalities, and the potential of time travel as a sub-metaphor to discuss the negotiation thereof. The form employed by the author, the context of the translation itself, led me to revisit Bella Brodzki's reflections on translation as intergenerational transmission and develop the sub-metaphor of letter-writing, to ponder how one generation answers another.

The untranslatable past manifests in the letters as terms and expressions no longer applicable, expressions specific to the culture and idiom of the time, and idiosyncrasies inherent to a man of that time—all of which lend the text undeniable authenticity. Efforts were made to manifest these elements in a text recast in the present, by featuring loan words, and annotations intended to host the foreign past. Paratexts were added by later generations, when the letters were transcribed, to guide the reader; because the translation is for Joseph François Mangin's African-American descendants, their reshaping also required careful consideration.

This translation and its commentary emphasize the translator's role as mediator of temporalities, the intergenerational nature of the endeavor and its potential for agency and conservation. They are intended to contribute to research in the translation of historical texts possessing literary qualities.

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Journeying light is often sustained by purpose, resilience and trust—both in oneself and the path ahead. I am grateful for those who helped kindle this project, for the whole line of transmission, may these letters be passed on for generations to come. May this translation generate others.

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I am deeply thankful to my family, to my father and mother, and to my ancestor Joseph François Mangin and his wife Rosetty, who demonstrated the same strain of courage they did.

I thank the Leroy family and the French Mangin family for sharing the letters, genealogical reports, and hosting my mother and I for a meeting in Mangin's town of origin, Dompaires, France. This project is dedicated to the humble pride she took in her cultural heritage and family history, and to expanding its scope. I would also to like to thank her cherished friends Helen Roth and Uda Bradford for their kind support.

This project is also dedicated to Marianne, whose constant faith conjures stubborn devotion—look at what the light did now.

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Foreword

By what I always believed was some peculiar twist of fate, I have borne the initials JFM my entire life. The same as my grandfather John Francis Mangin, who bore the same name as his grandfather. One could say it was a tradition passed down to the present with little substance to it because it was never mentioned. The letters of Joseph François Mangin, their ancestor, have taught me otherwise. They are historical evidence, and this translation is evidence of an African-American family trying to reclaim its past.

With this in mind, there is an aspect of Joseph François Mangin's history that requires careful consideration. He is celebrated both in France and the United States for his architectural achievements in New York. Some of his letters, which have yet to be translated into English, bear witness to the city's early history. But the earlier ones, bear witness to the reality of slavery on French sugar plantations. To the fortune he made surveying them, drawing maps for their owners. They also bear witness to the outbreak of the Haitian revolution, an uprising that ended in his forced exile. How best to present this ancestor's truth to my family and the world has led me to query translation's role in shaping textual representations of the past; its power to reframe history and in some cases erase it.

Once, when I saw the tears upon your vines

You told me they were “weeping”—but for what?

I find the secret in your kinsman’s lines:

They missed the honeyed music he has caught.

-Robert Underwood

(translation of Giovanni Rucellai’s poem: ‘Le api’)

The Author

Born in 1758, Joseph François Mangin left Dompaire, a village in French Lorraine, when he was 26 and never set foot there again. His was a time of upheaval and turmoil. The Age of Revolution began when he was seven and would go on for 34 years after he sent his last letter in 1815. He was out of the country for the duration of the French revolution, but he weathered the Haitian one, and was forced into bitter exile by it. Like many Frenchmen cast out by Haiti's slave rebellion, he washed up on the shores of America where he would spend the best part of his life trying to make a fortune. He arrived in New York City in December 1793 and spent 18 years there. It is for that part of his life that he is known today.

Increasingly hailed as having been influential in the planning and creation of many of New York City's early landmarks, he was honoured by former Mayor Bloomberg at a ceremony marking the 200th anniversary of New York City Hall where he was belatedly recognized as its architect (Edozlen, 2021). He designed buildings for a wide variety of the city's public institutions, old Saint-Patrick's Cathedral and fortifications for the war of 1812. He is also credited with having drawn a visionary map of Manhattan which became the inspiration for its world-famous grid (Koeppel, 2015).

Presumably, the circumstances surrounding Joseph François Mangin's momentous decision to leave his hometown in Dompaire for the colony of Haiti revolved around a certain Rosette, a town girl he had a child with, out of wedlock. As fate would have it, once he had made it to America, after the death of his first wife, he would marry a Black woman bearing virtually the same name: Rosetty. The life of Joseph François Mangin and his career, like much of the past, remains an enigma full of holes which evidence can help fill. And once the evidence comes to light, there is the mystery of bygone life itself, in a present increasingly remote from our own.

With regards to historical narrative, the letters themselves have contributed to help establish the paternity of his work. He remains a person of interest for architecture scholars in New York and he was the topic of the French radio show *Au Coeur de l'Histoire* hosted by French radio host and television presenter Stephane Bern[1]. His letters speak of a campaign in Montreal and of having drawn plans for the city of Chambly, its adjacent Canal and the Canal of Saint-Ours. These claims are yet unverified but are part of an ongoing genealogical investigation. Evidence has yet to be uncovered, collected and translated into the present, addressing questions and raising many in their wake. The quest for the truth behind Joseph François Mangin's life has spanned generations and will puzzle many still.

[1] *La véritable histoire de Joseph François Mangin, l'homme qui imagina Manhattan* broadcast on *Historiquement Vôtre* hosted by Stéphane Bern on Europe 1, September 11th, 2023. https://www.boomplay.com/episode/5208842

The Letters

Joseph François Mangin never made it back to Dompaire but the letters he sent there hold details of his life, ones he wished to share with his family, his mother, or, once she had passed, with his brother-in-law and his brother. There was also the matter of the French authorities, who were known to examine the mail of their citizens with great interest.[2]

Photocopies of these letters made their way back to New York in the early nineties. They were sent to my late uncle, a retired U.S. Army Colonel and psychotherapist who received them at his Manhattan address. A French family from Vosges, a district in the historic region of Lorraine, had contacted him, claiming that his family—by and large Afro-American—might have an ancestor in common with theirs—one who made the uncommon choice of marrying a Black woman in 18th century New York. For reasons I am unfamiliar with, my uncle chose to let the matter lie.

Two decades later, the advent of this thesis project has afforded me the time to delve deeper, to contact the French family that sent the letters, establish a line of ancestry, and to read the letters in consultation with their author's biographer. It allowed me to ponder an avenue for their translation, which would enable my family to discover who their ancestor was, and for them and the citizens of the country he ended up choosing, to know his truth.

I chose to translate eight letters, the first and the last ones he sent are included because they begin and end the correspondence, and offer contrasting perspectives. One expresses culture shock, while the other no longer entertains notions of a return, but of yet another voyage.

[2] During the period from 1785 to 1820, French authorities systematically monitored and censored citizens' correspondence through an institution known as the **Cabinet Noir** ("Black Chamber"). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_noir

The others were selected on the basis of their historical interest, the events described, the degree to which they are eye-witness accounts of key moments in history. The longest and most eloquent letter is the first one, written before he found employment, and had time to put the culture shock and homesickness he was experiencing into words. Other short ones like the one dated May 05th, 1791 show a change in his circumstances, a pivotal moment. They also illustrate that it was when things were going well that he wrote the least.

Chapter One

Translating historical letters

Historical Letters as Primary Sources and Evidence of the Past

Because they are first-hand eyewitness accounts, letters and diaries are termed "primary sources" by historians. Primary sources also include interviews, oral histories, photographs, newspaper articles, government documents, poems, novels, plays and music. On History Matters: The US Survey Course on the Web (2018), a website established at the turn of the millennium by a coalition of university historical centres collaborating with the American Social History Project, primary sources are referred to as evidence. In the section Making Sense of Letters and Diaries (2002), Steven Stowe, a professor of History at Indiana University, gives history teachers and students of American history advice on how to approach these documents. Like many historians, he uses the time-worn cliché, popular on historical websites, that they are a window into the past. In explaining why this is the case, he is careful to make the distinction between "personal" and "private", explaining that letters, because they employ common styles, belong more to the former. They hide and reveal what their author wishes to communicate, and the styles they employ vary according to their time period, and other social and material factors (2002, 1). He contrasts the forms of letter writing and diary keeping, indicating that the latter is fairly recent, and the former far more ancient. Referring to theories that letter writing arguably gave rise to many literary forms including the novel, he notes its many developments during the 18th century, a sort of golden age for the medium, a time at which letters by politicians and commentators addressing the public were published, and where letter writing was taught in schools. Letters were used as a means of sharing interests, and for cultural exchange, and were a "flexible form for inscribing literate, bourgeois values in the education of youth" (2002, 2). The fact that they

employ, to varying degrees, common styles adapted to different occasions makes them interesting to the historical investigator looking for commonalities and trends in social relations, work and values (2002, 1).

The Ambiguous Status of Historical Letters

Because letters employ styles that can be taught, there is a tension between showing and telling. And because they address a reader and seek to impress that reader with a crafted message, it seems legitimate to ask whether writing letters can be seen as a literary activity, and whether letters themselves are a form of literature.

Stowe notes that in the 18th century, publishers produced instructive volumes of the letters of famous men (2002, 2). Today, "The Art of Letter Writing" yields 355,000 results on Google, with many links leading to published works and websites proposing to introduce people to what some, like Alexa Erickson, writing for MarthaStewart.com, sentimentally refer to as a "Lost Art" to reclaim. At the very least, despite the decline of the form, nostalgia for it seems rather popular, and interest in perfecting the "art", a preoccupation.

In his essay "On the Edge of Literariness: The Writing of Letters" (1994), comparative literature scholar, Claudio Guilen, tackles the possible literariness of letters with great aplomb. He begins by asking himself whether the discovery that they are well written is enough to call them literature. He goes on to define three levels of achievement in the epistolary communication process: "literacy", "literariness", and "poeticity", that are either reached, or that form a continuum along which the process moves (2). He also echoes Stowe's claim that the tradition dates back to Antiquity, and refers to the publication of the 18th century works of Samuel Richardson as a "climactic moment in the history of epistolarity". He alludes to the complex norms such works have created for the form over the centuries, beginning with the first of the

Hellenistic manuals: The *Epistolary types* by Demetrius, which offered twenty-one letter types to choose from (3).

As Guilen points out, this testifies to the practical nature of the endeavour, one that is unmindful of literary ambition. But whether the product is literary remains ambiguous, after all, letters contain fictions of their own, and some are written as exercises in form. Guilen informs us that with the advent of printing during the Middle Ages, the epistolary form was identified with the art of rhetoric, and that the tradition yielded more and more to the "lure of fictionality", and in some cases could "go over the edge or across the boundary between literacy and literariness" (4). He explains that fiction builds as writing progresses, stating:

> There is hardly an act in our daily experience, rooted in life itself, that is as likely as the writing of a letter to propel us toward inventiveness and the interpretation and transformation of fact: hence the ambivalence of the product, on the razor's edge between the fact and the interpretation. (Claudio Guilen 1994, 5).

Different Standards of Readability

Despite the considerable amount of skill involved in writing historical narrative, the historian Willi Paul Adams suggests that there has traditionally been a disconnect between historical translators and literary translators because of the latter's contempt for non-fiction (1999, 1285). It is a notion that resonates with the bias against the translation of non-fiction that translation scholar Esther Allen alludes to in her essay "Translating the Local: New York's Micro-Cosmopolitan Media, from Jose Marti to the Hyperlocal Hub*"* (2019). In it, she discusses the impact of this bias on the availability of important non-English writing to Anglophones, along with the fact that it contributes to create a false impression that the English language has a monopoly on fact (3). According to her a growing number of translators and translation studies scholars have begun protesting:

> …the prevailing tendency of the Anglophone book-publishing industry to translate—when it translates at all—primarily fiction and poetry to the neglect of the vast category known by the problematic and uniquely Anglophone catch-all of nonfiction,[3] which covers journalism and literary *reportage*, as well as biography, history, memoir, scholarly and philosophical work, cookbooks, self-help, how-to, and other, still-more-uncategorizable areas, such as the work of the 2015 Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich[4] (Esther Allen 2019, 114).

The visibility of historical translators may have contributed to such a bias amongst publishers, at least as far as contextualized, self-authenticating historical content is concerned. In his essay "The Historian as Translator*"* (1999) Paul Adams states that translating historians' values regarding readability are different from those of literary translators. Their translations are grounded in a quest for authenticity. They have no compunctions about creating an annotated translation that declares itself as such—because the original is historical evidence, and its translation is not. Accuracy and intelligibility are paramount, and annotated translations, that read as translations, are the norm (1287).

Working at the crossroads of history and literature

In speaking of collaborating on the translation of documentary evidence in their article "Writing Translations, Writing History" (2018), historian, John Duval, from the University of Arkansas, and literary translator, Kathleen Duval, from the University of North Carolina mention a convergence of interests: to write a good story, do it justice, and convey an example (162).

They also note that they faced the same challenges. They allude to the recurring problem of diachronic translation that George Steiner refers to in his *After Babel: Aspects of Language*

3. For more on the problem of the term *nonfiction*, see, for example, Richard Lea, "Fiction v. Nonfiction: English Literature's Made-Up Divide," *Guardian*, March 24, 2016.?
4. "Precisely because nonfiction is such a baggy, difficult-to-track category, ranging from literary works to technical manuals, *Three Percent*, the University of Rochester–based database of translated books, does not include it. For the sake of our sanity, we've limited our data gathering to original translations of fiction and poetry published or distributed here in the United States. See http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/index.php?s=database." (2019, 130)

and translation (1992). The text is embedded in specific historical time and meaning must be transferred through time. They propose the terms *horizontal* and *vertical* shifts to differentiate between translation that occurs across space and translation that occurs throughout time (154). Horizontal translation happens across languages and vertical translation occurs upwards from a distant time. In historical letters, both the horizontal and vertical intersect and therefore travel along both those axes is required, for, as they point out:

> The task of the historian and the translator are parallel but not exactly the same. The translator interprets what is foreign, while the historian explains what is different. (Duval 2018, 155)

Translation History

In *Charting the Future of Translation History* (2006) Paul F. Bandia and Georges Bastin contemplate the nascent field of Translation History and invite scholars to imagine and fulfill the task of the translation historian.

In a response published in *The Translator* in 2014, Bandia replies to calls that endorse an interventionist approach to translation history and asks the question whether translation historians should adopt a transdisciplinary perspective that is likely to involve other historians. He suggests that combining different complementary approaches could be productive (112). In addressing Baumgarten and Gruber's more radical approach to interventionism, Bandia reminds us that translators taking on more "meaningful and assertive roles in addressing the political and ideological underpinnings" is "even more urgent and relevant in the current postcolonial, postmodern contexts that are characterized by unequal and asymmetrical power relations" (113).

Conclusion

To translate historical letters is to translate evidence of the past and the occasional literary occurrences it may contain. Traditionally there has been a gap between the fields of literary translation and history, aggravated by different standards and a bias toward fiction on the literary market. Primary sources clearly require the skills of both, as they must be translated across languages and throughout time.

Chapter Two

Temporality and translation

Temporality and Translation

In this chapter, I will delve into instances where temporality has been addressed in translation studies and discuss how they inform my approach. I will ponder how time factors into translation and how akin to constraints imposed by space, it forces a reshaping of the text. In considering how this might impact the translation of historical evidence, I will discuss the translation of primary sources using James St-André's metaphors of forgery and passing. And I will draw upon Lawrence Venuti's writings on temporality to discuss the adoption of a fluent strategy for my translation.

In reflecting upon the potential for rethinking spatial metaphors in temporal terms, I will discuss the metaphor of travel and bridge building developed by Susan Bassnett and introduce the sub metaphor of time travel to it, to ponder the ethical implications of translating time. To highlight the problem posed by temporality, I will end by discussing the challenge posed by presentism and the absences of correspondence between temporalities.

Pondering Chronos: Time and the field of meaning

In "The Search for a Native Language", in discussing deficiencies in equivalency between languages, Annie Brisset notes that variations in linguistic subcode that have no corresponding value in the target language or culture are complicated to varying degrees by time. She emphasizes that fundamental questions surrounding historical time aggravate the translator's agonic position of being caught between source and target text (2012, 344). Between two artifacts

stemming from different temporalities; one dead, the other struggling to be born. And as Antonio Gramsci points out in the quote I am paraphrasing, this gives rise to the "time of monsters"[5], a temporality unto itself, in which the translator must do battle.

Rainer Guildin refers to this temporality when he brings up the acting metaphor developed by Yotam Ben-shalom. He breaks it down into stages of translation or time units and emphasizes that challenging the underlying time conception of translation can lead one to better understand how the translation process works (1994, 38-40). One could consider this chapter as a stage, an important one, a time during which my translational choices are re-examined. And in coming full circle, like the needle on a watch, there is opportunity for lucidity and growth.

The Foregrounding of Time in Translation Studies

Of late, there appears to be a growing concern with time and the translator's relationship to it. The proliferation of lines of research surrounding space caused translation scholar James St-André to remark in his introduction to *Translation and Time: Migration, Culture, and Identity* that this may have come at the expense of the temporal, which remains an understudied topic in the field (2020, 11).

Spearheading inquiries into the matter, St-André adopts a forensic approach to literary history reminiscent of that adopted by historians. In speaking of how translations date over time, he uses the queer submetaphor of 'passing'[6] and extends it to the forensic, to 'forgery', ultimately

5. 1. "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time for monsters." A liberal translation of Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1971) Notebook *3,* §34 popularized by Slavoj Zizek (2010) "Now is the time for monsters" is more commonly translated as " …in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." (1971, 275-276)

6 In his study of the history of translation between Chinese and English from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries, St-André developed the metaphor of translation as cross-identity performance, an umbrella term that includes blackface, drag, masquerade, mimicry and passing to help theorize how translators may be conceptualized as filling a variety of roles. (2010, 53)

speaking of it in its original sense: as creation, and of the translator as blacksmith, one who is called upon to recast the text or recreate it. In defending a creative approach to translation, he alludes to the *trace* of time inherent to a specific cultural moment, as being present in the act of creation, and manifesting in language. Because of this, a translation which seeks to reproduce or imitate, rather than recreate, is an obvious forgery because of the overlapping temporal traces of the original and its reproduction (55).

In his introduction to the book, St-André refers to the 'illusion of simultaneity', the process of representing the past in the present, and the translator's role in connecting the two:

> …linking two distant points in time, allowing the reader to travel back or the text to travel forward, creating correspondences (in the Baudelairean[7] sense) for us to explore (58). [8]

Metaphors in translation studies contribute to illustrate the translation process, our multifaceted conception of it and enable observations and discussion. According to St-André, they work by drawing parallels between two separate and often hitherto unrelated phenomenon.

> They are conceptual leaps, thought experiments, usually unjustified by any demonstrable objective connection, and yet so often crucial to creative thinking processes in all fields of knowledge (St-André 2020, 55)

Rainer Guildin's chapter "Translating Space into Time*"* (2020) discusses the use of temporal metaphors. He focuses on how they can be used to rethink the process of translation, the relationship of source to target text, and the role of the translator. Picking up on the implications that past research surrounding translation's spatial dimension has for the temporal aspects of translation, he discusses four interrelated points: the metaphorical relationship of time and space; the use of spatial metaphors within Western translation theory and their implicit temporal

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7. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

8 Correspondences in the Beaudelairean sense express a poetic vision of the world as a web of interconnected sensory and spiritual experiences where everything is charged with symbolic meaning. The translator creates such correspondences by representing the past in the present and investing it with a degree of symbolism signifying the past. E.g., the use of an archaic tone.

dimension; the question of how the implicit temporality of spatial metaphors can be brought to the fore by retranslating space into time, and, the many-layered heterogenous time(s) of translation (St André 2020,13-14). I found such an approach productive because it prompted me to reconsider existing research surrounding space through the lens of the temporal.

Time as a function of space

In translation studies, the concept of *topos* (space) is often used to analyze how certain themes or conceptual frameworks are transferred, transformed or reinterpreted across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In demonstrating how the concept of power has contributed to opening up new lines of research in translation studies, Carmen Africa Vidal Claramonte states that "an extremely interesting and new approach is that which argues that all cultural experience results from the intersection between language, *topos* and identity" (2018, 84). She refers to Marilyn Gaddis Rose as one of the first scholars to insist upon translation's spatial component and goes on to describe how inspirational this intersection has been for scholars in the field.

'Chronos' is defined as the concept of sequential or chronological time**,** the term originates from ancient Greek, where it denotes measurable, linear time—the kind that can be quantified in seconds, minutes, and hours.[9] It is productive to focus on this variable in already existing work at the intersection that Gladdis Rose mentions, and ponder how 'chronos' factors into 'topos'. In doing so, I will take the opportunity, to draw a parallel between the ethical predicament of the time traveler, brought to life in myths and in fiction, and that of the translator. Much has been made of the translator's mediation of space, I wish to reconsider this role through the lens of the temporal and consider journeys translators must make throughout time to authenticate their work.

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronos

Journeys across Time: The Submetaphor of time travel

As Rainer Guildin points out in his chapter "On Re-Translating Time*"* (2020), there are many ways of conceiving time, each one opening a door to another conception of translation. He suggests that the Western linear conception of time is restrictive but that it serves the transference metaphor well[10]. In his eagerness to move beyond this conception, he proposes many alternative ways of 'seeing' which help reveal the inappropriateness of such a view because of its spatial connotation (29)[11]. However, latching upon his conviction that the temporal can help us rethink spatial metaphors and spark new lines of thought and inquiry, I wish to, because my approach is performance oriented, introduce a submetaphor based on the linear conception of time[12]. Rooted in the much-developed metaphor of travel, it has been tirelessly exploited in popular culture, and, bearing it in mind, I would like to cast the translator as Charon, the ferryman, transporting texts across the river Styx toward the afterlife that Walter Benjamin refers to in the *Task of the Translator* (1923)—and imagine that afterlife as another time.

In her article "Traveling and Translating*",* Susan Bassnett states that:

> The translator explores a text written in another time and place and brings back his or her version of that exploratory process in the form of a translation (2004, 70).

This exploration is the by-product of displacement in space, and in time. In this fashion, Bassnett not only styles the translator as a spatial explorer but also a temporal one, a time traveler of sorts, one who is called upon to not only mediate topographical space—and the ensuing cultural difference and variation—but temporal space and its ensuing variations as well, to reconcile two time periods, in the versioning of their journey, the rewriting of the past. This

[10] From source to target

[11] Guildin quotes Serres and Latour's work (1995) regarding the erratic flight of time, explicitly stating: "it does not flow like a river" it follows "the crazy flight of a wasp" (2020, 46).

[12] Guildin is quick to point out that a performance-oriented approach to translation suggests "an ever-progressive line of translational attention, curving its way gradually and … intuitively between source and target texts. (Benshalom 2010, 54)"

temporal exploration, this reconciliation in the present, brings to mind the work of Bella Brodzki, who in *Can These Bones Live?* (2007) engages in a similar metaphor, likening the mechanics of translation to the mechanics of memory, because both bring us to the past whose unearthing is a mode of translation (62).

In this sense, translation, like memory, functions as a time traveling device, and the translator, like one who remembers, is a time traveler accounting for the past's absence. It is an absence echoed by the lack of correspondence in the present, of linguistic subcode stemming from temporal distance, a vertical shift, which corrupts intelligibility, and capacity or willingness to receive what constitutes archaic language. Much like memory, translation serves to domesticate the past and filter it. As evidenced by intralingual translation and the fact that texts are periodically modernized, the past falls under the *foreign* side of the spectrum and the present on the *native,* domestic side. For the present is *home*, and continues to be, which is why translations need to be periodically updated for the times that they seek to inhabit. A translation finds a home in the present, only if it is adapted to modern language. Hence the translator is a time traveler, a master of both past and present, returning what was then to the becoming now, his vision thereof, and adapting it to fit the expectations and needs of present-day readers. Like memory, the translator functions as an intertemporal mediator, filtering the past into the present, and to a certain degree withholding it. In her work, Loredana Polezzi conceptualizes translation as a reactive agent—a methodological tool that responds to and interacts with various cultural, social and historical contexts (2001). One could say that because translation occurs in the present it, it responds to the past, defends against it and attempts to assimilate it by way of the translator.

In her article 'Traveling and Translating' (2004), Bassnett highlights the importance of belief in the past when she discusses the importance of authenticity as a foundation for it. She outlines the translators' strategies for authenticating the tales of their metaphorical journey across

space and throughout time. These strategies, the ones they share with travel writers, which consist in comparing with and borrowing from others, could also be likened to those employed by storytellers and interpreters in oral cultures, who perform their roles through the act of remembrance, adapting their narratives to the moment, and reviving memories of past performances with their choices.

The Flux of language

Given the fact that the translator's journey involves temporal exploration and the reshaping of temporal elements, perhaps tales and myths of time travel can inform translational activity. One notes commonalities between dilemmas and predicaments faced by fictional time travellers and those faced by the translator.

Let us begin with the impossibility of being faithful: Bassnett states that "No translation or account of any journey can ever be truly faithful." (2004, 70). This predicament resonates with the Greek myth of Cassandra, a time traveler in her own right, because of her knowledge of the future. She is faced with a dilemma, brought on by a curse: she cannot get anyone to believe her accurate visions of another time, and must decide whether to share her knowledge or not. Her faithfulness to a different time is the cause of disbelief. The only way for her to be believed is to collude with her audience, feign ignorance, and, in the manner of a horoscope, align her predictions with ones that are familiar and expected. The translator's plight is similar because they must to some degree overcome their knowledge of the past and its corresponding variations, to make themselves understood to readers in an ever-shifting present and the language manifested in it. This everchanging language, that exists within the translator and without, that they inhabit and are inhabited by, is akin to the flux the Greek philosopher Heraclitus perceived, when he saw time as a river, where only change, which ignites and extinguishes—and alters language and

matter accordingly—is real. This notion of temporal flux, extended to language, highlights the multiplicity Bakhtin[13] saw there and enriches it (1981).

The Time traveler's dilemmas

The dilemma of whether or not to interfere in the present, to disrupt it, because of knowledge of the past, is shared by time travellers in more modern tales featuring time travel machines.

First popularized by H.G Welles' novella *The Time Machine* (1895), in which time is referred to as the fourth dimension (a term that would later be adopted by Einstein), the dilemma of whether to disrupt and unravel the present, the narratives underlying it, the beliefs and expectations surrounding it, and by extension the language manifested in it, is also shared by time travellers in popular tales. Franchises like Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* (1985), wherein the protagonist Marty travels back to the past and inadvertently alters it in a way that will cause him to cease to exist, reflect the dilemma faced by translators who upon reshaping a historical text, run the risk of erasing the past.

In *The Terminator* (1984), another blockbuster franchise from the same era, a machine is sent back to the present to protect the future. Having succeeded, it engineers its own destruction, to preserve the present from being contaminated by it. This act of abnegation is reminiscent of the translator's own, which results in part from their attempt to collude with the present, at the expense of the past, in order to preserve their readers from alienation and dystopia.

[13] Mikhail Bakhtin defined multiplicity in language through the concept of heteroglossia, which refers to the coexistence of multiple voices, perspectives, and social languages within a given linguistic space. He argued that language is never singular or monolithic but is always shaped by diverse influences, historical contexts, and power dynamics. I would add to this 'at a given time'. This multiplicity is exponential and infinite as these linguistic spaces have a unique time signature, a temporality, which is part and parcel of an everchanging flux.

This incompatibility between temporalities, this seemingly impossible heterogeneity is evoked with great pathos in the screen gem *Portrait of Jennie* (1948), the story of an artist who falls in love with Jennie, a girl who inhabits the past and is fated to die young, long before her temporality overlaps with his and he can marry her. When the event comes to pass, he finds the courage to be an artist and paints his first significant work. His consecration as an artist is the acceptance of the past as such and the impossibility of bridging the temporal gap. The only way he can be with her is to recreate her as he sees her. A similar predicament to the literary translators who must recast the text through the lens of the present.

But perhaps it is our way of conceiving time which is broken and needs fixing, in the film *Arrivals* (2016) by Denis Villeneuve (already discussed by Michael Cronin in *Translation goes to the Movies* (2009)) —one of the many movies of late featuring a translator as a protagonist—the translator must learn a language that references both past and future in order to save the present.

Unearthing the past

The past is buried and requires careful unearthing. Yet some of it cannot be unearthed at all, and therefore like the future, it must be imagined. The deductive work of translation historians like Siobhán McElduff, who puzzle together ancient translational practices illustrates this. In her article "Speaking as Greeks, speaking over Greeks" (2015), she takes up the challenge of exploring the oral component in the Romans' translation of Greek texts and must work within the boundaries of limited historical data. In doing so, she suggests probable effects of orality upon Roman translation that scholars may have ignored.

This kind of suggestive guesswork also applies to the search for the temporality of the translation. In discussing questions raised by the field of meaning of a text, Susan Bassnett references the quest to puzzle out the time of a translation as a journey, which, along with

language and place, requires the reshaping of a text. She refers to a translational journey that is threefold: across language, space and time (2004, 70).

It stands to reason that to bridge temporal space, to span *chronos*, to create a source text belonging to the past in the present, the translator, re-translator, or historiographer, must reshape the past and the language inherent to it and translate it on the present's terms. That a translation makes past language more intelligible, denotes hybridity occurring in the temporal dimension of language. The field of meaning of a text, its temporal quality, is reshaped in order to fit into the space the present has allocated to the past.

Presentism in Translation

As far as temporality is concerned, perhaps the greatest monster, the *tarrasque*, is the one Brisset refers to when discussing the deficiencies that arise in the target language because of historical variations. She asks the fundamental questions that come to mind: whether the translator should recreate the feeling of the time period they are translating and if they should modernize the archaic form of the language (2012, 344). It stands to reason that this is a problem translators have dealt with since the early days of the practice. The tendency to modernize is a longstanding one which meets the needs of the present, those who dwell there, and expectations created by markets. J.A Posin, a foreign language teacher and translator notes in 1955, in an article titled "Problems of Literary Translation from Russian to English*",* that when Shakespeare's works are translated into Russian they are more intelligible to Russians than the original English version is to English readers. When speaking of the requirements for an ideal translator, that encompass more than mechanical mastery of both languages, he imagines a bi-cultural translator, 'steeped in history', and speaks of time and space as being extremely important considerations (13).

Filling in the Blanks

One must ponder how modernization in translation affects the integrity of historical evidence, and whether the historic language of the past risks death or erasure, in whole or in part, in order to favour, as Walter Benjamin would have it, a blossoming in the present (1968, 71-72).

The fact that deficiencies in correspondences between linguistic subcodes are exacerbated by historical time highlights the missing past. The present makes up for it with something akin to what Walter Benjamin refers to as 'The Presence of Now' in his essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History*"* (1942). It projects itself onto the blanks of history and becomes magnetic. How the translator responds to this magnetism and makes up for these deficiencies is open to interpretation. In his article, "Translation, History, Narrative*"* (2005) Venuti asserts that time is a guarantor of the translation's textual autonomy. He compares translations of Montaigne from different time periods, and discussing Ezra Pound's experiments with archaizing English, he demonstrates that the quest to create equivalence, as far as the language's temporal quality is concerned, is misleading.

In failing to establish a perfect stylistic or temporal fit, the practice of archaization is evocative rather than accurate (Venuti 2005, 807). Thus, in a quest for intelligibility and accuracy, historical and literary texts are modernized when they are updated or translated. Their temporal quality, akin to what Walter Benjamin, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1938), called "aura", or what James St-André, in *Translation and Time* (2020) refers to as "trace", is thus modified or erased altogether, and the temporality of history is relegated to the present.

Answering the past: the Sub-Metaphor of Letter Writing

In order to settle upon an ethical approach, I would like to take the opportunity of the literary form employed by the text's author to pursue the analogy already drawn between travel writing and translation, and develop the sub-metaphor of letter writing[14], by connecting it to the Benjaminian concept of translation as intergenerational transmission.

In other words, I would like to compare the activity undertaken by the text's original author (letter writing) to that of the translator (translation). And, because the author of these specific letters happens to be my ancestor, I would like to ponder how one generation answers another; how a translation responds to an original.

The letters belonged to my ancestor. For this reason, Bella Brodzki's *Can These Bones Live?* (2007) is specifically relevant to this translation project. It explores, amongst other things, Walter Benjamin's genealogical notion of translation, translation's connection to cultural memory and its practice as a means of establishing a line of intergenerational transmission that enables survival through renewal and transformation.

When referring to *the Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston, Brodzki refers to the role of translation in the survival of the past and the empowering opportunity it represents.

> Rather à la Benjamin, this translation signifies a life-sustaining act, a life-empowering moment shared between two generations in an ongoing process of carrying over the past into the present (2007, 3).

With each generation this opportunity arises, and with it a chance to redress historical wrongs. In the book *Mapping Memory in Translation* (2017), which explores the intersection of memory studies and translation Studies, Siobhan Brownlie demonstrates that the translation of historical evidence, as was the case with the treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand, can play a

[14] In relation to the metaphor of travel developed by Susan Bassnett.

defining role in the fate of a group; and that, in the aftermath, the translator's task, much like the historian's, is to reconcile the present with the past through memory[15]. Contextualization is important, and paramount, when one is dealing with texts that bear witness to traumas that were experienced collectively, it can be an opportunity to acknowledge historical wrongs, the translator's presence and agency, and the simple fact that the past is a foreign entity. Contextualization comes at the cost of visibility, a degradation of the illusion of simultaneity St-James refers to. But that cost can be a gain as it can inspire trust and belief in authenticity. In this fashion the translator's reply, their framing and reshaping of the text which constitutes their own answer to the past, can be signed in visible ink and forwarded for retranslation in a not-too-distant future.

Conclusion

The deficiencies brought on by a temporal incompatibility of linguistic subcodes, lingering questions surrounding the rendition of historical time, and the proliferation of lines of research focusing on space, have led to a foregrounding of time in translation studies which encourages us to rethink how time relates to translation. In doing so, we are invited to revisit lines of research centred on space by way of their temporal component and engage time-related metaphors.

With these two objectives in mind, I have introduced the sub-metaphor of time travel to the metaphor of travel and cast the translator as time traveler, visiting the past and rendering it to the present, drawing upon the present (of which he is a native) to fill in the blanks created by a

[15] According to Brownlie the past is interpreted through the lens of the present, and meaning is found in the treaty, a meaning created by the strange situation of the original text and divergent translation which now act as combined memorial document. (2017, 14) And thus, Brownlie demonstrates that memorialization can alter the ideological course of a document.

language in flux. This sub metaphor enables us to compare the translator's predicament to that of time travellers in fictional tales and ask questions about the dilemmas raised by having to negotiate temporalities. Ethical questions surrounding one's representation of an enigmatic past, no matter how derivative it is considered to be, crop up rather sharply when historical evidence is concerned.

Chapter Three
An Ecotouristic approach to the foreign past

Ecotourism in Vietnam

I first encountered ecotourism in South-East Asia, in Vietnam, in 2011, as I was travelling a road delineated by the *Lonely Planet,* a tourist pilgrimage that invariably led to meeting other tourists and speaking English. A very lonely planet indeed. I grew fed up, began seeking an alternative and discovered an agency offering Eco touristic stays. I settled upon a hike through the rice paddies with a local guide, down into their village, where we would stay overnight.

As we negotiated the mountain paths, the guide, a local girl who was also working on a thesis, brought our attention to plants along the way, pointing out their uses for her community. She led us to a popular bathing spot and told us of the people she knew, stopping to speak to farmers who were out tilling the paddies.

We spent the evening with a local family, partaking in their home cooking, drinking rice wine and watching Korean soap operas set in medieval times. They could barely speak any English, so we embarked on a timid informal tour of the language that permeated their daily lives.

Since I first heard the word foreign mentioned and associated with Antoine Berman in translation studies, and learned of how the translator must define, conceive and negotiate it, I've often been reminded of my Eco touristic stay, secretly yearned for it and have attempted to envision an approach to the foreign which would inspire itself from it. In a breach of transparency, at the expense of invisibility, it would give the reader an opportunity to be hosted by the foreign, to be initiated, participate and build empathy. Offering in exchange for this

discomfort, a mundane and beautiful sight, a new word, a shared laugh, another means of exploring.

An ecotouristic Approach to translation

Archaisms in language are seldom carried over in translations. Language is usually modernized in the process, the way it is intra-lingually when translations are updated. The temporal specificity of language is not translated and the text's ability to function as an accurate representation of historical evidence is weakened. This raises the question: how can the temporality of language, and the cultural reality it denotes, better survive the rigours of translation? The translation of historical letters can inform this practice. In performing this one, I will draw upon historical methodology to introduce an ecotouristic approach to translating the past. Rooted in the metaphor of travel, my use of the term 'ecotourism' is metaphorical in part, my aim in applying it to translation is to borrow the ecotouristic lens in use in the tourism industry[16] , and employ it to develop an approach that seeks to achieve a similar goal in translation: for the reader to be hosted by a past culture and establish a connection with it. To reward the reader for how this might affect the flow of reading, the rest of the text will be recast and performed (e.g. the use of an archaic tone) to provide readers with an aesthetic experience that takes full advantage of present-day language and the readers knowledge and appreciation thereof.

[16] In the tourism industry ecotourism is defined as a responsible travel approach aimed at conserving natural environments and improving the well-being of local communities. It emphasizes education, sustainable practices, and cultural exchanges, allowing travellers to connect with the host culture while minimizing ecological footprints. (UNWTO – UN Tourism https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/ecotourism-and-protected-areas

Bearing this in mind, the translation will adopt a proactive postmodernist stance toward history recommended by Bandia (2006), and thereby seek to elaborate an interventionist approach to the letters' translation. It will also draw upon Venuti's notion of translation as representation[17]: "A translation can be linguistically correct and yet offer nothing more than a representation at a given time in the translating language and culture" (Venuti 2005, 806).

Taking this into consideration, the goal is not to reproduce evidence but to represent it and be transparent about its connection to the past. In developing the notion of the text as a "representation", I have alluded to James St-André's metaphor of "passing"[18]. This approach highlights the performative and transformative aspects of translation, emphasizing how translators mediate and reconstruct identities across cultural boundaries. I have also referred to how he uses its forensic equivalent: "forgery"[19] to argue for a text that avoids archaisms and is recast. To *pass* as an 18th century text, an archaic tone will be used throughout the letter's translation. I will also endeavor to keep a certain strangeness by translating the author's quirks and writing numbers the way he did. Beyond that, the translation will seek to conserve linguistic elements of the past's culture by using a translational methodology that employs annotations and loan words. And do this in a manner that seeks to find a middle ground between the heavily annotated translations of historians and the smooth texts of literary translators. The reader will be afforded rare glimpses of the foreign language as it existed in the past and the cultural nuance it

[17] According to Venuti recognizing the translation's autonomous status is crucial for translators to distance themselves from the original. He points that this autonomy is relative because translating is a derivative or second-order form of creation, intended to imitate or recreate a foreign-language text. (2005, 801)
[18] St-André conceptualizes the metaphor of "passing" in translation as a form of cross-identity performance.
[19] He explores the metaphor of "forgery" in translation by examining how translations can be perceived as counterfeit or inauthentic reproductions. He argues that forgeries betray themselves as such because of their temporal "trace" which can always be detected and interferes with the original's (2020, 59)

carries. Efforts will be made to accurately account for how the field of meaning of some words have changed by providing footnotes that are intended to contextualize.

Usually used to describe a non-intrusive form of travel that seeks to observe natural environments and the traditional cultures prevailing there, minimising negative impacts upon the natural and social environment (UN Tourism, 2002), my use of the term *ecotourism* builds upon Susan Bassnett's metaphor of translation as travel, and seeks to host the reader by connecting them with untranslatable cultural elements of the foreign past, in a manner that seeks to preserve and curate what, for temporal reasons, lies beyond the limits of translatability. The translation itself, and the method it employs, will function as an invitation to historical exploration, and reward the reader for their metaphorical journey by providing them with an aesthetic experience rooted in the present.

Methodological Framework and discursive strategies

In carrying out the translation, I have decided to draw from the succession of varying translation methods of poetry in German culture distinguished by Goethe and noted by Venuti when demonstrating the historical nature of translation[20]. (1) The first, "simple prosaic translation"; (2) the second, where "the translator really only tries to appropriate foreign content and reproduce it in his own sense" (3) the third, "an approximation to the external form of the original", a "close adherence" that imports foreign linguistic and cultural elements (Venuti 2005, 801). These provide a range I am comfortable with, a palette of methods to draw from. The first is, as Venuti

[20] "A Translation reveals historical continuities and divergences between two languages and cultures that it brings into contact. Furthermore, not only is every stage in the production of a translation profoundly marked by its historical moment, but its circulation and reception inevitably trace a history that is distinct from the destiny of the foreign text." (Venuti 2005, 801)

points out, domesticating and homogenizing. The second, a middle ground that cloaks foreign content in domestic clothes, and the third allows for a degree of foreign elements to be introduced. Venuti asserts that Goethe acknowledged that these methods could be used simultaneously (2025, 801). Ultimately, in developing an ecotouristic approach, I chose to favour the third because I found it the one best adapted to my goal of hosting the past and connecting the reader with a bygone culture. To achieve this, I chose to import linguistic and cultural elements belonging to it through the use of annotations and loan words and idiosyncracies inherent to the author's writing.

Deciding upon temporality

I spent a lot of time pondering the possibility of writing a translation reproducing French 18th century writing in English 18th century writing. Venuti however demonstrates that methods that attempt to match the temporality of the target language to that of the original—as is illustrated with Ezra Pound's experiments in archaizing poetry—only serve to historicize translations[21](2005, 807). With this in mind, I elected that the ecotouristic approach I employed would remain consistent with the universals of deformation inherent to our time and observed by Venuti, and that the translation would adopt a fluent strategy entailing reliance on current usage, in order to make it immediately intelligible and appealing to contemporaries (2005, 808).

It would avoid the pitfalls of archaizing language, which only seem to throw the reader off, and come across as imitation (Venuti 2005, 806-807) but instead use an archaic tone resembling the one commonly employed in contemporary theatre and film to evoke past speech. Ultimately, it would apply a standard of close semantic correspondence with the French text that would, by and

[21] To suggest that the texts had been produced in a historically remote culture.

large, follow the author's lexicon and syntax, and use M.A. Screech's translation of Montaigne (1993) as a model to create a readable text, that would allow for occasional annotation:

> The lexical choices avoid archaism: they consistently conform to current usage and rely on the most familiar forms, including some that have a conversational quality […] at points he also departs from the French syntax to create more readable constructions (Venuti 2005, 805).

Chapter Four

Accounting for Lost Time

Accounting for the Journey

This chapter will account for the text's transformation and renewal, the challenges that were encountered and how they were overcome. I thereby wish to provide a brief account of the translational journey, particularly the temporal one. I seek to be transparent about the analysis it required, the practical considerations posed by time, and how they were addressed in this specific case. I will share insights into the process that were gained by pondering theoretical considerations of temporality and demonstrate how these contributed to the development and application of an approach.

My stance is one of a literary translator dabbling in history, seeking to bring its remnants to life. In the same spirit as the letters, I wish to report my observations and explain my choices. To forward this translated text to the reader and include my notes. Most documentary editors provide an explanation of the "style" that they have decided to use for their transcriptions.[22] This chapter will serve as one for my translation. My application of the ecotouristic approach arose out of the choices pertaining to the kind of representation of historical evidence I wished to achieve. It is my hope that the resistant strategies I have adopted will compel and excite curiosity and discovery, and highlight the original as evidence of a foreign past which the translation hosts in the present.

22. According to https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/em-dashes-transcriptions.

Considerations relating to the reception of the letters

This translation has a dual purpose: (1) To make the letters of a man who played a decisive role in shaping New York City more accessible to American students, scholars, libraries and institutions, and (2) to deliver a translation of his letters to his African-American descendants who have left them untranslated ever since they were first sent to them by the descendants of Charles Nicolas Mangin[23] in the 1990s.

Because I am one of these descendants, this is my primary purpose. I suspect the letters were left untranslated for so long because there was no real desire to find out the details of our connection. And perhaps a little fear. But recently interest has grown and the family's genealogists and storytellers await a missing piece of their history.

Framing the past with paratext

The original I received of the letters was a computer file, a transcription originally undertaken by Antoine Pons, a distant cousin, on a typewriter that was then digitized decades later by his son Jacques Pons. Their purpose was genealogy, to preserve the content of the handwritten letters, document it for the family archives and prepare it for assimilation into history. Perhaps they wished to find evidence of noble lineage, his accomplishments, a neutral observational tone is maintained throughout the paratext which takes the shape of a table of contents sorting the letters by date, and of sparse paragraphs that precede some of the lengthier letters, and summarize their contents. By all accounts[24], the immediate readers these summarizing paragraphs were intended for were the genealogists working with the documents and family.

[23] Joseph François Mangin's brother

[24.] According to Thibaud Leroy, Joseph François Mangin's biographer.

I decided to follow their example and translate, and in some cases adapt, their paratext for my African-American family. The summaries are practical as they allow the reader the same luxury as an abstract, to stand at the doorstep, take a glimpse and decide whether to venture further. For a family unearthing memory and trauma, this could prove a crucial step. With this in mind, when I speak of paratext, I will be referring to Kathryn Batchelor's definition of the term

> A paratext is a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received (2018, 142).

According to her the 'text' in question can be in its original language or translated. Its influence is in the historical contextualization it provides or fails to do. The tone employed by Pons is neutral, appropriate for history, and the succinct delivery of details is authoritative, even judgemental at times. For instance, the line '*La révolte éclate et met l'ile à feu et à sang'*[25] seems to (as JFM does in his letter) put the devastation caused by the rebellion squarely on the shoulders of the revolutionaries.

In the context of family genealogy these paratexts constitute an intergenerational answer to the past, a collaboration, and correspondence that furthers the life of the text. Weighing all these factors, I decided to include a translation of the paratexts, as evidence of another generation. And then, in some cases, to change it and evidence my own response, creating a text not only layered with temporalities, but generational substrata, a culmination to the present.

My most significant alteration to the paratext is to the paragraph preceding the first letter because it does not mention its most salient aspect, that is my ancestor's debate regarding the institution of slavery with his mother. It is Information my African-American family will be seeking, because it is the truth they will have to reconcile.

25. Lettre du 15 décembre 1791.

In the letter he writes:

> *Arrivé au port, le premier coup d'œil s'arrête sur cette populace de nègres qui vous entourent. D'après le poignard que Raynal*[26] *leur met entre les mains pour les arracher et les soustraire à l'horreur prétendue de leur servitude, je m'imaginais n'entendre que des coups de fouet, que le bruit de leurs chaînes, que les cris de leurs douleurs et de leur désespoir. Je n'ai vu au contraire que des êtres la plupart plus heureux que nos domestiques d'Europe.*

This information was missing from the paratext. And so, I went from:

> *Puis il fait part de ses réflexions sur l'Île, son climat, les moeurs des habitants, les esclaves noirs et les façons de les traiter, les femmes belles et précoces mais vite fanées.*[27]

To:

> And he shares his thoughts on the island, its weather, the customs of its residents, the beautiful women that are precocious, his endorsement of slavery and repudiation of the abolitionist writings of Abbé Raynal.

I had to research the contents of the letter, the historical reference to Raynal to understand my ancestor's knowledge of the argument against slavery. It's the detail I think will most benefit my family in understanding where their ancestor stood a few weeks after he had reached the shores of Haiti.

Another significant alteration was made to the first sentence of the paragraph preceding the letter dated June 20th, 1812:

> *A peine trois mois après sa première lettre, Joseph François reprend sa plume pour décrire l'évolution de la guerre civile à Saint-Domingue entre le roi noir Christophe et le président mulâtre Petion.*

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[26] Known as « L'Abbé Raynal », Guillaume-Thomas Raynal was an 18th century French historian who published the widely circulated *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* which decried colonial practices and the institution of slavery.

27. Lettre du 9 mai 1785

The old paratext seems to be foregrounding the race of the leaders of the conflict, perhaps seeking to frame this as an interracial conflict between Blacks and mixed-race individuals. Upon inspecting the letter, this is what the author does, he refers to Henri Christophe as *roi nègre*:

> *Voilà ce qui se passe dans cette belle et malheureuse Colonie: Christophe, Roi de la province du Nord, s'est présenté devant le Port au Prince avec toutes ses forces qui consistent en 11 000 hommes, pour vaincre et détruire le parti du Président Petion qui a été envoyé par l'Empereur français pour tenter de rétablir l'ordre; dans les différentes attaques que ce roi nègre a faites contre cette ville.*

Or *cruel nègre*:

> *...car ce cruel nègre a la louable coutume de faire massacrer toute la famille d'un homme qui déserte ses drapeaux.*

Pétion in counterpart is described as *un homme humain.*

> *Tous ses soldats et tout son monde, fatigués de leurs guerres continuelles ont enfin appris qu'ils ne pouvaient pas vivres sans les blancs, et Pétion, qui est un homme humain et réellement attaché à cette couleur…*

I chose to translate "*président mulâtre"* as "mixed race president". As we will see in the section on offensive language, if the term is included in historical evidence, I would have no compunctions about its inclusion. But since it is there to guide the reader, I chose to change it to suit the tastes of an American readership because there seems to be a cultural divide in how the term is perceived in English and in French.

I also modified 'King Christophe', to his rightful moniker; he was proclaimed Henry I, King of Haiti. I presume Antoine Pons went for 'King Christophe' because that is how he is referred to in the letters and nowhere else. His official monikers were Henri Christophe or Henri I.

The Choice of American

Despite his letters to France, and the desire he expressed therein to return, what remains of Joseph François Mangin's heritage, his architectural works and the visionary map of Manhattan he created, are in New York under the purview of American scholars.

His claims as to the work he mentions that he did in Canada have yet to be verified.[28]Joseph François Mangin was a refugee fleeing the Haitian revolution, he did not choose America but he remained there for the best part of his life and most likely died there[29]. The 09th of May 1796, he was recognized and took an oath as a freeman of New York and was naturalized an American citizen.[30] He wrote to Alexander Hamilton, his patron:

> I am an American and the last drop of my blood will be shed in the service of my country (Koepel 2015, 37-41; 51-56)

His known descendants are all in the United States, the country where his ten children were born and where he very likely met his demise. With this in mind, a choice was made for translating the letters into present day American English. One copy will be sent to the Mangin family in New York and another to The Library of Congress so it can be openly consulted by scholars. In this regard, this translation is another step in Joseph François Mangin's naturalization.

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[28] A translation into Canadian English might be warranted somewhere down the line.

[29] The events surrounding Mangin's death are unknown. In the end, he bought a farm and some land in Saint-Lawrence, Madrid. Then disappeared, his final letter states that he was seeking passage to Cuba, where the slave trade still flourished.

30. *MS Minutes of the New York Supreme Court,* January 19th-5th of November 1796 (See French wikipedia entry 9)

Challenges specific to the letters

Though 18th century letters are riddled with conventions, for which manuals were published to ensure proper letter writing, Mangin's observance of these conventions did not pose problems as far as opacity. He sometimes wrote for a combination of readers, like the letter dated June 20th, 1812, where he asks his brother-in-law (where his brother is staying) to please pass the letter on to his brother once he has read it.

> *Quand vous aurez lu cette lettre mon cher Poirson, faites-la passer à mon frère Lolot.*

He also writes on his brother's behalf, co-authoring the letter dated December 15th 1791. These did not constitute challenges per se but seemed very specific to the form employed, one rooted in the material page which can be damaged or lost. With this in mind, when Mangin does not receive replies to his letters, he chances others, hybrid ones, with overlapping temporalities, that include excerpts of the possibly lost letter and new material as well. The letter dated June 20th, 1812 reprises some of the letter dated March 08th, 1812, a fact he openly admits to.

> *Je vais te donner un extrait de mes deux premières lettres que tu te dispenseras de lire si tu les as reçues.*

Interestingly, the reprised passages differ slightly and required therefore a different translation.

Letter dated March 08th,1812

> *Je passe sous silence ta captivité en Angleterre que j'ai sue à peu près trois mois après ton départ, pour te féliciter de l'heureuse délivrance de ta femme et de la naissance d'un fils qui t'apprend, quoique un peu tard, mais pour la première fois de ta vie combien il est doux de se voir renaître; embrasse pour moi et la mère et l'enfant, puisse-t-il parcourir sa carrière dans des temps plus tranquilles que ceux que nous avons passés.*

Letter dated June 20th, 1812

> *Je passe sous silence ta captivité en Angleterre pour te féliciter sur l'heureuse délivrance de ta femme qui t'a appris à sentir le bonheur d'être père. Embrasse pour moi la mère et l'enfant. Puisse-t-il parcourir une carrière heureuse et tranquille.*

He also repeats the list of his works in Canada and on the Erie Canal in both letters. But in the second letter the cost of the canal project goes up by four million gourds, almost double what it was three months prior. One can only assume that he is trying to entice his brother into returning to America. Rather than conform both passages, I chose to let the translation tell the same story as the evidence and thereby allow for a glimpse into the subtext of the letters.

Time's Omissions

Nothing gives the physical original more authority than words lost. Some in translation and others because of the vagrancies of time.

Fortunately, there are only a few, and they do little to hinder understanding. To lend the translation the authority of the original, to evidence its physical nature, I have chosen to let time's omissions lie and represent them using the two emdashes recommended by the Chicago style preferred by most historians[31]. I also chose, in the manner of transcriptionists of historical evidence, to use brackets to indicate the emdashes extratextual nature.

The French transcription of the letters includes suggestions to fill in the blanks left by words that have been smudged. They appear to have been cautious in doing so because it only happens when the suggestion is an obvious one. As a procedure, the transcriptionist signaled a suggested word by putting it in parentheses. Since they facilitate the fluency of the text, do not alter its meaning, and there are very few. I decided to include these as well but to include them in brackets so that, once again, there is no confusing their nature.

In this fashion, the time of the text's transcription, a crucial step in the text's migration to the present is made visible, highlighting the authority of the original as forensic evidence.

31. According to https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/em-dashes-transcriptions

Hosting the Past

Places of the past

Mangin often mentions Cap-Français in his letters, the name of present-day Cap-Haitien. The city was known as Cap-Français during the French colonial period and so I chose to conserve his usage of the term to maintain the illusion of the past, to evoke Cap-Haitien as it once was called before the Haitian Revolution. It went on to be known as Cap Henri and then later, Cap-Haitien. Interestingly, he consistently writes Cap-Français: *Cap français.* And fails to capitalize places in other instances as well. According to Wikipedia's entry *usage des lettres* there was no fixed system for capitalization until the beginning of the 18th century.

Expressions of the past

In the letter dated May 09th, 1785, I translated *mémoire d'apothécaire*[32] to "apothecary's memory". The expression *mémoire d'Apothicaire*[33] appears to stem from *compte d'apothicaire.* The *Dictionnaire libre* indicates that it is synonymous with it. Since, according to *Projet Voltaire*[34], *compte d'apothicaire* was coined in 1826, I assume it is an older version. Both expressions denote a highly complex bill, murky and suspicious; or a bill whose numbers have been increased[35]. A deed for which apothecaries in France were notorious at the time. The *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française* 5e édition (1798) points this out and cites the expression *mémoire d'apothécaire* as an example indicating that it is used to speak about dubious

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32. The original shows that Mangin misspelt the word *apothicaire*.
33. Mémoire d'apothicaire, selon Wikitionnaire, *Le dictionnaire Libre: (Vieilli)* Synonyme du compte d'apothicaire.
1. Compte, calcul, de manière très précise, avec manie.[1]
[1] https://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/compte_d%E2%80%99apothicaire
34. https://www.projet-voltaire.fr/origines/expression-compte-apothicaire/
35. https://www.projet-voltaire.fr/origines/expression-compte-apothicaire/

accounts.[36] I chose to import this expression using the old-fashioned expression 'apothecary', adapting it into English. To imbue the text with the strangeness Duval refers to (2018; 156). In this case, that strangeness is within reach and not too difficult to overcome. My assumption is that the reader will be able to quickly make sense of the expression with the help of an annotation and will come away from the experience with an appreciation of the way people once spoke and knowledge of a bygone idiom and culture.

Jargon of the past

In the Letter dated March 08th, 1812, Mangin's usage of the verb *tracer* made it hard to decipher the exact nature of Joseph François Mangin's work in Montreal. When referring to his work in Canada, he uses jargon specific to his activity of land surveying which makes it hard to grasp the details of what he did. For example, when speaking of his first mission in Montreal, he says that he was called to *tracer une ville.*

> *J'ai eu depuis ton départ deux missions conséquentes: la première a été d'aller à Montréal pour tracer une ville au-dessous de la première… .*

A few historians I spoke to seemed puzzled by the expression. The *dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* 5e édition (1798) defines *tracer* in the following manner :

> Tracer: Tirer les lignes d'un dessin, d'un plan, sur le papier, sur la toile, sur le terrain; faire le canevas les premiers points. Pour marquer le contour des objets dans un ouvrage de broderie, de tapisseries. *Tracer un plan. Tracer un dessin. Tracer une Allée, un parterre, un fort, un bastion, des travaux, etc. Tracer de la tapisserie.*

This lines up with today's definition given by the CNRTL (Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales):

36. *Des mémoires d'Apothicaire pour des comptes sur lesquels il y a beaucoup à rabattre.*

> 3a) Tracer quelque chose.
> Former quelque chose en exécuter le dessin. Synonymes: dessiner, esquisser, représenter.
> *Tracer un triangle, une croix, une épure, une esquisse, un canevas, une silhouette, une carte; tracer une composition.*

Yet, the 1798 dictionary immediately speaks of *tracer un plan,* suggesting that at the time this expression was often used to designate that activity. Knowing that Mangin is now famous for the map he drew of Manhattan I chose to translate *tracer une ville* as 'draw the plan of a city'. When speaking of his second mission, Mangin's use of *Tracer une ville* is followed by another nebulous expression *donner la direction d'un canal.*

> *…ensuite pour donner la direction d'un canal de navigation qui doit partir de la rivière Saint-Laurent pour passer derrière Montréal et la ville que j'ai tracée.*

In today's French, it is hard to figure out if Mangin is speaking of supervising a canal project or of conceiving a navigation canal. In the *Dictionnaire de L'académie Française 5e édition* (1798) the word *direction* is defined as leading or taking the lead.

Direction: Conduite *Sous la direction d'un tel. Prendre la direction de quelque affaire.*

This resembles today's definition, which according to the CNTRL is:

> 1. Action de conduire, de mener, d'administrer.
> A) en parlant de choses: La direction de travaux, la direction d'une entreprise, d'une machine.

It really is Mangin's usage which makes it difficult to pinpoint what exactly he means, but given the dictionary definitions I opted for "to lead a navigation canal project".

Names of things past

One point of resistance for me, which I instinctively felt posed a problem as far as correspondence was the word *habitation* and how specific it seemed to French culture and the time and place from which Mangin wrote.

Here are a few examples of how he uses it in the first letter he sends home dated May 09th, 1785:

> *...et dans presque tous les habitations les nègres [passent] des jours très tranquilles.*

Or

> *Je n'exige des vieillards que le peu de forces qui restent à des bras qu'ils ont mis au service de l'habitation.*

The sense grew as my readings progressed that habitation's equivalent wasn't the English 'plantation', in the context of an English colony or the United States. In his dissertation *La Société d'habitation: une civilisation historique,* Vincent Hughes Belrose (2023) explains that it is a term, possibly Normand, which has been used since the beginning of French colonization to designate a permanent place of residence with a farming operation and that it was in use even before creole came about. He specifies that in Haiti, it is a unit of measurement of life and social status. And notes that at the end of the 19th century *habitation* was replaced by the English word 'plantation'. An error according to Belrose, who claims that the English word broadly denotes an overseas colonial installation with a variety of activities, whereas the French word *plantation* has a narrower meaning, restricted only to planting and to plants.

> En Haïti particulièrement, l'habitation demeure la plus petite unité pratique de vie et de reconnaissance sociale pour le paysan qui demandera à celui qu'il ne connaît pa: *Ki bitation ou soti?* (*de quelle habitation es-tu?*). En Louisiane, le terme est synonyme de propriété agricole[1].

> A la fin du XIXe siècle, sous l'influence de la littérature nord-américaine, le terme anglo-saxon *plantation* s'est substitué au terme français "habitation". Mais s'il est vrai que le mot anglais désigne d'abord, de façon générale, l'installation de colons outre-mer, quel que soit leur rapport au sol et le mode d'exploitation, puis la grande exploitation agricole coloniale, le mot français "plantation" ne désigne que le fait de mettre en terre des graines ou des plants. En outre, l'exploitation agricole dans les plus anciennes colonies tropicales de la France possède des traits originaux qui la distinguent nettement de ses homologues anglaises et hispano-portugaises (2023).

Belrose suggests that reintroducing the word "habitation" would give a more accurate idea of the spatial and social framework of French colonization. I chose to retain the word as a

foreign element in the text and thereby denote its untranslatable nature. And to include an annotation providing sufficient context for the reader to begin to imagine it.

Idiosyncracies

Spelling

Deprived of the timeworn original, in the author's own handwriting, the reader has little to indicate whether or not the author's spelling mistakes and irregularities stem from him. His capitalization is irregular and he is occasionally stingy in his use of accents. He also consistently fails to use the connecting *trait d'union* in the names of places, writing 'Port-au-Prince', 'Port au Prince'.

Because the reader would have too much difficulty spotting these mistakes as authentic ones, I decided to correct them in translation. I did however choose to preserve some of the short form in which he wrote. This included him writing numbers numerically or writing 'Saint-Domingue' as 'St-Domingue'. I can only speculate that in shortening his words, he was vying for space and trying to save ink. Whatever the case may be, I find that preserving it implicitly signifies the form of letter writing and serves to signal it to the modern reader.

Writing style

Joseph François Mangin was an educated member of the upper middle class. He studied law at the University of Nancy. His compositional style manifests most in the early letters. They are longer, presumably because he had more time on his hands, was homesick and wanted to convey his impressions of a newfound land. In the first letter dated May 09th, 1785, in his description of the countryside is filtered through culture shock and homesickness and leads to a descriptive passage, where imagery of plants is used to depict Haiti as forlorn, drab and

unchanging. In writing this passage, Mangin manages to conjure a vivid description of what Haiti must have felt like to a Frenchman who had never left France and who was experiencing *le mal du pays*.

> *Leurs feuilles sont toujours du vert le plus monotone. Jamais on n'y distingue l'aurore où leur bouton naissant va briser son enveloppe légère. Jamais on ne les aperçoit successivement croître, se développer, jaunir et tomber.*
> *Chaque jour on se couche bien sûr que le lendemain sera le même que celui qu'on vient de passer, et cette variété n'est-elle pas la source de tous nos plaisirs?*

Translating these passages proved more challenging than the rest. In general, I emulated Mangin's syntax and paragraph structure and had no trouble finding correspondences for the imagery he used. His creative use of expressions proved to be more challenging. In the letter dated October 12th, 1814, to describe his financial situation, he states that he is *entre deux eaux* which means to be stuck between two warring factions, to refuse to take a side.[37] The expression doesn't quite fit, but after many a reading I believe it is used in this fashion to put some creativity on display. To show some *esprit.* The inverse might also be true, perhaps he knew the expression poorly. Whatever the case may be, I chose to adopt the author's quirk and use the English equivalent 'stuck in the middle', in the hope, that an astute reader would pick up on its original use. And that this would contribute to imbue the text with the author's original character.

There is also another expression that he either invents or has drawn from a time and place where I could not track it down. In the letter dated March 08th, 1812, when speaking of the accent of French Canadians, he says:

> *Ils m'ont comblé de caresses en m'écorchant les oreilles avec leur Français flamand.*

He reprises this passage in his letter dated June 20th of the same year. The use of the verb *écorcher* makes it clear that he is comparing Canadian French to the worst form of French he can

37. https://www.expressio.fr/expressions/nager-entre-deux-eaux

think of: Flemish-French. Because the translation aims to be a fairly accurate representation of historical evidence. I also chose to adopt this expression, to once again replicate the author's personality but also to provide the reader with an accurate idea of what his geographical and linguistic references were. Annotations were used in both cases to let the reader in.

Incoherence

In the letter dated May 08th, 1815, there is a sentence that hardly makes sense given the context:

> La personne qui se charge de ma lettre se nomme Mr Tai… (?). C'est un américain très riche; il va en France pour cause de maladie et se propose de voyager dans ce beau pays; il passera peut-être chez vous; si cela est, je ne vous recommande pas de le bien recevoir.

If Mister Tai is indeed rich, giving him a warm welcome would be of the utmost importance. This was the only instance of blatant incoherence. I chose to let it stand, translating it as it was written, and by way of apology, to annotate the whole with an explanation. Leaving the reader to wonder, as I still do, what caused Mangin to write it such: a failed attempt at sarcasm? An inebriated state? A twist of the tongue? The mind?

Linguistic heterogeneity in the letters

There is one instance of self-translation in the letters that not only stands out for its rarity (it only occurs once), but for the questions it raises as to its possible motivation, its intended reader(s) and desired effect.

In the letter dated May 08th ,1815, when writing to his brother Lolot and his brother-in-law Poirson, Mangin switches to English in order to deliver news of his wife Rosetty.

> I am more and more pleased with my Rosetty, her conducte toward me and my childrens deserve my love to her; she have five little ones four Boys and one Girl, all handsomes: She charge me of her […] [(to)] you, your Lady and Children if you have any, and rejoice ... [(?)] to see all of you.

Time was unkind to the last sentence imparting her words, the only instance in the series of letters where they were recorded.

I chose to conserve this instance of Mangin's bilingualism because it is evidence of his transnationalism, his new American identity, his degree of proficiency with the English language at the time. Also, because it signifies that he clearly isn't doing it for the benefit of his brothers in France, but rather for the one who is mentioned, Rosetty, who would also eventually read this letter before it was sent, or was reading it over his shoulder as he wrote. Mangin is writing in English for her benefit, so that she might understand what he is writing about her, to the folks back home. It stands to reason, he might have been closer to her at the time, as his recent letters to France had gone unanswered and that was his chief reason for writing.

The paragraph gives us an indication of the role of translation in the lives of transnational subjects in 18th century New York. It speaks to the communal nature of how letter writing was practiced and the role of self-translation on an individual level. For transparency, to bond and cement trust. Preserving it highlights translation's potential role as a bonding agent in interpersonal relationships.

Annotations

Annotations were used sparingly, when necessary, to contextualize and prevent the reader from having to do immediate research of their own in order to understand references in the text. Their purpose was to guide the reader on a chronosconscious journey, one that is mindful of the translator's role in mediating and conserving the past. Along with the paratexts, they function as curation, as guide. For example, in the letter dated May 09th, 1785, I added an annotation to explain the author's use of the word *hibou*, an old French expression used to refer to a recluse. But as a rule, annotations were added as guard rails, to prevent error, the possibility of

misinterpretation and the reader getting lost. Decrees and historical characters mentioned in passing were also granted annotations to fill in the blanks they naturally create in the mind of the present-day reader.

Offensive language

There is language in the letters that today we would consider offensive. It was common at the time, but has aged as well as the ideology it represents. I had no qualms about translating the word '*nègre'* as 'nigger' because it accurately reflects the time at which it was used. And I think it is important to represent that time for what it was.

I did however remove language I considered offensive from one of the introductory paragraphs in the paratexts included by my French relatives in the letter dated June 20th, 1812, and in so doing discovered a crosscultural divide I was not expecting. The word in question is *mulâtre.*

> A peine trois mois après sa première lettre, Joseph François reprend sa plume pour décrire l'évolution de la guerre civile à Saint-Domingue entre le roi noir Christophe et le président mulâtre Petion.

There seems to be a difference in how the word is perceived in English and in French. The *Larousse* or *Petit Robert* flag the word as old, but not as offensive. They simply point out that the word is derived from mule and is not used much these days without referring to its offensive nature (as is their practice with other offensive words). This seems to imply that the word is not considered offensive in French, despite the fact that the negative connotations of *mulâtre* (mûle - âtre: comme une mule) seem to me more obvious in French than in the English *mulatto* which requires knowledge of Spanish.

In English dictionaries like the Collins however, the word is flagged as old and offensive. Since I am translating into English, I chose to translate it as mixed race. Had I been translating into French, I would have been faced with the challenge of finding a substitute and would probably have opted for *métis*.

Content Warning

To give the reader fair warning for content that has aged badly. I included a content warning modelled on one found on the website of the archives of the Royal BC Museum which contains archives of documentary evidence. The objective is to prepare the reader for offensive language and to help them acknowledge the power dynamics at play in the preservation of historical evidence and lay bare the reasons why we must depend on even the most offensive documents to gain an accurate representation of history.

Accounting for Lost Time - Conclusion

In applying an ecotouristic approach to the translation of the letters, I took into consideration the intended readers, the form, how to represent time's omissions, and searched for ways to host different aspects of the foreign past. I also endeavoured to render idiosyncratic elements of the author's style. An important aspect of which was an instance of linguistic heterogeneity that betrays the presence of another reader and the role of individual self-translation in the life of transnational migrants

Conclusion

In his book *The Past is a Foreign Country*: *Revisited* (2015), historian David Lowenthal states that the easiest way for us to experience the past is to look at the night sky. The distant light of the stars is so remote that it has fallen behind our time. It travels toward us awaiting discovery. Or rather, we look up, and imagine the future. In a similar fashion, historical evidence functions to bring truth to light. In creating this translation for Mangin's Afro-American descendants, I have had to travel back, familiarize myself with the past and consider the implications of returning it to the present, bearing in mind that the original in this case was evidence of moments of literary activity, and that it included eyewitness accounts of historical events, material that lies at the intersection of the somewhat estranged fields of history and literary translation.

The diachronic nature of the project led me to inquire into the issue of how temporality is translated, to survey aspects of a recent foregrounding of time in translation studies and to consider how pondering time could lead to the development of an approach. In reconsidering the variable of time in theories focusing on space, I extended Susan Bassnett's metaphor of travel by developing the sub-metaphor of time travel. I also considered the ethical implications of disrupting the present or colluding with it, by discussing ethical problems faced by time travellers in myth and film. In reflecting upon how one answers the past, I introduced the sub-metaphor of letter writing, proposing that translation constitutes an opportunity of reply and that our answer to the past lies in how we reshape and frame it. In considering an interventionist stance to translating the foreign past, I drew upon my own experience of travel to propose an ecotouristic approach that would be geared toward conservation, and privilege an aesthetic experience rooted in the present. I had to take the intended readers into account, the generations that came before, the imprint they left on the text and how it would be interpreted, to consider how to use paratexts as a framing device and make a conscious choice to write the translation in American English.

There were challenges specific to the form employed, the material nature of the document, details belonging to the foreign past, idiosyncrasies of the author and an instance of linguistic heterogeneity specific to the author's experience as a translated man. And because the text contains words and views that could be upsetting to present day readers, I devised a content warning based on those in use by Museum archives.

In undertaking this project and being mindful of both aesthetics and conservation, I have grown to appreciate the need and potential for interdisciplinary collaborations between historians and literary translators when it comes to primary sources, or the possibility of translation historians taking up this intersectional task and applying an interventionist stance in framing textual evidence that would enable readers to reconcile the past and gain fresh perspective on future events. In an increasingly everchanging present, there is a growing need for this. Lowenthal reminds us that nostalgia for simpler times has made the past "the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of them all". (2015, 51)

I have endeavored to make this translation a visitable realm, not necessarily the one of solace that Lowenthal speaks of, but one which includes a "verbal echo" as Sandra Bermann in her essay 'Translating History' (2005) puts it. One which, according to the Benjaminian logic she applies, preserves *previous* language rather than elicits it. Translating the letters has contributed to my awareness that one possible way to acknowledge the untranslatable past and return previous language to being is to practice hybridity of a temporal nature. Speaking of hybridity in fiction, Suzanne Klinger works according to the assumption that it is the text and the reader's representation of it which brings into being the story and the narration. She argues that spatial and temporal shifts in hybridity can affect worldview because they can trigger shifts in perception and ideology. The erasure or addition of linguistic hybridity can impact how narrative events are perceived because they signal perspective through language variation (2015, 12, 46). I submit

that because our representation of documentary evidence contributes to bringing into being our narrative of history, temporal hybridity can perform a similar role. Simultaneously allowing opportunities for historical perspective and empathy. According to Bermann, translating history reminds us that translation is a temporal art that can contribute to the action of history itself and to the ongoing conversation that gives it a meaning and a future (272). Historical texts acquire a life after death by speaking to those of us who inherit and question (269).

Joseph François Mangin sent many of these letters from New York, over two hundred years ago. Like journeying starlight, they have endured and return home, to descendants who barely know him; whose family history, by and large oral, goes back almost as far as he does—but not quite. These letters have served as evidence to establish their line of ancestry. They reveal the existence of the Black woman Mangin married at the time: Rosetty. She is their missing link to him. She survived him and lived on a farm with their children in Orange county. They then moved to Sandy Ground, Staten Island, one of the oldest free Black settlements in the United States—where she finished her days. No other surviving document captures her presence as well as these letters. Some of her children became farmers and oyster fishermen, others moved to New York City. They had children who became inventors, waiters, abolitionists, railroad men and chauffeurs. And amongst their children were colonels and psychotherapists who had children of their own, who became managers, translators, and yes, even architects.

Chapter Five

Translation

Content Warning

This translation and the archival record it represents may include content and language that is upsetting or triggering. The author's letters reflect the language and attitudes of the historical period in which they were created. This can include language that is racist or sexist. Many of these terms are unacceptable today.

Historical evidence is preserved in historical records for future use. As not every record ever created can be kept, only certain records are deemed "important" enough for archival preservation. In many cases, these "important" records are created by those in positions of power, whether within a family, business or government. Due to the history of the development of America and France, this has led to privileging the voices and experiences of white middle- or upper-class men within archives collections, while ignoring or undermining the voices of the rest of the population.

Letter dated May 09th, 1785 (Saint-Domingue, *Petite-Anse* neighbourhood)
Joseph François to his mother.

First letter by a young 26-year-old man, less than six months after his arrival in Saint-Domingue. After giving a few instructions regarding where his mail should be sent, he traces with an attentive pen the trials and tribulations of his luggage across France and then the ocean.
He goes on to share his thoughts on the island, its climate, the customs of its residents, the prematurely beautiful women whose beauty quickly fades, and speaking of the way slaves are treated, he elaborates a defence of slavery (his mother seems to have misgivings about the practice), its accompanying punishments and repudiates the anticolonial abolitionist writings of Abbé Raynal[38] as gross exaggeration. He suggests that the conditions most of the slaves of Haiti enjoy would be the envy of the peasants of Europe.

My dear mother,

I had not conceived, when I tore myself from your arms, when I disunited from myself, that I would have to wait 7 long months for tidings. Perhaps I'll pine longer still, awaiting the letter for which I have been yearning for so long.

Not that I wish to waste time with admonishments; I am utterly convinced of your motherly affection. I am sure that you wrote me as soon as you could, but perhaps your letter has been engulfed by the tide's swells; maybe it was on one of the ships that sank. All told, there have been 9 since I first came to this land.

Thus, I bid you, that when you wish to write, that you make a duplicate of your letters, that you send them to me via different ports—for example send one via Bordeaux and the other via Marseille—and always make sure to pay for the postage, otherwise they won't make it to me;

[38] L'abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal. French author at the time whose writings denounced colonialism.

simply address them to Mr. Mangin, at the *Habitation*[39] Galifet, in the neighborhood of Petite-Anse near Cap-Français, St-Domingue island, through Bordeaux (or any other such port of your choosing) in Cap-Français.

I urge you to send them via Marseille or Bordeaux, and seldom via Nantes, because few ships arrive from there. Above all else, be careful not to send them via registered mail, the course I'm recommending is the most reliable one.

Surely you remember that I had the honor of writing you, and of impressing upon you the dire financial straits in which I found myself in Nantes, and that Madame de Croix, moved by my predicament, was willing to help me by lending me 200 francs.

Deeply grateful, I eagerly impressed upon her how critical the favor she had rendered was, and that, despite the collateral she was given for the sum, I was able to appreciate this humane and honest deed.

The collateral I just mentioned is still a mystery to you, but since I'm out of danger, and my worries are at an end, I will explain.

The truth is we were forced to board before our trunks arrived, that Mr Desrivages, for whom I had some esteem and who had sworn that he would get them to Nantes within 20 to 25 days, knew very well that they could only reach their destination over six weeks later, since he knew

[39] A French colonial *habitation* typically included a permanent residence and a growing operation for either sugar, coffee or other cash crops.

that the itinerary he had chosen, which cost him a lot less, and which despite this cost us our 12 percent, was very long. But it is often believed that the best way to travel is to earn a little coin.

He resolved then to send our clothes via Paris by having them transported there from Chalon, which cost him very little, since one pays only 10 cents per hundredweight. Next, they were carted from Paris to Orléans, and from there, sent down the Loire all the way to Nantes. Which is how these trunks traveled 250 leagues, the bends in the river notwithstanding, and only traveled 80 leagues overland. I'll let you be the judge of whether our money, or to put it plainly, our speculator, did not reap maximum profit.

And thus, our woefully miscarried belongings made it to Nantes. Madame de Croix, who had come to my aid, thought it best to keep them until she had a better idea of what was going to happen with the refund that I had promised her. As a result, she wrote to Monsieur Desrivages, who answered that he had no intention of paying the amount, and that as a result, she should only relinquish it after she had been paid what she was owed: This dame Decroix is a crackpot and a scatterbrain. If her closest relatives are to be believed, she took her pale and thin countenance to a notary in Nantes and asked him to draft_a deed, according to which she authorizes her sister-in-law from Cap-Français to receive and withhold the trunks, and to assign to me, jointly with Mr Delavalle the debt that she was owed, which included both the 200 francs and the fees paid for the trunks' transportation.

As soon as the act was passed, they decided to take our trunks and load them onto a ship that set sail shortly thereafter.

And off they go once again, bound to reach us soon, but fate, which mocks man's designs, had ordained it otherwise.

Clearly our trunks had not traveled enough, because they went for a pilgrimage to Saint-Jacques in Galicia. The "Aurora", the vessel on which they were, having left port with a companion ship, was peacefully journeying along the sea's liquescent plain, when all of a sudden, a hurricane roared. An impetuous wind lifted the waters, turning them into mountainous slopes, forcing them to level out into horrendous cliffs that threatened to engulf them at any given moment. Every maneuver imaginable was employed to weather the fury of waves that shattered, broke, and obliterated everything that sailed in their path.

The Aurora's companion ship could not withstand the sea's brutal churning, it took water from all quarters, burst at the seams, and at long last yielded, and felt itself descend into that monumental abyss, dragging along with it its entire crew, none of which could be rescued, not a single man.

The « Aurora » having born witness to this terrifying spectacle, stripped of all its masts and threatened with a similar fate, did everything in its power to stopover in Spain. Finally, after considerable exertions, it was lucky enough to escape being shipwrecked, and to reach Cadix, where I will leave it for a while, in order to speak to you of the heartache, and worry, that our trunks caused.

One month after the two ships I mentioned set sail, others had come out the Nantes River and were dispatched for the Cap. Having arrived in the vicinity more or less of where the ship sank, they saw

a multitude of sails, of ropes bound to masts, snaking in the waves, with planks strewn — even a fragment of the ship's shell. There was no doubt in their minds that these were the crafts that had left a month before they had.

Once they reached the Cap, after a 50-day crossing, they published everywhere that the two ships were lost.

At the same time, the arrival of Mr Decroix, a very respectable man whom we had the misfortune of not meeting, writes to Mr Delavalle that our trunks were loaded onto-the ship "*L'Aurore";* this letter renders his misfortune a certainty and [(he)] hastens to share this good news with me.

I won't dwell on the details of the unfortunate situation I found myself in. It goes without saying that a young man arriving in the colonies without a wardrobe, one's most prized possession, is a sad sight indeed. The fact that my plans to strike it rich were delayed by two years, maybe more, made the sting of my predicament even worse.

While I was busy praising merciless fate for favoring me with such good fortune, efforts were being made in Cadix to fix the damaged ship which had been brought to the brink by the terrible storm. It took about six weeks to restore it to decent sailing condition. And so, we weighed anchor and ventured out, once again, on that dubious element. Sailing was rather smooth. It wasn't long before we reached the harbor of the *Cap*; the colonists there were quite astonished to see a boat pull in that they had thought lost. They imagined that it had come back from the dead and risen to the surface to give us tidings of our fallen brothers.

Mme de Croix's relative, who, obeying the instructions of a notification letter she had received, had had the trunks removed and was stowing them at her place, had someone tell me that I should come get them. This sweet news, which was quite unexpected, raised my spirits and I scrambled to call upon my belongings.

So, I went therefore to this lady's, who showed me Mme de Croix's aforementioned power of attorney, but she had neither my ticket, nor my waybill, which meant I was within my rights to not pay her unless she could produce them. But I didn't want to start an argument. I submitted to her apothecary's memory[40] and paid for everything, far too relieved to be freed from the claws of that sanctimonious shrew, who happens to be the family recluse.[41] I dare hope that she'll be pious enough to refuse the money that you'll have sent her to settle my debt. If she makes trouble feel free to resort to legal action, as I have a receipt from her relatives, and her power of attorney as well. But I really hope that it won't come to that.

And that's the story of my luggage, and if, after all its perils, I had not had the pleasure of getting it back, you would have never known, because I value your peace of mind too much to burden you with sorrows you are powerless to lift.

When I left, I promised to speak to you of Saint-Domingue and share with you my thoughts about its climate, lifestyle and the customs of the locals. It is only right that I fulfill my promise and share them with you.

[40] The author uses *mémoire d'apothicaire*, an expression that later became *compte d'apothicaire* (apothecary account). A highly complex account, murky and suspicious whose numbers have been increased. Apothecaries at the time were notorious for such practices.
[41] The author uses the expression *hibou* (owl), an old French expression used to designate recluses.

As fate would have it, my glimpse of America revealed the view I had been expecting. There is neither the greenery nor continual spring we are used to in Europe. Nature here is not pleasing at all. You never see it rejuvenated. Wherever you look, it is always the same, a gloomy green shade oppresses it and perpetually gives you the same feeling. Everywhere, the borders of the sea are spiked with rocks, which are battered by the waves. The land is interspersed with mountains whose moderately elevated peaks are shrouded in thick clouds that continually appear to presage storms. One sees a few dwellings in the distance, too remote to satisfy the stranger's wandering eye, which deprived of an object that might arrest it and allow it to settle, loses its way. Herds graze here and there in arid savannahs, where a few protruding trees have no other recourse but to grow against the continual and eroding eastern winds that scorch and wither their branches. Their leaves are always the most monotonous green. Never do we witness within them the dawn where an incipient bud dares to break its soft shell. Never do we see them in succession, grow, mature, turn yellow and fall. We go to bed every day knowing that the next day will resemble the last–yet is variety not the wellspring of all our joys?

Upon entering the port, one's gaze is arrested by the throng of niggers that surrounds you. According to the dagger that Raynal[42] thrusts into their hands, to yank them from, and spare them the alleged horror of their bondage, I had imagined that the only thing I would hear would be the crack of the whip; the sound of their shackles; their tortured cries of despair. On the contrary, all I saw were beings, happier for the most part than our servants in Europe. I saw some who shared the flaws of our country servants, like getting drunk, dancing, and working as little as possible; it seems

[42] L'Abbé Raynal author of a widely printed and distributed manifesto against slavery.

to me quite natural, that they are severely punished for their carelessness and do not think to seek revenge upon the hand that struck them, because they are sheltered from worry, and each sunrise is the same; they sleep without any fear of bailiffs, and eat and drink without paying rent or taxes.

Their food happens to be just as good as the oat bread and potatoes that our mountain dwelling peasants subsist on part of the year. Though some barbaric masters torture them according to their cruel whims, the vast majority are as indulgent as possible and on almost all of the properties, niggers [(live)] very peaceful lives.

On this *habitation*, the authorized representative is one of the most reputable in this regard and throughout the Colony unanimously thought to be the worthiest of such a distinction. There are 1000 to 1100 niggers in his work groups. Surprised to hear this gathering of slaves, hoes in hand, rousing their own spirits from their harsh labors by letting their joyous chants resound, I shared my astonishment with him. "Why would you expect…" he told me "…these people to be anything but happy? I ease their fate as much as possible. I do not ask anything of them that is beyond their strength which I harness in the best possible way. I would be quite distraught if any of them regarded me as anything less than a father, and a father does not mistreat his children. When they are sick, I make sure they receive scrupulous care. Pregnant negresses are assigned light labor, their children are raised and fed judiciously. My requirements of the elderly are proportional to the little strength that remains in arms that they used for the *habitation's* benefit. No harsh punishment is meted out without my consent and input. This regard shelters them from the whims of a plantation treasurer who would gladly treat them in the most inhumane way and from the eccentricities of a commander whose cruelty is ordinarily only matched by the nastiest Whites of Europe who come here just so they can torture slaves."

Satisfied by what I had just heard, I asked this man if the way he was treating these niggers was typical of the way they're treated in the colonies. Whereupon, I learned what I have had the chance to corroborate since, that barring a few exceptions, all niggers were treated, if not with the same kindness, at the very least with the same humanity, except on those *habitations* where greedy managers burden them day and night with labor that eventually ends up killing these unfortunate wretches or forces them to flee. The men who practice this kind of cruelty are usually runaway criminals or people born in the gutters of the cities of Europe, who deserve to trade places with those they prey upon with their inhumanity, to be chained to the same post, to be whipped at the same stake and to endure in the same hut, hunger, thirst and all the afflictions that are rooted in those two extremes.

Except for the heights and some fortunate spots, St-Domingue's clime is generally deleterious. However, there are a few things one can do, to make it so that the continuous sweating that it occasions is a source of wellbeing. Fevers are more or less commonplace at certain times of the year, but there is little that a rigorous diet and refreshments can't overcome.

I'm sure you want to ask me why so many Europeans meet their demise here, it's because far from using the strategies I just mentioned, they practice, without moderation, all the pleasures that adaptation has made less harmful to people who were born in these climes.

Women in this land need not rail against nature. They generally have a full waist, and the world's most beautiful eyes. The sweltering heat prevents blush from blossoming on their cheeks. But, by the same token, this lilac shade, this whiteness animate, only inspires more interest. It's unfortunate that this very same heat causes other even more precious gifts to fade before their time. Here a

woman is nubile when she is 12 years old. At 15, she makes for the most faithful and loving wife and the worthiest of being cherished. At 25, she becomes jealous, suspicious, worried; as if she's had her fill of happiness and pleasure. So much so that one is tempted to believe that her only joy lies in an entirely idle life and in the excessive care she provides her children. In the past creole ladies were easily swayed to friendship by the Europeans that wooed them. But they are warier now, as they've often learned that they were really only after their purses.

Letter dated May 27th, 1791 (Le Cap)
From Joseph François to his mother

To Madame Mangin in Dompaire in Lorraine by way of Mirecourt

To Dompaire

My dear mother,

I only have time to write you a few words by way of Mr. Duval, a man from our native Lorraine who is heading back to our country.

I received both of your letters and enjoyed them very much, I will answer soon because I would like to give you the details of my fortune, an impossible task for me at the moment since I do not have time to write a long letter.

Do not worry about my fate or that of my brother We are well off. I have a *habitation*, a place to call home. I have knife and fork.[43] If you see Mister Duval, he will tell you how far I've come. I'm sure it would please you to know that throughout my career I have always followed the principles of integrity that I learned in your bosom. Oh, dear mother, allow me to express my longing for your tender embrace! Alas! When will I be able to regain it?

[43] This appears to be an expression of his own creation.
A way of saying he has all the attending comforts of a home.

Farewell my dear mother, please give my love to my sisters, brother and nephews. One holds no grudges two thousand leagues away. My brother sends his as well. Farewell my sweet mother, I shower you with kisses. I will see you again, I will see you again.

I have the honor, my dear, sweet mother, of being

Your humble and obedient son,

Mangin

King's Surveyor

Letter dated December 15th, 1791 (Le Cap)

The Mangin brothers to Ms. Mangin,

Last letter from Saint-Domingue by the Mangin brothers. Rebellion erupts and takes the island by storm.

To Ms. Mangin in Dompaire in Lorraine by way of Mirecourt

To Dompaire

(Colony by way of Nantes)

We had resolved to not send news at all, only having the worst kind to share: however, since you cannot be unaware of the calamities and horrors that were perpetrated in Saint-Domingue, we thought that your maternal affection would have been too alarmed upon learning of our excruciating predicament, and perhaps our silence might have led you to believe that we were victims of the bandits' fury —the truth is we escaped it, but are we happier for it? —Let me explain.

Last August a hundred thousand niggers rebelled; and to obtain an illusory freedom, employed fire and steel; they burned down all of our *habitations,* looted our belongings and slaughtered all the Whites unfortunate enough to fall into their barbaric hands; children were not spared and women fell prey to the worst kind of terror, endured a fate worse than death, as their lives were spared but not their honor; some were raped, whereas older women fell under the blade.

We gathered, formed camps; went to meet them on the field of battle, and, truth be told, were successful, but we could not stop the devastating fires—we've been encamped for three months and are constantly in action.

This cruel and unusual scourge however, is only the half of it. Sicknesses occasioned by the exhaustion brought on by war kill brave compatriots on a daily basis: we were, my brother and I, perilously sick; lucky for us we found a friend (Mr. George de Flavigny) whose cares restored us to life; presently, we are in rather good health and are beginning war's travails anew.

Those arsonists, those murderers do not allow us a moment's reprieve; we must be ever vigilant to repel their attacks. Just imagine our exhaustion: we are only 8 000 strong and the bandits number altogether over 100 000. We have no choice but to defend our lives and forget our holdings, for they no longer exist; except for starvation, we are prey to the worst misfortunes imaginable; but if aid doesn't arrive from France soon, we will endure this final and most cruel of afflictions.

This is but the short version of our woes. The newspapers in France probably gave you the details. The losses that these misfortunes have incurred amount to over 60 000 French pounds. My brother lost about 12 000 pounds. All we have left are four shirts and that many coats, but that's not all: we had formed a company in which we were supposed to, thanks to substantial operations, earn at least 200 000 pounds in four years.

But let us draw the curtain on all these misfortunes; we have sacrificed all our wealth, and if we are lucky enough to keep our lives, we will not find ourselves lacking in courage and energy to extract ourselves once more from squalor.

Farewell, my dear and beloved Mother, we tenderly embrace you along with our sister and brothers and friends. Alas! Will we ever see each other again?

Goodbye,

Mangin

King's surveyor

We beseech you to answer us at once, to send our baptismal extracts which we couldn't even salvage. My address is "To MM Mangin, King's Surveyor in the neighbourhood of Limonade, dependency of Cap-Français in Saint-Domingue"

As I was about to seal my letter, I just learned that the city of Port-au-Prince has been burnt to the ground and that rebellion is widespread. Dear God, where on earth are we?

Letter dated the 18th February, 1794 (New York)

Letter sent by the Mangin brothers to their mother, three months after having arrived in New York. They relate how Cap-Français was in a state of utter desolation when they left, the reason why they did not receive any mail and the number of colonists who managed to leave Saint-Domingue alive. We also learn that they spent 80 days at sea on a dilapidated schooner before reaching dry land.

From New York, February 18th, 1794

My dear mother,

I've been trying to send you news for two years now and have not received a single reply. Not that I believe you haven't written; the letters make it to Saint-Domingue but not to the colonists.
I won't detail the woes that reduced the colony to ashes, the newspapers must have informed and instructed you about the long and the short of it.

You know that the city of Le Cap,[44] once so wealthy and opulent, a French warehouse of commerce, is nothing but a pile of ashes; that almost all the whites were slaughtered and that the only ones who escaped the fury of the thieving niggers were those who managed to get away. We escaped, my brother and I, aboard a miserable schooner that kept us afloat for roughly 80 days in the middle of waves and storms. Finally, we arrived in New York, a city of New England where, for three months now, the generous Americans have fed and looked after us.

Roughly six thousand colonists escaped the niggers' fury and are strewn across the continent's cities. We have come here to await the aid promised by our nation. We hope to soon see a French

[44] Cap-Haitien

squadron, that might either return us to Saint-Domingue to gather the remnants of our former wealth, or to leave for France; we wish to return to our homeland and to once again regain our family's bosom. Yet we are duty bound to obey the Nation's representatives and we would be happy to travel anywhere we are ordered to.

I wrote a month ago and sent you our certificate of residence issued by the Republic's consul, you've probably received it.

If there is a convoy leaving for New England you may address your letters to the *Mangin Brothers,* post office general delivery in New York in case we've left the country for Saint-Domingue or France. I will task an American company with forwarding them to my next destination.

Farewell, my dear loving mother, we embrace you with all our hearts, our brothers and sisters too.

Farewell, farewell, farewell.

The Mangin brothers

Letter dated March 08th, 1812
From Joseph François Mangin to his brother Charles Nicolas.

An important letter because it is the first of five Charles Nicolas received between 1810, the date of his return to France, and 1815, the date of the last one Joseph François sent. He replies item by item to the letter dated the 9th of February 1811.

And he lists the important work he did in Canada (city and canal planning in Montreal) and New York (plans for a canal linking Lake Erie in Albany and New York, construction of the Saint-Patrick cathedral). He is thriving. He insists that his brother join him.

I received, my dear brother, on September 14th the letter that you sent on February 09th.

I answered it on November 3rd, it was sent on a ship that was seized by an English frigate and led to Annapolis, an Acadian port. This second one is leaving via the French Consul who resides in New York.[45]

I won't say a word about your incarceration in England, which l found out, about three months after you left, and instead will congratulate you on your wife's happy delivery and the birth of a son that instructs you, albeit a bit late, but for the first time ever, how sweet it is to see oneself reborn. Give my love to both mother and child, may he live in more tranquil times than the ones we knew.

I was happy to see how kind Boulay was in welcoming you. Since he has not forgotten old friends, he has proven that he is above his station; I would have wished for him to be more useful as far as I was concerned, but I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up.

[45] Pierre Jean-Marie Sotin de la Coindière – started in 1798-

The news you gave me of my son with Rosette made me incredibly happy and taught me that we can never forget the objects of our love. Please hug them tightly for me, assure them that I wish I could be of more use to them and that I'd be delighted to get some news from them.

I thank you for the trouble you took in trying to locate Mr Bouland. One thing is for sure, he had a country estate in St. Cloud, which today is at the Emperor's disposal. He had eleven or twelve houses in Paris where he lived honorably, but you'll only be able to find accurate information in Besançon.

I was confident my good Bicotte would give you a warm welcome, kiss her a thousand times for me. I cannot think about her without getting emotional.

The good father from St-Sébastien hasn't changed; there are no revolutions for the kind at heart: don't forget to put in a good word for me.

So, you've seen our father's house, my friend, and I am forever deprived of this pleasure; cruel thoughts, do not add to the unhappiness that taints my old age! You've kissed Poirson, renew those kisses for me; I am incredibly grateful for the noble manner, disinterested and generous, in which he acted on our behalf; an honorable magistrate, may he live long, for the sake of his family's happiness, and be an example to all men! The news I received regarding his children piqued my interest.

I can readily imagine that you had a hard time recognizing the people you once knew in Dompaire. It goes to show that you're not getting any younger. I still think about Guiguitte George; it's too bad she isn't happy; I have fond memories of doctor Guyot. Please give him my best; the wines

from Lorraine aren't very good, but at least they're wine, and I'm deprived of the pleasure of drinking any; the inquisitive Marianne Andreu would like to see me, probably because she wants to see if I've gotten uglier and old like her, tell her that is not the case, but that I kiss her despite her wrinkles.

Letter dated June 20th, 1812 (New York)
From Joseph François Mangin to his brother Charles Nicolas.

Barely three months after his first letter, Joseph François takes up his quill again to describe the civil war in Saint-Domingue. Fought between Henry I, King of Haiti, and President Pétion. It fuels his hope that the old order will be restored and of returning to the island with his brother and his son (from Patenotte).
Then he shares with his brother an excerpt of his two earlier letters and notably repeats, detailing them, a reminder of all his activities. He concludes by announcing the declaration of war between the United States and England.

When you will have read this letter, my dear Poirson, pass it on to my brother Lolot. Good news, my dear brothers, and especially for you, my dear Lolot: the doors of St-Domingue are going to open up for us again and the old order will be restored.

Here's what's happening in this beautiful and ill-fated Colony: Christophe, King of the Northern Province, came to Port-au-Prince with all of his forces, about 11 000 strong, to vanquish and destroy President Pétion's forces,[46] in an attempt to restore order at the behest of the French Emperor; the different attacks he led against the city were always vigorously repelled and he lost a good many men in the process; he made an attempt against Fort George that cost him 800 of his best men.

His soldiers desert when they have the chance, but the numbers would be even greater if they didn't fear for their families lives, as this cruel nigger has the commendable custom of having a deserter's family slaughtered.

[46] Not sure that "forces" is the correct translation, as it was originally stated "le parti du president pétion". Perhaps they mean his political party (since he is referred to as Président)

In the end, unable to succeed, he withdrew and Pétion's army, about 15 000 strong, is dying to challenge King Christophe, and everything is being prepared to carry out this sortie with a zeal that is hard to describe because it is regarded as the final one and the end of the war.

Another army, 6000 strong, led by general Borgella, commander in chief of the Southern part, has left for La-Croix-des-Bouquets, to cut off Christophe's retreat and to follow him all the way to Fort Laferrière,[47] where he buried all the treasures he inherited from the famous nigger Dessalines. It is almost certain that after the destruction of Christophe's army, and of the bandits hiding in the mountains of Jacquemel and of Jérémie, President Petion's goal is to dismiss most of his army and restore this beautiful island's crop growing operations, people openly say that he intends to recall the White colonists as long as they submit to his rules.

All of his soldiers and his people, tired of their perpetual wars have finally learned that they cannot live without Whites, and Pétion, who is a humane man who has demonstrated a sincere attachment to that skin color since his administration began, has insinuated and encouraged this notion amongst all the peoples under his command, and is pleased to see that the misery stemming from unremitting troubles has finally forced everyone to open their eyes and clamor for the recall of the Whites, saying that they'll do everything they can and spare no expense to enable their return, which they will soon carry out.

[47] Citadelle Laferrière

The President is friend to all the Whites who side with him and he consults them in all things and is always on their side. He often tells them: “Take heart, before long everything will go your way”. All of Christophe’s ships surrendered, were taken or destroyed.

Well, Lolot! What do you make of this news? I bet it pains you and that my sister would hate to get a taste of Jacquemel’s bananas.

I am going to share with you an excerpt from my first two letters that you can forego reading if you’ve already received them. On September 14th, I received your letter from the 09th of February; I answered November 3rd, 1811 and March 8th, 1812.

I won’t say a word about your detention in England, rather I would like to congratulate you on your wife’s happy delivery, which taught you to feel the joy of fatherhood. Give my love to both mother and child. May he have a happy and peaceful life.

The warm welcome Boulay provided you proves that he is even better than his station gives him credit for because he has not forgotten old friends.

The news you shared of my son with Rosette made me very happy: give them my love and make sure you bring my son with you, whether you come to New York or to the colonies; he’ll be happier over here than he was in France.

I’d like to thank you for the hard work you put into trying to track down Mr. Bouland. I think that Besançon is the only place you’ll be able to find out for sure.

I was sure that my dear Bicotte would give you a warm welcome; shower her with kisses for me…

Saint-Sebastian's good vicar is still the same; there is no such thing as a revolution for the good-hearted: don't forget to say hi.

Then you've seen the family home and hugged Poirson. Hug him again. The noble, selfless and generous way in which he acted on our behalf; I am entirely grateful for.

Give my love to anyone in Dompaire who shows interest in me.

Try to come to New York with the money you got for our property and bring my son with you. As soon as you get here, we'll leave for St-Domingue, but, if you don't hurry, I might already be gone. In that case, speak to Mc Comb who sends his regards; he'll have some information for you.

Since you left, I have had two important missions: the first was to go to Montreal. First to draw a city that is being built according to plans that I drew, and then to initiate the project of a canal that should start from the St-Lawrence river and go through the aforementioned city. I also did this for a second canal, which should start at St. Jean by Lake Champlain[48] and go all the way to the St. Lawrence river near Montreal, across from the city that I drew. This work kept me busy for an entire campaign, I had a lot of fun with those lovely Canadians who are almost all French, and who lavished me with affection and made my ears bleed with their French Flemish.[49]

[48] Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu
[49] West Flemish dialect spoken in the north of contemporary France.

The second mission, a very important one, was to journey to lake Eerie, to, from there, find a way to build a canal that should go all the way to the Black River near Albany. It will, in other words, be 350 miles long. I spent nearly a year working on this great project which was well received. I think it will cost at least 10 millions gourdes.

Poor Laguerre has a very unpleasant illness: he succumbs to bouts of syphilis every new moon. I did all I could to try and heal him; all the remedies were ineffective; he is a good nigger, full of good intentions, but he cannot do much.

I don't know whether I told you in my previous letters that I could not forward your letter to Saint-Thomas: no ships go to that island, if they do, they don't announce it in newspapers, as a result your letter is still at home. I'll keep abreast of any developments.

I did not receive the 800 gourdes I was to receive from you;

Business is quite bad here. We are expecting war to be declared with England. The Congress is assembled. It is holding secret sessions. This country will know its fate in two to three days. In the meantime, an army of 25 000 line troops is encamped and ready to march; another army of 100 000 well outfitted citizens, disciplined and mustered, is ready to leave for all the different points of attack and defence. Canada is the first object of conquest.

I am learning at this very moment that three couriers just arrived from Washington City to announce that Congress has declared war on England.

As a result, the wife of General Moreau who took it upon herself to deliver this letter and who is leaving for France, instead of setting sail on the 25th of this month, is boarding a ship this evening, it sails tomorrow morning. The parliament member who is going to Bordeaux will stay there for a while and you can write me something and give it to him when he returns.

Goodbye. With all my love.

Mangin.

My children and Rosetty, send their regards and love to both you and my sister.

Letter dated October 12th, 1814 (New York)

Third letter from Joseph François, more than two years after the last one. He still hopes to meet his brother in New York, and then to go to St-Domingue as soon as the opportunity arises.

He shares news regarding:

- *His circumstances "stuck in the middle",*
- *Of his three children (with Thérèse Bouland), including the eldest Charles, who became a sailor when he was 15 years old and has been missing for three years;*
- *Of his new marriage with Rosetty and their five children.*

New York, October 12th , 1814

My dear brothers Poirson and Lolot

The following is for both of you. I won't leave out my beloved Bicotte whom I wish I could hug and who is so often in my thoughts.

I believe, my dear friends, that you wrote me on more than one occasion. I have, however, only received, my dear Lolot, the letter dated the 25th of October 1810 which I answered, and another dated Huningue January 12th 1812, to which I responded in duplicate, not to mention the two other letters I wrote to you since. I hope you received at least one of them.

For the fifth time, I thank you for everything you undertook at St. Cloud with regards to Mr. Bouland.

I did not receive the letter you wrote on the 9th of February in which you go into our affairs in a bit more detail, neither did I receive the one dated 13th of August that announces your nomination as

the sergeant major of the Engineering Corps in Huningue. I was also unlucky with the 8th of July one of the same year, in which you repeat what you told me in the previous ones.

Whatever the case may be, in this last one, the one I'm now answering, and which repeats the content of the previous ones, you announce your wife's happy delivery which was good news to me.

Also, I was happy to hear of the warm welcome that our old friend Boulay gave you and of the interest he appeared to take in me, and of how you kindly mentioned my skills, in order to try to obtain on my behalf a job that would ensure my return to France.

The good parish priest of Vandoeuvre is no longer amongst us; may he nevertheless still hear my feelings of esteem, tenderness and gratitude.

My dear Poirson. I have given you thanks on more than one occasion. I thank you and will thank you all my life for the generous and august manner in which you acted as far as our inheritance is concerned; I would have been happy to have told Mr. Noël as much.

I can't say anything, dear Lolot, as far as your acting on my behalf with regards to my interests. Everything you've done is fine, very fine indeed. You really can't do better. I carefully read the unjust and despotic decree dated the 26th of august, 1811.[50] As a result, I followed your advice, and I sent you, in duplicate, the item you thought necessary for saving my little inheritance from disaster.

[50] This decree allowed members of nobility in annexed territories to solicit titles of nobility.

I also sent another item that regards you, it's of little use to you, but I wanted to make you happy. I hope you received them.

I immediately sent your letter to the Philadelphia merchant Mr. Guebion. I received neither news nor money from Misses [(?)] Thurel of St-Thomas.

Keep your word, my dear Lolot; my friend, keep your word, leave and come to America with your family. Come to a country that is happy, despite its war with the English, which barely registers for us. We beat them everywhere we go; our soldiers and sailors show bravery that astonishes our enemies. They are powerless against us and will be on the losing side of the argument.

But you, you my friends, what a bewildering revolution[51] you've experienced! Will our nephews even believe it? I won't comment upon it. The discussion would be long and useless. You'll likely be happier under the present regime than you were under the former one. At the very least you can't be worse off, and I hope that we'll finally be able to return to St. Domingue.

I am still, my friends stuck in the middle, which is to say, neither rich nor poor; however, I have work. I am employed by the government for military affairs which have been keeping me busy for two years now. I'm almost done and I don't know what I'll do next.

[51] A coalition of European powers defeated Napoleon and restored the monarchy to the brother of Louis XVI.

My three boys have different jobs. The eldest, Charles, chose to become a sailor; he's traveled to England, Spain and Portugal. About three years ago, he left on another trip: I haven't heard from him since, and could not find him no matter how hard I searched.

The second Zozot (because, my dear Poirson, I called him thus out of love for your elder who was so very much like my Bicotte) has chosen to be a carpenter by trade. He is very energetic, active, laborious and clever; he is doing very well and I believe, will one day make a fortune.

The third, Frédéric is a tinsmith: it happens to be an excellent trade in this country.

You are doubtlessly surprised, dear Poirson, that I chose for them to learn trades rather than encourage them to aspire to professions that are deemed honorable in France. Lolot will tell you, as will I, that in America all professions are equally honorable, and the only thing that can lead to one being addressed as "Sir" is wealth, no matter the honest manner in which it has been attained, and because we are truly free, we have the good sense to look at a man as man, regardless of his profession.

Rosetty, my dear Lolot, remembers you fondly. She asks for me to extend her regards to both you and your wife. She deserves your consideration. She is a woman whose conduct and tenderness for her children, her economy, and her diligence in providing all the comforts of a loving home has earned her the love and respect of all honest folk. It's too bad she's a little prolific, she gave me four boys and one girl.

Write me, my dear friends. I cannot tell you the best way for you to get your letters to me. However, there are American agents in Paris; they are probably your best bet.

I repeat, my dear Lolot, bring your family to this tranquil country, while we wait for it to be possible for us to be able to return to our beloved St-Domingue where we will spend the rest of our days amongst our gathered children.

And you, my dear Bicotte, I'm afraid I'll never see you again. No matter, we will always love one another, whether we are near or far. Our hearts will always be one and I will always think of you.

Goodbye dear Bicotte, goodbye dear friends, nephews and nieces. I hug you all very tightly and will always be the best of friends.

J. Fs. Mangin

Letter dated May 08th , 1815 (New York)
From Joseph François Mangin to his brother and to Poirson

To Mister Poirson, Advisor to the Appeals Court
Department of la Meurthe in Nancy.

New York, May 08th 1815

Dear Poirson and Lolot,

I seize every good opportunity to write you, and every time I complain that I'm not getting any news in return. Not that it has helped, since both of you have kept incredibly quiet. I just can't bring myself to believe that you've completely forgotten me, and that the war between America and England has robbed you of the means to send me news.

At least that's what I tell myself, but this idea, or spell, that dazzled my eyes, can no longer exist: we have been at peace long enough for you to have written twenty times over; boats from Bordeaux arrive all the time, loaded with wine, spirits and news, but never any mail for poor Mangin: he runs to the post office in vain, he always returns empty handed. I know letters get lost sometimes, and there are captains that dally, but if one uses multiple channels, it's quite seldom that some do not make it.

As a matter of fact, you have the administrative route; you have enough friends in Paris that could forward your letters; I have pointed this avenue out to you on more than one occasion but to little avail. Anyway, may god's will be done, you'll be most welcome the day you decide to speak up.
In the one-and-only letter I received from you, my dear Lolot, you impressed upon me that France watches out for its colonies, and that you hope that we'll be able to soon return to St-Domingue, and the thing that pleased me most, [(that)] you would come to New York and take us all to that

country. This news filled me with joy. I answered you as soon as I could and called upon you to keep your word. But so much time has passed, your promise remains unfulfilled and even more time will pass to be sure!

We have learned of Napoleon's miraculous undertaking and of his recovery of France's throne. The hasty and unexpected return of this great man has astonished the Americans. The English are dumbstruck: they want to try to put a spin on this incredible endeavor. They come up with ludicrous explanations. They look like they're smiling, but they're frowning, Republicans on the other hand are jumping with joy, and are making all the newspaper presses moan with reports detailing the circumstances of this great event.

I have nothing else to share, dear brothers, concerning the state of my affairs in France. I know they are in good hands. But why can't I, at the very least, reap some small benefit from them?

My circumstances in this country haven't really changed, still stuck in the middle, in other words busy enough to stagnate or live, but never enough to save money. But I'm getting old; it's about time I struck it rich, a very difficult thing in this country, damn near impossible.

I could very well follow the example of many other French people and travel to Havana; I have every reason to believe that I could make some money there, the Spanish have been quite busy restoring this colony. If I ever end up, dear Lolo, taking that route and you come to America, please speak to our friend Mc Comb, he will have the information you will need to find me.

My eldest son has not returned yet. I don't know what to make of him. The two others are very well behaved, they are making their way, earning money, and can get on without me; they send all of you their love.

I am more and more pleased with my Rosetty, her conducte toward me and my childrens deserve my love to her; she have five little ones four Boys and one Girl, all handsomes: She charge me of her [(?)] [(to)] *you, your Lady and Children if you have any, and rejoice* [(?)] *to see all of you.*[52]

Break your silence, my dear brothers, and send more news. And you, Lolot, where are you?

The name of the man in charge of my letter is Mister Tai [(?)]. He is a very wealthy American who is going to France because of an illness and wishes to travel around our beautiful country; he might come see you. If that's the case, I recommend you do not receive him well.[53]

I send you all my love, your women, your children, Titine's children. I am, and always will be, your loving brother.

J.F. Mangin.

My address is:
New York, n° 5 Broome Street.

[52] The decision to italicize here is to highlight the foreign nature of the speech. My assumption is that Joseph François wrote this part in English because he wanted Rosetty (his American wife) to be able to understand what he was writing.
[53] This sentence has been translated as it was written: "*Je vous recommande pas de bien le recevoir"*.

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