

Chapter Title: “You Are a Poisoner”: Planter Linguistics in Baudry des Lozière’s
“Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo”

Book Title: Encyclopédie noire

Book Subtitle: The Making of Moreau de Saint-Méry's Intellectual World

Book Author(s): SARA E. JOHNSON

Published by: University of North Carolina Press, Omohundro Institute of Early American
History and Culture. (2023)

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469676937__johnson.11

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of North Carolina Press, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Encyclopédie noire*

CHAPTER SIX

“You Are a Poisoner”

Planter Linguistics in Baudry des Lozière’s “Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo”

P H R A S E S .

donne-moi ton bras. toalam mioko.
tu es une bête. gnéi ioba.
balaye la chambre. kombazo.
fils de femme dé- kounou goua kou.
bauchée.

FIGURE 44. Excerpt from “Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo,” in [Louis Narcisse] Baudry des Lozières, *Second voyage à la Louisiane, faisant suite au premier de l’auteur de 1794 à 1798* . . . , 2 vols. (Paris, 1803), II, 115.

“Give me your arm.” “You are a beast.” “Sweep the room.” “Son of a debauched woman.” These are English translations of four phrases that appeared in succession in a “Congo” language learning tool published in 1803 by Louis Narcisse Baudry des Lozières (Figure 44). A planter, amateur linguist, and Moreau’s brother-in-law, Baudry included many such incongruous terms and phrases in his “Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo,” a project he imagined as a useful guide for American colonists. Taken out of context, “give me your arm” (*donne-moi ton bras/toalam mioko*) is an innocuous request, perhaps an offer of assistance. The next line, “you are a beast” (*tu es une bête/gnéi ioba*), is less subtle in its implied insult, and the pronoun *tu* suggests familiarity. The command to “sweep the room” (*balaye la chambre/kombazo*) has an authoritative, even confrontational tone when read after the previous entry. The final phrase, “son of a debauched woman” (*fils de femme débauchée/kounou goua kou*), is inexplicable. Who is being addressed, and why would such an expression appear in a phrase book? Other examples are more disturbing and graphic. The progression of the phrases in this small excerpt has a metaphoric quality that stands in for the whole. It

underlies the process of colonization from the perspective of the colonizer—"give me your arm," "come with me," "under my tutelage you shall learn about civilization." When seen as an analogy of the colonial process, the excerpt relates an overture of friendship belied by the forced labor and abuse that is to come.¹

This chapter draws on Baudry's work to continue the discussion of how the study of language and print culture exposes the quotidian violence and sexual coercion structuring Moreau and Baudry's world. My focus is the mobilization of the Kongo family of languages across the French colonial empire during the Age of Revolutions, and I make a threefold argument. First, Baudry's "Vocabulaire" provides a critical reminder of the need to more systematically consider African languages as American ones. The "Congo" Baudry documented is Kikongo, an important Bantu cluster language in West Central Africa. At a decisive historical juncture, it was a key vector of communication for those who participated in the Haitian Revolution. People from West Central Africa, a region that stretched from the Loango Coast south to Luanda, formed a substantial percentage of the African-born population in Saint-Domingue and North America, especially in South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana. John Thornton, whose scholarship has done much to document the importance of Central African culture in the Americas, particularly African political formation in the Haitian Revolution, notes, "Slaves from this region made up the majority of those imported into Saint-Domingue for the last twenty years before the Revolution. . . . They were common enough among the rebels that Congo became a generic term for the rank and file of the slave insurgents." By setting Baudry's expertise alongside expanding scholarship on the "Kongolese Atlantic," I wish to restore our sense of Kikongo as one of the *lingua francas* of Saint-Domingue.²

Second, the "Vocabulaire" was undertaken as a project to maximize labor extraction and to create a psychological instrument of abuse, even as it purported "to soften" (*adoucir*) the lives of the enslaved people it addressed. Words project power, and the study of languages in the extended Americas was frequently occasioned by the desire to conquer land, people, and consciousness. The terms of the "Vocabulaire" and the paratext surrounding them highlight the fantastical self-fashioning of the planters who violently exploited men, women, and children yet envisaged themselves as benefactors and enlightened owners. A close reading affords a glimpse of the intimacy of person-to-person contact in colonial zones, particularly its sexual dimensions. My purpose is to imagine the printed words on the page as utterances within a sociohistorical context. This entails exploring the motivations and scholarship (social interactions and source material) of those attempting to speak and codify the world of Kikongo that surrounded them. It

also requires informed speculation to include the perspective of those who heard some approximation of Kikongo shouted at them in anger or whispered to them in the slave quarters by those to whom the language did not belong.

Third, the turn toward supranational concerns in the study of the early Americas—be it vast, comparative American, or transatlantic—marks a *retour* to how many scholars of the period assessed their own worlds. Foreign-language study—including concerns with mutual intelligibility, control over others, and the possibility of transcribing oral speech so that it could be used in both scholarly environments and tense on-the-ground situations—was a fundamental method by which late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century American scholars engaged their global business concerns and extended household networks. Indeed, restoring an analytic framework marked by transcolonial itineraries, linguistic interactions, and contingent politics more aptly reflects the world as it was experienced by those living, conducting their research, and disseminating their findings in the time before the nation-state became geopolitically dominant.³ In the Caribbean, such a perspective was turned at once locally and outward, be it in transatlantic, African diasporic, or hemispheric and archipelagic directions. Baudry’s “Vocabulaire” documents an assertion of power that extended its hopeful reach from West Africa to large swathes of North America to the *plaines* and *mornes* of Saint-Domingue.

Although the “Vocabulaire Congo” provides a window into what was most of interest to colonists, it also provides modern-day readers with filtered access into the parallel yet divergent worlds that the enslaved inhabited and how they might have interacted with their masters. An analysis of the text and the ideas it contains reveals a communal biographical approach that centers other people in the Baudry and Moreau households. These people were key interlocutors, informants without whom the “Vocabulaire” could not have existed. It is critical to understand that the Kikongo language in Saint-Domingue was shaped by a dialectical process in which the term Congo increasingly became synonymous with the most determined and efficacious resistance on the part of the enslaved. Put simply, Baudry’s “Vocabulaire” offers an implicit recognition that a principal language of communication was also a local threat that eluded planter control. At the time of its publication, during the massive Napoleonic expedition sent to restore control over the French Caribbean colonies, the “Vocabulaire” exemplified the hope of transforming a tool of revolutionary exchange back into one of attempted domination. As an invaluable literary artifact of this moment, the “Vocabulaire” illustrates what it means to speak of language as a weapon of war. The combatants are revealed in an archive of words.

No Slaves, No Colonies: That Is an Incontestable Fact for Those Familiar with Colonial Matters

Baudry des Lozières (Figure 45), the author of this "Vocabulaire Congo" and the inscriber of the heading above, is not as well known outside French Atlantic historiography as Moreau. Whereas Moreau was a French creole, Baudry was born in France. He claimed, however, to speak with authority about the colonies because of his "stay of twenty-five years" (*séjour de vingt-cinq ans*). The two met while practicing law in Cap Français, and they married two sisters. They spent long periods of their adult lives in each other's company, and Baudry described them as "linked by blood and by friendship, for close to thirty years" (*liés par le sang et par l'amitié, depuis près de trente ans*). Baudry acted as Moreau's power of attorney for transactions ranging from manumissions of the enslaved to inquiries about his book publications; he was the one who handled the manumission of Angélique, Moreau's wet nurse, and her children. They were active Masons and shared intellectual pursuits: Baudry hoped to write an *Encyclopédie coloniale*, and Moreau researched and published excerpts of his colonial encyclopedia. Both helped establish the Cercle des Philadelphes in Saint-Domingue, an important scientific and cultural society in the early Americas. Over the course of these decades, they lived abroad together as they fled the French and Haitian Revolutions and eventually took government jobs under Napoleon. Baudry in fact succeeded Moreau as historiographer of the French Ministry of the Navy and Colonies when the latter assumed his diplomatic post in northern Italy.⁴

Like Moreau, Baudry has a reputation as a strident ideologue of white racial superiority. He is best known for his invective against "*nigrophiles*." I translate the term as "n— lovers," rather than "lovers of Black people," since the pejorative, hate-filled sense of the former more closely coincides with how he invoked the word. Dedicated to "all of the honest colonists, victims of the revolution of the n[—] lovers" (*tous les Colons honnêtes, victimes de la révolution des Nigrophiles*), the "Vocabulaire" positioned itself as a proslavery tract. Much like his book *Les égaremens du nigrophilisme* (1802), it justified the transatlantic African slave trade as both a "civilizing" mission and a necessity for colonial agriculture. Advancing the belief that merchants and planters were "liberators" (*libérateurs*) of the people they purchased, he suggested French enslavement of Africans saved those who would "perish from hunger" (*périraient de faim*) and from the dangers of bad governance among so-called brutes and barbarians. His self-serving sophistry led him to assert that slavery as practiced in the colonies was only slavery "in name" (*que par le nom*), not as "odious" (*odieux*) as fanatical philosophes exaggerated it to be. In fact, echoing Moreau's contentions about slavery

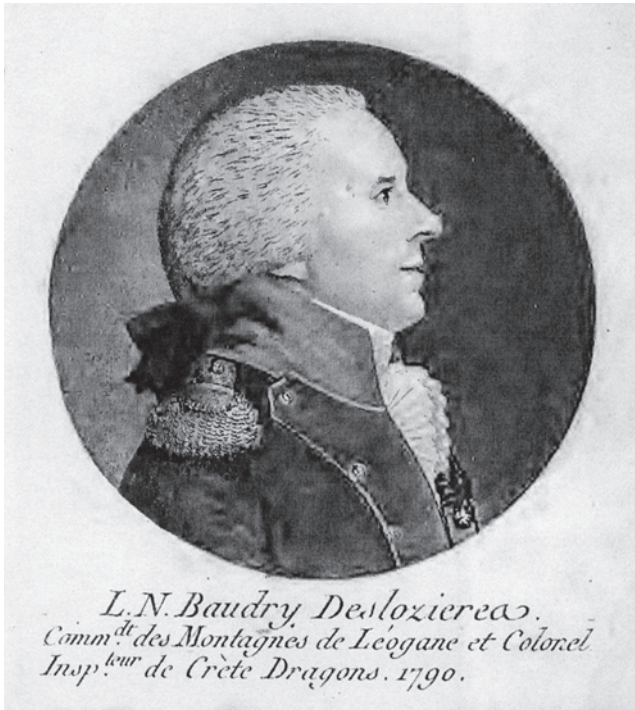


FIGURE 45. Portrait of Louis Narcisse Baudry des Lozières. 1790. Frontispiece from G[abriel] C[hastenet-]d’Esterre, *Précis historique sur le régiment de Crête, dragons; suivi d’une notice sur la vie militaire, politique et privée de M. Baudry-Deslozières, colonel-inspecteur dudit régiment*, 3d ed. ([Paris?], 1804). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.

in *Mémoire justificatif* and *Considérations présentes aux vrais amis du repos et du bonheur de la France; à l’occasion des nouveaux mouvemens de quelques soi-disant Amis-des-noirs*, Baudry gave metropolitan actors and their allegedly ill-formed, abstract policies more acerbic attention and causal responsibility for the Haitian Revolution than he afforded the enslaved and free people of color themselves. He boldly claimed that planters loved Black people since they knew how to pursue their desire to improve the lives of their laborers without risking the public interest. This seeming contradiction—a policy of enslaving people as a way of caring for them—underscores the structure of sentiment he created to undergird his proslavery propaganda.⁵

Baudry’s material motivations underpinning his claims are discernable. In addition to practicing law in Saint-Domingue, he was a landowner who had

firsthand knowledge of forced labor practices on his coffee plantation in the mountains outside Léogâne. A 1789 letter that his wife wrote to Moreau demonstrates the Baudry family's reliance on slavery for economic profit. She bemoaned the fact that they did not own more people because a bigger labor pool would have yielded a larger harvest. With seeming resignation, however, she noted, "But I have new Blacks, who need a lot of care, and as a consequence, I go very slowly. You know that the first law of a settler is to take care of his property, and I assure you that the Blacks are very happy with my presence" (mais j'ai des Nègres nouveaux, qui ont besoin de beaucoup de ménagement, et en conséquence je vais bien doucement. Vous savez que la première loi d'un Habitant est de ménager son mobilier, et je vous assure que les Nègres sont bien contents [*sic*] de ma présence). One must wonder how "happy" Madame Baudry's enslaved workers were about her purportedly benign oversight of their lives. Her comments are a reminder that a genocidal regime of labor extraction made Saint-Domingue a major coffee producer as well as "Europe's most profitable colony and the world's largest producer of sugar" at the end of the eighteenth century.⁶

In his scattered recollections of events of the Haitian Revolution, Baudry lamented that his subsequent oeuvre was colored by "melancholy" (*mélancolie*). This was due to the memory of losing "all of his fortune in a day" (*la perte qu'il fit en un seul jour de sa fortune*), the lingering physical injuries inflicted by insurgent enslaved people and lower-class whites (*petits blancs*), and his being forced to live in exile with his family in "frightful misery" (*la misère affreuse*). The tone of his work is more hostile and delusional than melancholic, and a barely contained bile outweighs the feigned bonhomie of the kind, paternalistic planter he hoped to portray. This range of affective stances brings into focus the artifice and fictionality of narratives written by the planter elite across the Americas: they vacillated from implying that all their enslaved adored them to categorically stating that all Black people were inherently dangerous enemies and inferior beings who deserved to be enslaved.⁷

Baudry spent four years of this "frightful misery" in Philadelphia, living with the Moreaus and later in a cottage in Germantown. He was a regular visitor to Moreau's bookstore, probably consulting many of the texts he used as source material for his work and trading notes about his own research with other exiled colonists. Members of these circles tended to read their work aloud to one another, creating an atmosphere of nostalgic reverie that indulged their intellectual pretensions. Baudry's career, and by extension those of other exiled Caribbean planters in the early North American republic, is important for centering race, language, and colonialism in discussions of Philadelphia's print culture community. In part because Baudry's unspecified business interests produced "only a



FIGURE 46. *Louisiane et pays voisins, d’après les relations et les cartes les plus récentes*. This map demonstrates the combined size of the upper and lower Louisiana colony and includes Indigenous nations. Frontispiece from [Louis Narcisse] Baudry des Lozières, *Second voyage à la Louisiane, faisant suite au premier de l’auteur de 1794 à 1798 . . .*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1803), I. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.

trifling profit,” Moreau purchased return tickets to France for both families in 1798, when they became *personae non gratae* in the United States following the Alien and Sedition Acts.⁸

“Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo” appeared as an appendix to Baudry’s *Second voyage à la Louisiane* (1803), which was a follow-up to the account of his first trip. Both texts were poorly organized anecdotal narratives of eighteenth-century political and natural history in Louisiana (the lower territories of *la Nouvelle France*, which stretched from the Ohio Valley through Saint Louis, Mobile, and New Orleans) and Saint-Domingue. Figure 46 is a reproduction of the map Baudry included in his work on Louisiana and shows the immense territory claimed by the French in North America. Discussion of the imbrication of Louisiana and Saint-Domingue within the nostalgic context of a lost but recoverable empire reflected Baudry’s and other exiled planters’ optimism that the Napoleonic expedition would return their American properties (both land and the enslaved) to French control. Many scholars have debated whether a military

victory in Saint-Domingue would have been followed by an increased French presence in the Lower Mississippi, as opposed to what resulted: the selling of remaining French lands to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Baudry's "Vocabulaire Congo" was meant to be used, and its inclusion in a volume about Louisiana suggests that he expected this crash course in Kikongo to be of practical importance both in the Caribbean and on the North American mainland.⁹

The seventy-four-page "Vocabulaire Congo" contains a list of more than 650 words and 120 phrases that provide French-to-"Congo" translations. The project was compiled in the last decade of the eighteenth century, when the study of linguistics and philology was popular in France and gaining steam in the new United States among scholars such as Thomas Jefferson and Peter S. Du Ponceau. Unlike earlier missionary linguistic undertakings, Baudry's text was a very secular project, not evangelical in purpose. Nor was it a treatise interested in detailed theories of the origins, hierarchies, or relationships among language groups.¹⁰ Although it contained a long description of the slave trade in the Central African coastal communities of Ambriz, Cabinda, and Loango, it was not an ethnographic project that used language to study Kongo communities in the Americas and speculate about a Kongolese worldview. Rather, it was a project motivated by a desire to be "useful," whose core defining principle was maximizing trade profit and labor extraction in direct-encounter situations.

Baudry envisioned this publication as a guidebook for planters, especially those new to the Americas. Ironically, the same revolution that Baudry repeatedly reviled became a potential selling point for the book, as he suggested that the large number of planter deaths would occasion the arrival of inexperienced people needing language training. Similar to a modern-day Berlitz language and phrase book, this guide would ideally give planters a means of communicating with the enslaved in their language. Baudry fancied that, by having this capability, a planter would be able to form a bond of trust with his labor force:

The majority [of planters] buy Blacks, and they do not know their language. . . . Being a planter myself, I understood the utility of this type of science and dedicated myself to it during my moments of leisure. I tried to learn only enough to understand my newly arrived slaves [*bossals*] and to make myself understood. Nothing is sadder than the Black person taken on board. . . . Accustomed to dealing only with cruel people in his own country, he arrives in a country he does not know, among men whom he naturally compares to the executioners and cannibals of his country of birth. . . . But knowing how to talk to him, you cheer him up, you inspire him with confidence. His

hope born, you allay the memory of his hut, of his sad family, and soon he will see you as nothing but a man superior to him, a benefactor who tears him away from death, misery, and the degradation of man.

La plupart [des planteurs] achètent des nègres, et ils n'en connaissent pas le langage. . . . Étant planteur moi-même, j'ai senti l'utilité de cette espèce de science, et dans mes momens de loisir je m'y suis livré. Je n'ai cherché qu'à en savoir assez pour entendre mes esclaves *bossals* et en être entendu. Rien n'est plus triste que le nègre pris à bord. . . . Accoutumé dans sa patrie à n'avoir affaire qu'à des hommes cruels, il arrive dans un pays qu'il ne connaît pas, parmi des hommes qu'il compare naturellement aux bourreaux et aux anthropophages de son pays natal . . . mais sachez lui parler, vous l'égayez, vous lui inspirez de la confiance. Son espérance naît, vous lui adoucissez le souvenir de sa cahute, de sa triste famille, et bientôt il ne voit plus en vous qu'un homme supérieur à lui, qu'un bienfaiteur qui l'arrache à la mort, à la misère et à la dégradation d'homme.

There was no intentional irony in Baudry's claims. Again, his assertions exemplify how he imagined a world in which he had saved Africans from the dangers of their native land. The horrors of the Middle Passage and forced labor in the colonies allegedly did not compare to the misery they would have suffered on the African continent.¹¹

Most crucially, Baudry posited language as playing an essential role in the acclimation, or “seasoning,” process. He believed that competence in an African language among the master class could be a soothing, friendly gesture of goodwill, a skill worth acquiring for very practical reasons. Observing that “these unhappy slaves often perish soon after their arrival because they cannot make themselves understood” (Ces malheureux esclaves périssent souvent peu de temps après leur arrivée, parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas se faire comprendre), Baudry hoped that this guide would improve their chances of survival, a presumed benefit for both the enslaved and their owners. Baudry noted that his work would “also be very useful to doctors and surgeons who can only treat newly arrived Africans poorly if they are not able to ask them questions” (est encore d'une grande utilité pour les médecins, pour les chirurgiens que ne peuvent que traiter mal les nègres nouveaux, s'ils ne sont pas en état de leur faire des questions). Many of the phrases were included with this audience in mind. Terms such as “dysentery” (*dysenterie* / *minga*) and phrases such as “is your stomach okay?” (*ton estomach est-il bon?* / *miévésé ptima tiak ou?*) and “do you have a hernia?” (*as-tu une hernie?* / *guëié madongou bakzi?*) are easy to take at face value in the context of poor living and working conditions. Others, such as “are you blind?” (*es-tu*

aveugle? / guéie m'pofò?) and "do your ears hurt / are you hard of hearing?" (*as-tu mal aux oreilles? / béla koutou?*), also carry insulting connotations in the context of forced labor and possible resistance to it.¹²

Baudry's endeavor to "understand" the enslaved was no doubt also motivated by a desire to recognize potential sedition and to rupture the secrecy afforded to the enslaved by their knowledge of a language outside their masters' purview. A planter's ability to understand and "listen in" on the Kongolesse enemy was a valuable skill, both in everyday conflicts between members of a slave society and during "official" war. If we remember these two social groups as locked in combat rather than coexisting peacefully, we understand that acquiring some level of proficiency in an enemy's tongue had varied strategic uses. Baudry's text embodies the tensions that would have been seething just below the surface in Saint-Domingue during the last decades of the eighteenth century; speakers used Kikongo for a range of purposes, often in opposition to one another.

Baudry understood the practical applications of learning African languages, and he maintained that this linguistic work was part of a much longer research project. He informed readers that he had "united [all the jargons of Africa] with exactitude after ten years of hard work" (*avais réunis [tous les jargons de l'Afrique] avec assez d'exactitude, et après dix ans d'un travail assidu*). It is unclear if "jargons" referred to languages from multiple regions—say, Kikongo and Wolof—or if he was referring to the multiple Bantu languages that would have been spoken by people from West Central Africa—Kikongo, Kimbundu, Kituba, and the coastal variant of Kikongo known as Kisolongu. He lamented that events of the Haitian Revolution, however, left him with only "some notes on the language of the Kongos" (*quelques notes sur le langage des Congos*), a far cry from the encyclopedic "twenty-four- or twenty-five-volume work" he was hoping to publish on the colonies. In addition to on-the-ground practical uses, this kind of linguistic "science" production was integral to accruing social and intellectual capital. Baudry reaped the benefits of his human chattels' physical labor and their intellectual knowledge. For example, familiarity with colonial customs afforded job opportunities and membership invitations to the various learned societies and academies that Baudry and Moreau held dear, from the *Cercle des Philadelphes* in Cap Français to the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia to French salons. Baudry's "Congo dictionary" seems to have been particularly impressive to the *Académie de Marseille*, which counted him as a member owing in part to this publication.¹³

Within the context of Baudry's study of African languages, the aforementioned demographics in Saint-Domingue are indispensable to understanding his investment in such a project. James E. McClellan III notes that "ninety-nine slave

ships arrived in Saint-Domingue in 1789 alone, and crammed into their [holds] breathed 27,000 slaves." He cites sources that number the total enslaved population between 500,000 and 700,000. When we remember that, in the three decades before the publication of Baudry's text (1770–1799), 232,530 people were estimated to have been boarded by French merchants specifically from Central Africa, it is clear that knowledge of Kikongo would have been enormously helpful for those buying and selling their fellow human beings both along the African coast and in the Americas. In her work on the Haitian Revolution, Carolyn E. Fick asserts, "The Congolese were certainly among the most numerous of the ethnic groupings composing the African-born slave population, and although reputedly well-adjusted to slavery, they constituted the predominant nation among the maroons." Moreau himself, the source for much subsequent scholarship on the Kongolese, extolled their physical attractiveness, virtues in the arts, and good qualities as workers, concluding that they had "a sweetness and gaiety that makes them sought after" (*d'une douceur et d'une gaieté qui les fait rechercher*). Kongolese women in particular were "sought after" for sexual reasons. Moreau blithely blamed these women for white male desire, stating, "In a country where the values are not of exemplary purity, Congolese women's penchant for libertinage has increased ours for them" (*dans un pays où les moeurs n'ont pas une pureté exemplaire, le penchant des négresses Congos pour le libertinage a-t-il augmenté celui qu'on a pour elles*). Language study was a vehicle of sexual aggression then as it functions as a window into that aggression now. Concluding with comments that only call attention to the false portrait of the carefree, happy enslaved that he had just painted, Moreau said, "One could reproach them for being a little inclined to flight" (*On peut leur reprocher d'être un peu enclins à la fuite*).¹⁴

An increasing amount of scholarship is dedicated to the "Kongolese Atlantic," in which places such as Saint-Domingue, Brazil, Cuba, and the South Carolina–Georgia Lowcountry form crucial nodes of connection. The presence of words from Bantu languages in religious rituals and medicinal practices (Vodou, Palo Mayombe) is one way that scholars trace the continued importance of Central African cultures in the Americas. As one of the most creative and indispensable of human inventions, language gives form to social interactions. Its study elucidates these relations and is crucial to understanding how people of different backgrounds negotiate their contact with one another. A study of the vocabulary of the enslaved, both for Baudry's generation and in the present, is thus an important view into multiple markers of belonging in the Atlantic world, from social relationships involving labor to spiritual practices showing how people interacted with their natural environments, ancestors, and gods.¹⁵

Conversations with scholars of the Bantu language region and my own

comparison of Baudry's text with other French-Kongo dictionaries from the period show enough correspondence to confirm that Baudry did in fact record actual Kikongo words. Christina Frances Mobley's study of Bantu words used in eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue concludes that Baudry's dictionary uses "western varieties" of Kikongo. The terms in the "Vocabulaire" were not invented. Baudry claimed to have interviewed native speakers, and he probably had access to written documents as well. Equally important is the actual use of these terms in day-to-day personal conversations. How syntactically correct were the phrases when it came to the conjugation of verbs or appropriate word order? How would they have sounded to the people being addressed? Did his transcriptions account for intonation? Although many of the terms might have been accurate, the linguistic value of Baudry's combination of them into "usable" phrases is more difficult to gauge.¹⁶

Issues of accuracy and usability in Baudry's "Vocabulaire" are intriguing. Its very existence also pushes us to think more imaginatively, both about how language was used then and about how we classify and interpret its use now. Although official written documents may give the impression that Saint-Domingue was largely French speaking, the reality was far different. By the late eighteenth century, more than two-thirds of the population was African-born, and many of its residents were not conversant in French. What do we learn if we think about the majority of the colony as non-French-speaking? Other languages predominated in quotidian life, including a variety of Bantu-family languages, various West African idioms, and Haitian Kreyòl. The creation and perceived demand for a text like Baudry's illustrates the limits of European languages for fully telling the stories of these sites. Given the demographic statistics mentioned above, it is implausible to think of Haitian Kreyòl and French as the sole, even the predominant, languages in Saint-Domingue just before the revolution. A more expansive approach is needed to account for the vast linguistic diversity of the early American geographies we tend to study as mono- or bilingual. An approach that includes the perspectives of those who spoke these languages is likewise essential.¹⁷

A firsthand example makes this point eloquently. In correspondence between the French republican commissioners and two former leaders of the Haitian Revolution's early years, Jean-François Papillon and Georges Biassou, the latter two complained that they could not control some of their fellow insurgents, "a multitude of *nègres* of the coast [of Africa] who for the most part can scarcely make out two words of French but who above all were accustomed to fighting [à guerroyer] in their country." Jean-François and Biassou might have been referring to Kongolese rebels, and their non-mastery of French clearly had no effect on

their desire or ability to fight. In fact, if we refer to the latter stages of the Haitian Revolution, when the leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines warned his troops in 1804 against becoming victims of the "artful eloquence of the proclamations of their [the French army's] agents," then scarcely making out "two words of French" could provide a distinct advantage to combatants tempted to believe in the false promises emerging from the French state.¹⁸

Jean-François and Biassou understood the French language's limitations. Baudry did, as well. Navigating the many idioms on the island, they recognized the need to expand their linguistic horizons in the quest for power over those whose labor they hoped to command. In the late eighteenth century, then, at the pinnacle of French control, we see an open acknowledgment of the importance of multiple languages and global geopolitical contexts to an understanding of local conditions. We might productively ask: At what point and why did we lose sight of Kikongo as a Saint-Domingan and American language? In the present moment, Haitian Kreyòl studies continue to be outnumbered by the francophone and anglophone ones of the island. The study of Kikongo as a Haitian language is even less well documented. Michael A. Gomez, in his discussion of "talking half African" as part of the "transformation" of African identities in the U.S. South, provides a succinct answer to why such questions matter. He states, "Within the context of a political struggle, which is exactly what slavery was, it ceased to matter whether specific cultural forms could be maintained over increasing spans of time and space. What mattered instead was achieving a self-view in opposition to the one prescribed by power and authority."¹⁹

The Kongo language continuum was one such cultural mode of self-fashioning for the enslaved population in Saint-Domingue. Far from the American "legacy" language it has become today, Kikongo was a living, vibrant language that tens of thousands of women, men, and children thought in, dreamed in, plotted in, and used to comfort or confront each other. Although it gave way to Haitian Kreyòl or French (or English, Spanish, or Portuguese in other territories), its relative longevity in a particular location is only one pertinent research concern. As a key communication tool for those who participated in one of the modern world's most extraordinary political and social struggles, Kikongo is of paramount importance. If we think of Saint-Domingue as a predominantly non-French-speaking space, we must explore the avenues of inquiry that appear when we consider Kikongo (and by extension other African idioms) as an American language.²⁰

In a world where it was less costly to continuously import African men, women, and children to work than to ensure their survival for more than a few years, there was no foreseeable end to the need to study African languages.

Mastery might not have been the ultimate goal of this second-language learning, but the capacity to utter spontaneous phrases that were lexically and grammatically intelligible would have been vital. One way to do so was by means of the *vocabulaire*, a genre that highlights contact. In her excellent work on Native North American vocabularies, Laura J. Murray argues, “The vocabulary is a more idiosyncratic and culturally evocative linguistic genre than the dictionary or the grammar.” Suggesting, much as I do here, that it is a textual display of colonial power relations rendered linguistically, she goes on to state, “Sudden tonal switches from friendship to hostility are quite typical. . . . Vocabularies tend to present speakers who trust neither their interlocutors, their interlocutors’ language, nor their own grasp of their interlocutors’ language.” These comments ring true for Baudry’s text, as well. A seemingly kind question such as “do you have an appetite?” (*as-tu de l’appétit? / guéie bakzi zala?*) was quickly followed by the slurs “son of a debauched woman” (*fil de femme débauchée / kounou goua kou*) and “my, aren’t you ugly!” (*que tu es laid! / guëié manbéne m’bi!*). That the phrase book section of the text provided such colorful language and insults, however, suggests free rein of the imagination—whether or not the students of Kikongo were comfortable with their grasp of the language, their relative lack of fluency did not prevent them from finding the proper epithets to hurl at their newly acquired “property.” Though Baudry called this text both a *vocabulaire* and a *dictionnaire*, it was really the former, given that there were no accompanying definitions of the included words. Definitions would have provided ethnographic background for how people in either Saint-Domingue or Louisiana might have used these words. Many of the terms and phrases, however, are so graphic that, by imagining them as utterances, I can theorize about the context of their use.²¹

“Chagrin: Banbou i kelé andi”

—Entry under C in “Vocabulaire Congo”

Arranged in loose alphabetical order in French, each letter in the header section of the “Vocabulaire” included a list of words and then phrases using some of the corresponding terms (Figure 47). A listing for “we” (*nous / béfo*) was followed by the phrase “we are good” (*nous sommes bons / béfo miévésé*). One can imagine the surreal, even disorienting impression such a comforting assurance of goodness uttered by a planter or other slave driver must have made. “To finish” (*achever / sonpouka / salakomaka*) was followed by the expression “go finish your work” (*allez achever votre ouvrage / guëié koinda sala sonpouka*). The format, then, was designed to make terms usable and intelligible in the context of day-to-day interactions. It was not a format that encouraged grammatical and lexical

(130)

est-il là.	likoko ?
il y est.	kéléka likoko.
je suis fâché.	mang'zi.
ta mère a mis au monde un cochon.	mamakou oli outa goulonbou.
tu es empoisonneur.	guéié n'doki.

L.

L.A.	Ovo.
là-bas.	konan.
lâcher.	lazika. — bika.
laid.	m'bi.
lait.	dévouaman. — man- vouiman. — kiall. mayéné.
lance.	léonga.
langage.	binbon.
langue	loudémi. — louloumi.
languette.	kolo.
langousse. (espèce d'homar ou araignée de mer.).	kosa magnan.
largeur.	ianguil.
laver.	soukoula.
léger.	linguézé. — linga.
lever quelque chose.	nangouna. — téléma.

FIGURE 47. Words and phrases for *L* in “Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo.” From [Louis Narcisse] Baudry des Lozières, *Second voyage à la Louisiane, faisant suite au premier de l'auteur de 1794 à 1798 . . .*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1803), II, 130.

proficiency, however. That is, information was not presented in an order that built on previous information: there were no lists of pronouns, no examples of how to conjugate verbs or vary verb tenses—not even a list of consecutive numbers, one of the first things that most new language students encounter.²²

A textual analysis of a few words establishes the geopolitical context of the “Vocabulaire.” These terms set the stage for real-life interactions in the enslaved’s new environment. Baudry included entries for “my country” (*mon pays/siaménon*) and the “country of the whites” (*pays des blancs/poutou-mondélé*), as distinguished from what life might have been like in “your country” (*ton pays/sia-kou*), the “country of the Blacks” (*pays des nègres/poutou-fioté*). There were in fact several entries for “white” that distinguished the color from the man. An assortment of trade items (*merchandise*), many of them fabrics, provides a

glimpse into the local economy and its global reach—*indienne/songui pinba* was a popular cloth manufactured in Europe to imitate Indian textile printing. In the “country of the whites,” with its different social structures and expectations, labor hierarchies were documented. Entries for “master” (*maître/foumou/bakala*), “mistress” (*maîtresse/foumou kinto*), “slave” (*esclave/vika*) and “big house / plantation” (*habitation/botta*) demonstrated vital terms to understanding the plantation complex of a slaveholding society. Activities in the field found their apogee in the seemingly benign phrase “the sugar is very good” (*le sucre est bien bon/sukidi boté manbéne*). This is one of the phrases a reader can indeed imagine being used frequently in late-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue or in nineteenth-century Louisiana. Worldwide economic systems put into place over centuries, systems that occasioned massive population flows, movement of goods, and untold human grief, culminated in the ability to mouth these seemingly simple words with such complicated underpinnings. The global dimensions of American agriculture, migration, and linguistic patterns were embedded in the research that allowed Baudry to publish such a sentence.²³

Although Baudry provided relatively little ethnographic description of the Kongoleses once they disembarked in the Americas, he echoed Moreau’s comments that they “had a sweet, humane, and hospitable character” (*ont un caractère doux, humain, et hospitalier*). They allegedly “spread joy throughout the workplace with their silliness, and are among their equals, what our superficial personalities are in our societies” (*répandent la joie avec leurs folies dans les ateliers, et sont parmi leurs semblables, ce que nos esprits superficiels sont dans nos sociétés*). This amiability made them “popular for domestic needs” (*recherchés pour les besoins domestiques*). Household activities were thus well represented in Baudry’s “Vocabulaire.” The “go finish your work” entry could have applied to a litany of tasks he suggested a new planter might wish to have performed: lighting a light, attending to a child, taking someone water or a plate, wiping this or that. The presence of a noun such as “laundry” (*linge*) made perfect sense when combined with the presence of the verb “scrub” (*frotter*).²⁴

An examination of verbs, both their meaning and their grammatical presentation, is particularly instructive. Though there was an assortment of questions included as helpful phrases, the “Vocabulaire” did not have a primarily dialogic function. Rather, imperative phrases documented commands as opposed to conversations. These commands used both the formal *vous* and more personal *tu*. “Go look for my needle” (*allez chercher mon aiguille/miakou koinda vouka*), “sweep the room” (*balaye la chambre/kombazo*), and “hurry up” (*dépêche-toi/ienga nana*) are representative examples. In a guidebook for planters, the imperative mood is not surprising. What, then, should be made of the *utilité* of planters’

mastering some of the other verbs he documented, especially if we imagine them as commands? “To kneel,” “to love,” “to kiss,” “to tickle,” or “to embrace”? Under what situations would a planter or physician need to know how to say these words in Kikongo?²⁵

Baudry’s “Vocabulaire” provides a direct indication of interpersonal, close-quarter coercion, often of a sexual nature. Nowhere is this more evident than in some of the entries for helpful phrases. From the banal yet supplicant “Yes sir” (*oui monsieur / guété moenné*), one moves to more insidious snippets of interaction. Commands to “open your mouth” (*ouvre ta bouche / zibla monnoé*) or “go to bed” (*allez-vous coucher / ienda léka koinda*) combine with the micromanagement indicated by sentences such as “don’t put too much salt on what you eat” (*ne sales pas beaucoup ce que tu manges / katata sia m’salou bakanako dia tiakou*). These phrases suggest that, even when engaged in self-care rituals such as eating or sleeping, the enslaved were supervised and intimidated. A cringeworthy phrase such as “do you love me?” (*m’aimes-tu? / menou zozé guéié?*) indicates how a master might have required admiration, respect, and amorous affection in addition to physical labor. And what should be made of a phrase such as “your milk is good” (*votre lait est bon / miévézé kialia tiakou*)? Perhaps Baudry envisioned it as a useful phrase for a wet nurse. We have seen two of these women circulating in Moreau’s and Baudry’s circles—Angélique and a woman who remains anonymous.²⁶

Coupled with verbs such as “to kiss” (*baiser / zibika*) and “to embrace” (*embrasser / fifa*), these terms are an ominous reminder of what a gendered analysis of the abuses of slavery adds to our understanding of life in the most profitable slave society in the Americas. Certain phrases such as “are you pregnant?” (*es-tu grosse? / guéié oïémito mayemita?*), “get undressed” (*va te déshabiller / guéié koinda bolola m’lélé tiakou*), and “do your testicles hurt?” (*as-tu mal aux testicules? / makata etia koué béla?*) could be understood in a medical context. Such a limited interpretation, however, runs counter to the well-documented record of sexualized violence and harassment suffered by the enslaved. A rich bibliography documents this topic, and as Wilma King puts it succinctly, “Vulnerability to sexual exploitation by Europeans began before African women were removed from their homeland, and the practice continued in the Americas.” Men were victims of this sexual harassment, as well. In a comment that recognized this practice as abusive, yet simultaneously excused it, Moreau wrote, “One might even be authorized to say that the heat of the climate that irritates desire, and the *ease of satisfying it*, will always render the legislative precautions one would like to take against this abuse useless, because the law remains silent where nature speaks imperiously” (*italics mine*) (On est même en quelque sorte autorisé à dire, que la chaleur du climat qui irrite les désirs, et la facilité de les satisfaire,

rendront toujours inutiles les précautions législatives qu'on voudrait prendre contre cet abus, parce que la loi se tait où la nature parle impérieusement). As we have seen, in Moreau's estimation, Kongolesse women were particularly marked as willing sexual partners because of their alleged libidinous nature. Of course, the publication of the "Vocabulaire" and the account of such attitudes in Moreau's famed *Description de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* occurred in the literal midst of revolutionary pushback against the violence made possible in a context in which a planter's authority was virtually unchecked.²⁷

This history of conflict and resistance on the part of the enslaved is embedded in many words and phrases. Verbs such as "to lie," in the sense of telling an untruth (*mentir/louvounou*), were provided along with nouns such as "homicide" (*vonda montou*) and "thief" (*voleur/moévi*). The phrase "if you don't work I will beat you" (*si tu ne travailles pas je te battrai/guëié salako filam singa akona matakou tiakou*) suggests work stoppage or outright refusal to labor. The term for "brigand" used the same term, *n'doki*, as in the phrase "you are a poisoner" (*tu es empoisonneur/guëié n'doki*). *N'doki*, a word that refers to a witch/sorcerer, indicates that Baudry was equating troublemakers, poisoners, and witches: they all posed both spiritual and real-world threats. The "Vocabulaire" provides linguistic evidence of the anxiety slaveholders felt about enslaved women and men seeking retribution. A phrase like "what ship brought you?" (*quel navire t'a porté?/kia kombi nata guëié?*) also hints at the ties forged during the horrors of the Middle Passage; the formation of shipmate kinship networks was key to surviving and resisting the alienation of people's new lives in the Americas.²⁸

The reality of a landscape in Saint-Domingue, where the death rate for the enslaved was "higher than anywhere else in the western hemisphere," is brought home by the violence emanating from these words (Table 1). Planters were taught to curse and denigrate their laborers. For a perceived infraction, the enslaved might have insults directed against their progenitors in what amounted to a Kikongo game of "yo mama" with a drastically lopsided power differential in which one person had the power of life or death over another. Baudry imagined phrases such as "your mother gave birth to a pig" and "son of a debauched woman" as helpful conversational knowledge. I'd like to emphasize that Baudry also provided multiple translations for various words directly related to punishment. In an indication that different Kongo dialects were spoken around him, he noted, "Every group has words that are particular to it. When a group doesn't understand one word, they comprehend another" (*Chaque cahute a des mots qui lui sont particuliers. Quand elle n'entend pas l'un, elle comprend l'autre*). His choice of which terms were important enough to include in triplicate is instructive. Three expressions were provided for "whip" (*fouet*): *m'singa*,

singa gombé, and *motamis*. In addition to knowledge of the three phrases for the object itself, a planter was taught how to threaten, “Be careful of the whip” (*prends garde au fouet / bika m’singa lakota*). An instrument of torture and an example of how to use it in a “practical” sentence were thus foregrounded. Three words were also listed for “fear” (*peur*): *boman*, *ouili*, and *bamoën*. This was an emotion that a planter or driver would need to provoke constantly to enforce discipline and compliance. In addition to providing concrete words that incited fear of violence (“whip”), Baudry ensured that conversationalists would know that they were talking about fear; hence the need for the abstract words that referred to the emotion itself. Finally, three words were given for the verb “to cry” (*pleurer*): *lila*, *dila*, and *mazanga*. “Cry” was an important enough concept that a planter needed to master the expression “do not cry” (*ne pleurez pas / lila bakanako*). Like many of the terms contained in the book, this one was polyvalent. Provided in the imperative, the phrase implies a range of emotions from strict command to an attempt at comforting a suffering person / people. Baudry’s avowed politics—rabidly proslavery but “kindly” so—makes both explanations possible.²⁹

The psychological dimensions of linguistic violence on display here are deeply disturbing; there is a sadistic element to the text’s pedagogical intent. In other words, the “Vocabulaire” was not simply a manual with instructive phrases for directing tasks. It is clear that, in addition to providing words for the jobs themselves, the text was designed to teach the abusive language that one needed to compel people to perform these jobs. “Whip.” “Fear.” “Cry.” Although Baudry told his readers that speaking Kikongo would persuade the enslaved that they were fortunate to be owned by such a “superior benefactor,” the very words he bothered to document blatantly chronicled force and derision. The enslaved were beaten down with the tongue as well as the whip. They could be forced to undress, compelled to tickle or be tickled, have their milk supply inspected, all in some approximation of their “native language” and while being asked if they “loved” their oppressors. Baudry casually sketched situations that entailed provoking pain (kidnappings and sales, miserable labor conditions, and a litany of other physical and psychological abuse) and suggested that planters and their agents had the right to assuage that same pain. There was a collective and narcissistic pathology at work that normalized such antisocial and inhumane behavior. Not only did the text normalize this delusional orientation toward others’ feelings; it also cloaked its sadism in a language of emotions that included so-called compassion.

The darkness of this source, its inherently disturbing nature, is belied by Baudry’s upbeat conclusion after years of contact with Kikongo; he claimed that

TABLE 1. Sample Terms and Phrases from the “Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo”

FRENCH	KIKONGO	ENGLISH
canne à sucre	moulinga	sugarcane
singe	kiman	monkey
antropophage	lianga bantou	cannibal
chaîne	panga	chain
sang	minga	blood
agenouiller	foukaman	to kneel
baiser	sounga	to kiss
jouer du violon	sika sanbi	to play the violin
frottez cela	kiafiona	to scrub that
allez achever votre ouvrage	guéié koinda sala sonpouka	Go finish your work.
allez chercher mon aiguille	miakou koinda vouka	Go look for my needle.
prends garde au fouet	bika m' singa lakota	Be careful of the whip.
oui monsieur	guété moenné	Yes sir.
je suis fâché	mang'zi	I am angry.
ta mère a mis au monde un cochon	mamakou oli outa goulonbou	Your mother gave birth to a pig.
tu es empoisonneur	guéié n' doki	You are a poisoner.
quel navire t'a porté?	kia kombi nata guéié?	What ship brought you?
m'aimes-tu?	menou zozé guéié?	Do you love me?
es-tu grosse?	guéié oïémito? –mayemita?	Are you pregnant?
votre lait est bon	miévézé kiali tiakou	Your milk is good.
que tu es laid!	guéié manbéné m'bi!	My, aren't you ugly!*

*The exclamation point appears in the original.

Source: “Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo,” in [Louis Narcisse] Baudry des Lozières, *Second voyage à la Louisiane, faisant suite au premier de l'auteur de 1794 à 1798 . . .*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1803), II, 108–146.

it was "the most pleasant language, and often it greatly helps one understand other African languages. Its sweetness is seductive, and I do not think that even the Italian language beats it" (*c'est d'ailleurs la langue la plus aisée, et souvent elle aide beaucoup à concevoir les autres de l'Afrique. D'un autre côté, sa douceur est séduisante, et je ne crois pas que la langue italienne même l'emporte sur elle*). His adjective of choice, "seductive" (*séduisante*), carries a sexual innuendo when we recall that Kongolese women were marked as desirable and available sexual partners. Although Baudry repeatedly described African intellect as inferior, he did not use language as "proof" of this belief. In this, he differed from natural historians such as Félix de Azara, whom we have seen associating the sounds of different Indigenous Latin American languages to their speakers' alleged inferior cultures. Baudry's assertions, however, are a further example of how Americanist scholars used their language skills to ostensibly foster good relationships (between "heathens" and the "true" God, between slavers and the enslaved) while bringing the full force of violence to bear on their antagonists.³⁰

A Note on Sources, Methods, and Delusion

Michael A. Gomez eloquently describes language as "the bridge and the void over which it extends. . . . A weapon of war. . . . A primary theater of conflict, a principal site of contention." He states: "The real question is not, how difficult was it for Africans to learn English [or, I might add, French, Spanish, Kreyòl, Dutch, or Portuguese] words? Rather, the truly important queries are, what did it mean to the African to hear and at some point repeat words associated with his captors? What did it signify to the African to be expected to learn and embrace concepts which further concretized his condition of social death?" In the context of Baudry's linguistic work, what of the men and women beaten down in some approximation of their "own" languages when they arrived from Africa? An antagonist could have wielded an enslaved person's own language, or, again, some version of it, as an undeniably strong weapon.³¹

It is critical to see (and hear) this material from the vantage point of the enslaved and to hypothesize about how eighteenth-century Kikongo speakers might have assessed the content and nuances of their language when it came from the mouths of strangers. We can visualize Baudry's scholarship "at work" in the fields or in closer quarters. What would it have been like to stand in the sun listening to commands shouted in what sounded nothing like an enslaved person's actual language? To be told to "go get undressed"? The next chapter attempts just such a visualization. This orientation accounts for the active suppression and careless

disregard of the opinions of people who both were direct actors in determining Baudry's intellectual trajectory and found themselves the de facto recipients of his "enlightened" ideas. Though the source itself was written by and about a planter, we can reinsert the silent interlocutors of these exchanges. The newly enslaved were processing and negotiating their environments through experiences gleaned from their homelands, the transatlantic voyage, and a new landscape where they were surrounded by a cacophony of languages and the cultures that spoke through them. The study of language (whether Haitian Kreyòl, French, or Kikongo) and its relation to power and personhood was multidirectional. Like Baudry, the enslaved were also thinking about multilingualism as a route toward control over their lives. Multilingual Americanist scholarship provides a method for studying the subjectivities of the enslaved as well as white colonial identities in formation.

Work in comparative African historical linguistics provides a similarly rich methodology for assessing these subjectivities. Kathryn M. de Luna suggests that when studying orally based knowledge production, "Words are as much historical sources as political treatises or court testimony because language is a product of the history of its speakers and words bear the content of that contested history." In his analysis of Baudry's "Vocabulaire," James Sweet demonstrates this approach through a close reading of four terms that appear within—*mvika*, *macoute*, *ndoki*, and *mpoutou*. By studying the words used by the enslaved themselves and their history in West Central Africa, he shows that an understanding of how those same words were employed in the Americas, particularly Saint-Domingue, allows for a reorientation of history from the perspectives of the enslaved. And the stakes of doing so are high. As he puts it:

To shrug our shoulders and concede to the futility of excavating African ideas in the Haitian Revolution is to reify those European intellectual strands that are familiar and accessible. Such a move forecloses *any* African intellectual history of the Haitian Revolution and leaves us with the same old "Enlightenment" and "Age of Revolution" approaches that are far more ahistorical (and essentialist) than those that try to center on the majority-African rebels. Bringing the Africanist's methodological toolbox to bear on Haitian sources challenges the way we understand "slavery" and "revolution" in Haitian history and memory.

Sweet's extended exegesis of the term *mvika* is evocative. He writes: "For Baudry, *esclave* translated as *vika* in Kikongo. The ambiguity of this term begins to come into view when we also recognize that Baudry also translated *captif* as *m'vika*. As we know, all slaves were captives, but not all captives were slaves." Sweet then

posits that *vika* and *mvika* were fundamentally the same word in Kikongo (the *m* “a singular noun prefix for the root *-vika*”) and that its root was *-pika* / *-bika*. He cites the work of several Africanist linguists and historians, including Wyatt MacGaffey, Marcos Abreu Leitão de Almeida, and Jan Vansina, to conclude:

**pika* (*-bika*, *-vika*) did not imply chattel slavery at all: rather, the essence of these terms was “master exchange.” . . . In St. Domingue at least, the Kikongo words *vika*, *m’vika*, and *bika* operated side-by-side, opening onto a field of meaning that might explain the prevalence of *petit marronage* and French colonists’ seeming tolerance of slave gatherings at markets, provision grounds, and weekend festivals. . . . They [the people who used the term *mvika*] were “slaves” who had “left or parted,” or “abandoned,” and were now “waiting for someone” who might serve as a new protector / patron.

Rather than understand themselves as chattel, legally bound, along with their descendants, to an owner, the people who shared these words with Baudry had other understandings of what slavery could mean. As “dependents” of a master, they had some rights, including the right to look for other people who might better “protect” their interests. Baudry’s “Vocabulaire,” when assessed by linguists of Kikongo, has the capacity to reorient our understanding of life on the ground in the literal words of those who formed the backbone of the population. For example, a word as central as “slave” and how it was understood by the people capitalized and commodified as such is fundamental to any discussion of slaveholding societies where we might trace its use.³²

Baudry noted that personal familiarity with Kikongo enabled him to re-create his project from the notes he salvaged when fleeing Saint-Domingue. He asserted that he gleaned information about Africa through “the interrogation of a crowd of Africans” (l’interrogation d’une foule d’Africains) among the “bossals,” and his word choice to describe his research method implies questioning under duress. He made no mention of reticence to share information, although it is probable that his ego or ignorance prevented him from recognizing that information was being held back or deliberately misfed to him. With regard to the information-seeking process, a few phrases indicate the method used in this search to pin down and codify language equivalents—the presence of an interlocutor and someone looking for information. Consider the prompt “what do you call this thing?” (*comment nommez-vous telle chose? / dezina liandi nandi?*). The breakdown in communication potential is evident in the phrases, supplied in both the past and present tenses, “did you understand?” (*as-tu entendu? / ouadi kélé?*) and “do you understand?” (*entends-tu? / ouadzoué?*). This breakdown was inevitable, given that there were probably massive mispronunciations and missing

words projected by those speaking what were already only written approximations of lived speech. Baudry recorded the word for "cannibal" (*antropophage*) as *lianga bantou*. The literary scholar Elisabeth Boyi presumes that the accurate term would have been *liaka bantu*. The exchange of one consonant would have rendered this word inaccurate. This example suggests that Baudry was listening to what he heard but hearing it incompletely. His informants were likely misleading him as well, and I concur with de Luna's assessment that "Baudry's teachers fitted his mouth with words so that he would sound dumb." Finally, Kikongo is a tonal language, and it is unlikely that he could have adequately captured these sound nuances on the page.³³

Baudry appreciated the challenge posed by transcription, however. A few notes in his work indicate that he ruminated about how to capture sounds in writing in such a way that they could be brought back to life when read out loud. In the context of his linguistic work on Kikongo, it is important to note that it was one of three vocabularies included in the appendixes of his books on Louisiana. The other two were shorter works on the Native American languages Dakota ("Langage des Naoudououessis") and Ojibwa ("Langage des Chipouais"). He made almost verbatim scholarly orthographic claims in all three, explaining that he "attempted to write as one pronounces [the languages], and consequently, it is necessary to read all of the letters and sound them out" (*j'ai tâché d'écrire comme on prononce; en conséquence, il faut lire toutes les lettres et les faire sonner*). In this attempt to transcribe sound, he echoed Moreau's discussion of Guaraní. However, the "usefulness" of Baudry's work for a projected audience depended on making these languages available in written form that could then be reproduced orally. The stakes were higher and less theoretical than in Moreau's work. Baudry was thus actively engaged with the prime goals of foreign-language learning: the physical act of forming one's tongue, throat, and breath into speakable terms; developing a good ear for listening and hearing foreign sounds manifest as coherent words; and recording those same terms in writing.³⁴

Although Baudry might have indeed known how to speak some Kikongo and must have heard it regularly, it is not far-fetched that he might have also verified terms, perhaps even copied them, from written sources. There were several missionary dictionaries of French-Kikongo, but I do not know if he had access to them. In addition, I suspect that much of Baudry's work on this "Vocabulaire" might have been stolen. In a statement asserting that he liked to give credit where credit was due, Baudry wrote: "We owe part of the present chapter to M. Landophe, the ship captain, who spent a lot of time on the coasts of Africa. He reminded us of some of the information that we had lost due to the events in

Saint-Domingue. . . . He is well known in Saint-Domingue and all of the colonies for his long and important services” (Nous devons quelques parties du présent chapitre, à M. Landolphe, capitaine de vaisseaux, qui a beaucoup fréquenté les côtes d’Afrique. Il nous a rappelé quelques-uns des renseignemens que nous avons perdus dans les événemens de Saint-Domingue. . . . Il est bien connu à Saint-Domingue et dans toutes les Colonies, par ses longs et importans services).³⁵ This is the same Jean-François Landolphe who spent time living in the Warri Kingdom, brokered an arrangement for a slave-trading *comptoir* there, and hosted Prince Boudacan in France; Moreau hosted both Landolphe and Boudacan at the Musée de Paris in 1784. As Baudry suggested above, and as is apparent in Landolphe’s many appearances in the pages of *Affiches américaines*, his “important services” to Saint-Domingue included making the trade in people between the island and West Central Africa profitable. He appears to have studied many African languages during his years working as a slave trader. An anonymous manuscript copy of the “Vocabulaire” in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, whether the original property of Landolphe, Baudry, or someone else, is suspiciously similar to Baudry’s published version.³⁶

Whether Baudry created or copied some of this manuscript, he was likely familiar with the slave trader Louis de Grandpré’s *Voyage à la côte occidentale d’Afrique* (1801). Grandpré’s volume contained an appendix of “Congo” words that he believed would be helpful for trade situations along the coast and on shipboard; many of the words and their translations are identical to Baudry’s. The same Parisian publisher, Jean Gabriel Dentu, published both books within a year of each other. While Grandpré’s appendix did not contain phrases, it did record some extremely striking words mixed in alongside common verbs and nouns. These include “testicle” (*testicule/macata*), “sexual parts of a man” (*parties sexuelles de l’homme/seté ou soutou*), “sexual parts of a woman” (*parties sexuelles de la femme/neno*), and “another sexual part” (*autre partie sexuelle/didy*). The possible referent for this last term is in itself striking—anus? clitoris? Again, the inferences that can be drawn from the inclusion of such terms suggest abhorrent practices. If one is inclined to suppose that traders needed these words purely to determine the health and reproductive capacity of their captives, the phrase “junction of the two sexes” (*junction des deux sexes/songai*) suggests that violation of the enslaved was simultaneously mercenary and sexual. I mention this dimension of Grandpré’s vocabulaire to highlight the recurrent mention of sexual organs coupled with verbs that invoke physical intimacy, whether coerced or consensual. The two vocabulaires expose how sexual abuse was endemic to colonial domination. Although “sexual parts of a woman” is euphemistic in French,

perhaps more direct in the Kongo translation provided, a euphemistic veiling (through silence) of this dimension of violence would be a misleading scholarly choice in and of itself.³⁷

I close by considering two other texts that could have served as Baudry’s linguistic models in the geographic sphere of influence Christopher Miller terms the “French Atlantic triangle.” His text shares many common characteristics with the vocabulary genre, but it also reads as a how-to planter manual. This genre of instructional guide was published in the Caribbean and South and North America to share ideas concerning management techniques for enslaved people, crop rotation guidelines, and information about botanical science. *Debow’s Review* in a later North American context was one of the most well known. Though these manuals did not often include linguistic work, there were elaborate language studies in Jean Antoine Brûletout de Préfontaine’s *Maison rustique, à l’usage des habitans de la partie de la France équinoxiale, connue sous le nom de Cayenne* (1763) and S. J. Ducoeurjoly’s *Manuel des habitans de Saint-Domingue* (1802). The first contained an appendix with an extensive Galibi-French word list, alphabetized first in French and then again in the Indigenous Carib language Galibi. Conceived as a manual for how new settlers might “succeed” in French Guiana, the volume had detailed information about how to manage labor relations with Indigenous and Black workers. Moreau sold this book in his Philadelphia bookshop, so it is likely that both he and Baudry, given their interest in languages and French overseas settlements, would have been familiar with it. Ducoeurjoly’s *Manuel des habitans* was a detailed look at life in Saint-Domingue for would-be planters and other new arrivals. It had a French–Haitian Kreyòl dictionary, one of the earliest. Like Baudry’s work, it included phrases and even staged imaginary conversations between French and Kreyòl speakers ranging from ship captains to planters to the enslaved. In a posthumous 1819 book sale of Moreau’s personal library, all three of these books—Grandpré’s, Ducoeurjoly’s, and Brûletout de Préfontaine’s—were listed in the catalog.³⁸

The three publications underscore two observations. First, their presence in two catalogs documenting the contents of Moreau’s bookstore and library is circumstantial evidence that they might have exercised some influence over both Baudry’s and Moreau’s scholarship. They were grounded in firsthand knowledge of the African coast, the French Caribbean, and South America, and all three works would have confirmed the value of doing linguistic work in non-European languages. Like Baudry’s Kikongo study, they emphasized the practical skills necessary for labor management without validating the target listeners’ thoughts about their own circumstances. However, that these same studies needed to include threats, such as the aforementioned “if you don’t work I will beat you,”

allows us to visualize an uncooperative enslaved interlocutor. Second, the content of the books corroborates the indelible connections between colonial violence and language study. Kikongo, Galibi, and Haitian Kreyòl were all necessary, perhaps as much as French or English or Spanish, to the day-to-day workings of the colonial machine. Along with the whip, they were the gas that powered the engine (commanding cane to be cut, coffee to be harvested, specimens to be collected, or crying babies to be soothed). It is easy to see languages such as Galibi and Haitian Kreyòl, which were “born” in the Americas, as American ones. The “Vocabulaire Congo,” specifically designed for use in the extended French Americas, also reminds us that, at certain historical moments, African languages were American too.

To conclude, I wish to return to the “melancholy” that Baudry used to center his own experience and, by extension, that of all the other “honest colonists” who lost their lands, their enslaved workers, and their research, “victims of the revolution of the n[—] lovers.” Planter melancholy must be placed alongside a Kikongo entry that Baudry alphabetized under the letter *C*: “chagrin,” or *banbou i kelé andi*. Though it is not clear whose humiliation, distress, and embarrassment Baudry was concerned about and why such a word would be necessary, let us ground this emotion in the perspective of an enslaved person. Baudry viewed himself as a benefactor and his “Vocabulaire” as a public service not just for planters but for the enslaved as well. Yet, as we have seen, it was rife with contradictions. How do we reconcile claims of Kongo gaiety with the need for phrases such as “do not cry” or “chagrin”? A state of mind that Baudry saw or heard in front of him (tears, crying) or that he was able to intuit (distress, sadness, anger) mandated the inclusion of corresponding Kikongo words. Yet the very causes of this distress (separation from loved ones, nonstop work, illness, torture) were not recognized as such, nor did he take responsibility for them. Backbreaking labor was acknowledged in the phrase “does your back hurt?” (*ton dos te-fait-il mal? / nima tiakou bèla?*), but that pain became acceptable when it was displaced with the “knowledge” that these same laborers would have been “worse off” in Africa.³⁹

The imagination called on to create this delusional interpretation of the world is considerable. In an 1803 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, a critic of Baudry’s work on Louisiana commented on its oddities. He derisively noted that “the only uniformity which it possesses, is the perpetual egotism of the author. . . . The childishness of Citizen Baudry is indeed so excessive, and so various, as to become amusing; and the entertainment is from time to time heightened by the reflection, that this singular creature is actually Historiographer of the French colony department.” Another contemporary review called Baudry’s language

"fantastical" and suggested that his "*reflections*, as they are termed, are evidently opinions or ideas adopted *without* reflection." What read as entertaining and childish to early-nineteenth-century European readers also registers as malevolent. To return to Charles W. Mills, his assertion about colonialist philosophy is extremely cogent and valuable. He suggested that "the Enlightenment . . . 'social contract' is underwritten by a 'racial contract'" and that this racial contract demanded that "one has an agreement to misinterpret the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority, whether religious or secular." Baudry and Moreau's work epitomize this contract. Their jobs as Napoleon's historiographers of the French overseas colonies required just such a profession of colonialism's "civilizing" mission, a belief in themselves as "good masters." Competence in Kikongo was imagined as part of this mission. The gross misinterpretations of the world endure.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the tenor of Baudry's proslavery claims should be expected from someone who, as Marlene L. Daut has suggested, believed it necessary to wage "a war of annihilation" on people of African descent in the final years of the Haitian Revolution. Baudry, however, understood that African (and Native American) language acquisition was vital to understanding the late-eighteenth-century Americas. His work serves an important function in the present and brings me full circle to my opening assertions. The study of the Americas has been self-consciously "global" for several hundred years now. More to the point, when did we lose sight of Kikongo as one of the many languages of the Americas? The domination of English in much of the scholarship about the global South or extended Caribbean seems shortsighted to those who work primarily in languages such as Kreyòl, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and French. But to quote Craig Womack in the context of scholarship on Native American literatures, there are "vast, and vastly understudied" repositories awaiting our attention. Much as late-eighteenth-century Americanists saw the need to give priority to the study of non-European languages, there is a continued need to do so today. This is one way to decenter white planter intellectuals and their legacy. The next chapter offers another.⁴¹

Chapter Title: B.DRY LOZ: Illustrative Storytelling

Book Title: Encyclopédie noire

Book Subtitle: The Making of Moreau de Saint-Méry's Intellectual World

Book Author(s): SARA E. JOHNSON

Published by: University of North Carolina Press, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. (2023)

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469676937__johnson.12

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of North Carolina Press, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Encyclopédie noire*

CHAPTER SEVEN

ZOYLOZ

Illustrative Storytelling

Scholars of the enslaved are confronted with the evidence of things not seen. Unrecorded experiences. Unvoiced motivations. These silences constitute the recessed corners of the past.¹ The graphics in this chapter engage the impasse created by a lack of historical documentation concerning the thoughts of those who left few written records. Illustrative storytelling in its literal sense is one method of imagining the experiences of people desperate to figure things out in a world where so many new and ongoing experiences would not have made sense: masters who thought they were fluent in Kikongo shouting gibberish, people burning unintelligible symbols into one's skin. Misunderstanding could have violent consequences. In these three visual examples, incomprehension and meaning vie with each other, much as creating understanding in a world of incomprehension was a vital intellectual and affective task for enslaved people intent on survival.



A Listening Puzzle

In the presence of the unintelligible, one still heard sound. It could communicate threat, invitation, promise. It beckoned in shouts or whispers, repelled via tone or pitch. It was augmented and made meaningful through the body praxis of gesture. Listening to the sound of the human voice and converting that which was incoherent into meaningful words and eventually language (imbued with direct consequences) took time. This process was a fundamental challenge for the children, women, and men enslaved and transported across the Atlantic Ocean, from island to island and across and within the North and South American mainland empires. It was knowledge acquired with difficulty, and ingesting these letters, reading them not as words but as sounds, is also meant to be.

vaguely intelligible as isolated words. Or perhaps the sounds that they heard were decipherable and acquired meaning when joined into phrases and sentences. We can imagine that people stood in angry disbelief, reflecting, “I think this man is trying to tell me my mother is a pig.” We can picture the dismay and fear of a woman or man being touched against her or his will while listening to some iteration of *menou zozé guéié* or *mang’zi*.

mbimotamissingalakota mangziloudémi ludemi
 potou mondelemondélémondalaymondailai mond/ɛɪ/ɪɛɪ. panga minga
 mousingalakota
 paysdesblancschaines**SANG**fouet
 countryofwhiteschainebloodwhip

potou mundele mondele **mondélémondalaymondailai** panga minga msi
 lakota

paysdesblancs payee day blan mbi chaine sang fouet
 countryofwhites ugly chain blood

sukidi botémanbéne

kia kombi nata guéié

singemponok kiman

menoozozaigwaieaiaastula**chaudepissegonorrheamboulou**sucre

NDOKImingomingaguaaiaaaguayiyagwaiiaiguéiéguéiéguéiéguéié

brigandbloodbloodyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyouuglyuglyuglyuglyugly
 uglywhiphurryup!!!!!!!!!!!!³

poisonerbloodbloodyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyouyouuglyuglyuglyuglyugly
uglyunintelligible

hurryup!!!!!!!!!!!!

Do you understand? Did you understand?

sound chaos babble

letter disorder gibberish

parede de incomprehension

frustration

grief rage disbelief

recognition?

Oudzoué?

Oudi kéle?

СНУГЫН
 WHIP

The act of listening re-created through this puzzle converts what one might have heard into that which is seen and must be decoded as written signs. Sound is visualized, speaking converted to typed characters. In reading the puzzle, the eye jumps, searching for meaning, perhaps impatient, caring only for the words that are recognizable. As is the case when listening to the unfamiliar, one searches for signification that might be pinned down as a way of feeling grounded. The puzzle is a mix of nonsense and words in multiple languages. I wrote it to be wrestled with aloud, notating what would be long and short vowel sounds in English with the consonant blends that simulate those found in attempts to notate eighteenth-century Kikongo. Punctuation serves as conventional shorthand to communicate the intention of an utterance by marking shifts in tone and emphasis. Debates surrounding the best written forms for a host of traditionally oral languages, from French-based Kreyòl to Indigenous idioms, work as a subtext as I move between phonetic or etymological inscriptions. Consider the diacritic *accent aigu* on each *é* sound that Baudry used: two examples are found in the noun *mondélé* (country) and the critical pronoun *guëié* (you). Phonetically, Baudry's choice of the French *é* could be transcribed "ay," "ai," or "ei" for an anglophone reader or as the International Phonetic Alphabet symbol /eɪ/.⁴ With no "you" to command, there would be little point in his phrase book. When spoken at and to someone, the word would need to resonate as familiar.

My musings about transcription and typographical presentation mimic trying to pin down the ephemeral: to capture baffling speech as writing is an attempt to illuminate the occluded inner functioning of the mind. Outright confusion, gradual recognition, a refusal to engage: each signals the perception, sentiment, and intentionality of Baudry's interlocutors. Robert Bringhurst explains that, although legibility is a foundational principle of typography, there is "something more than legibility: some earned or unearned interest that gives its living energy to the page." That living, kinetic energy of letters arranged in jarring positions and to form words that may or may not make sense is intended to provoke readerly discomfort. One can describe the confusion that the enslaved might have felt, but is the recognition of such *felt* and *understood* in a different way when shared, however briefly? That discomfort and frustration is meant to come full circle to acknowledge the tremendous intellectual energy of those forced to exist physically, spiritually, and linguistically in a world controlled by predatory strangers.⁵

As we saw in previous chapters, Moreau and Baudry both appreciated the difficulties posed by transcription of spoken sounds to print. When trying to capture the South American Indigenous language Guaraní so that French readers and speakers would be able to pronounce the words in his translated natural history of Paraguay, Moreau wrote that he had "designated the syllables that it

was necessary to emphasize more than others” (On a désigné les syllabes qu’il faut faire sentir plus que les autres). One of the ninety-three examples he provided was the word *gou-a-zou-pou-cou*, noting that the “*gou, zou* and *cou*” should be “long.” In his work on the West African Warri Kingdom, Moreau observed, “The sound of the syllable *ou*, in the pronunciation of the word *Ouaire*, being very strong in the mouth of the natives of the country, I believed it necessary not to elide this syllable so that its pronunciation would be better appreciated in French” (le son de la syllabe *ou*, dans la prononciation y mot *Ouaire*, étant très-fort dans la bouche des naturels du pays, on a cru ne devoir pas élider cette syllabe, afin que sa prononciation fût mieux sentie en Français). When discussing Kikongo and the Native American languages Dakota and Ojibwa, Baudry explained that, in the case of Dakota, “the letters with a circumflex should be pronounced long. For example, *ouâ âtô*, ou *ichinaoubâ*” (les lettres où il y a un accent circonflexe doivent être prononcées longuement. Par exemple, *ouâ âtô*, ou *ichinaoubâ*). In the case of *gu é Ĩ é*, was the *tréma* (*ï*) Baudry added between the *És* his way of documenting that the vowel should be pronounced distinctly? Actual Kikongo could require a variance in tone across the length of the breath that held that sound. Textual Kikongo in the “Vocabulaire” is flat. —————

Kikongo cluster languages are not. ✓ Discernible tonal variation, within words and within word combinations, would require rising and falling sounds.⁶

How might *gu é Ĩ é* have sounded to the eighteenth-century listeners Baudry imagined? They would have had to make allowances for inadequate tonal accuracy, in addition to vocabulary and syntax that were likely to be unclear. The likelihood of miscomprehension was enormous, as was the possibility that listeners might have engaged in what Anna Brickhouse calls “motivated mistranslation,” the strategic process of deliberately misunderstanding what they heard or providing false information when queried so as to “unsettle” colonial projects.⁷

Thus far, the listeners and sources of Baudry’s “Vocabulaire” have been abstracted, albeit actual, human beings. Thousands of people from the West Central African region labeled the Kongo appeared across the pages of Saint-Domingue’s newspapers and in notarial records; they inhabited the same urban and rural household work spaces as the Baudry and Moreau families. These people formed a significant subset of the enslaved population. One was a man renamed Louis. He was five feet, two inches tall, quite powerful and broad shouldered. He sported a beard and had “healthy legs” despite his “small feet.” His speech was slow, although we do not know if the language he spoke slowly was his native one or the one(s) he learned upon arrival in Saint-Domingue. He had filed teeth that served as their own indicator of community belonging in his homeland and “reddened eyes,” perhaps due to exhaustion or disease (Figure 48).⁸

Louis, Congo, de 5 pieds 2 pouces, affez
 puiffant & les épaules larges, l'œil rouge,
 les dents limées, un toupet de barbe autour
 de la bouche, le parler lent, la jambe saine
 & le pied petit, étampé sur le sein droit
 LAMAND, & sur le gauche RCDAB,
 est parti maron le 5 du présent mois. Ledit
 negre appartient à M^e Baudry Deslozieres,
 demeurant au Cap, rue du Conseil, qui
 récompensera les personnes qui l'arrêteront.

FIGURE 48. Runaway advertisement seeking the return of Louis to Baudry des Loziers. From "Esclaves en maronage," *Supplément aux Affiches américaines* (Cap Français, Saint-Domingue), Aug. 4, 1784, [4].

Louis ran away from Baudry in 1784, when they were both living in Cap Français. By fleeing, he defied Baudry's assertion of ownership. Louis and Baudry were thus real-life historical antagonists, engaged in a battle of wills and contested authority. Would Louis have understood Baudry's Kikongo—the insults, threats, possible queries about his health, or invective against his (Louis's) mother? **Zi. I. Sia. Not. Ouad. Understand. I not understand.** This is my nonsensical piecing together of isolated parts of speech. Louis did not understand or accept the logic and intent behind the words in the "Vocabulaire." He did not view Baudry as a benefactor entitled to his labor and life.

Consider another scene peopled with historical actors, although the circumstances are abstract and fantastical in their own way. The setting is a mountain-top outside Léogâne, in the western province of Saint-Domingue. Planted with coffee and including an array of outbuildings, the site was originally purchased by Baudry in 1788 and named Crete. In this Caribbean Crete, a frequent visitor described how Baudry gave its quarters Western classical names such as Mount Ida, the attributed birthplace of the Greek god Zeus. According to the same eyewitness account, "His famous ornamental gardens that one called Greek-style gardens, and that were suspended on the side of the high mountain, excited the curiosity of guests who went to visit and who left there with the memory of Semiramis's gardens [the Hanging Gardens of Babylon]" (ses fameux jardins d'agrémens qu'on appelait jardins à la grecque, et qui, suspendus sur le côté d'une haute montagne, excitaient la curiosité des arrivans qui allaient les visiter, et en sortaient avec le souvenir des jardins de SÉMIRAMIS). The property was bought "naked [bare], meaning without Blacks, without tools and almost uncultivated" (toute nue, c'est-à-dire, sans nègres, sans ustensiles, et presque sans culture). The

cultivation of coffee plants and landscaped gardens required hard manual labor, and Baudry reportedly effected these changes because his wealth allowed him to “cover his habitation with arms and to render it flourishing from the point of view of utility and pleasure” (*couvre son habitation de bras et la rend florissante sous les points de vue d'utilité et d'agrémens*).⁹

This literal “covering” of a space with “arms”—people who tamed the wilderness by cutting, removing, collecting, digging, harvesting—mandated the labor of at least “50 . . . *bossals*,” who worked the land in the late 1780s. They could also have served as domestic servants in Baudry’s home at Crete or his houses in Port-au-Prince or Cap Français. Some of these African-born enslaved were no doubt West Central Africans. Louis would not have been linguistically or culturally isolated in the Baudry households. These Kongoleses laborers would have included some of the people Baudry questioned for details about their language. These workers were supervised, a neutral verb hiding a raft of coercive practices, by a manager, a doctor, two overseers, and Baudry’s secretary. And of course we have seen that Madame Baudry herself was intimately involved in the day-to-day operations of the estate, particularly with her “new Blacks.”¹⁰

If the man called Louis was recaptured, *if* he survived his work regimen, and *if* he continued in Baudry’s service, he could very well have been sent to labor on this coffee plantation in subsequent years. Would Baudry, or the managers he employed and perhaps instructed in a few Kikongo phrases, have successfully communicated their meaning to the enslaved laborers? I suspect that physical coercion was the most widely practiced communication strategy between these groups. Although inhabiting the same spaces, they likely had a radically different understanding of their immediate surroundings. Would Louis and the other newly arrived people living on the plantation have referred to this mountaintop idyll as Crete, a place not in the least bit idyllic in their own experience? According to local newspapers and visitors, some of the terrain in the vicinity of Baudry’s land had other names: one area was known as Moussambé / Masembé / Mozambé, and another was called “le Gris-Gris.” These names were grounded in African-derived words and cultural practices, likely attributable to the large numbers of Kongo-identified people living there and working the land. Visions of ancient Greece and West Central Africa coexisted. This coexistence was not harmonious.¹¹



Power was projected in markings/letters in what amounted to a fleshy public sphere. As people moved, their bodies were read. Letters declaring belonging/nonownership of self were inscribed on the skin, such that the skin limited one's ability to effectively disappear. No matter how people ran, walked, hid, or disguised themselves, these brands increased their vulnerability. What did Thérèse and Magdeleine see when they looked down at their own disfigured flesh? If they were burned on their chests, did the marks deform their breasts and change how they viewed themselves (as women, as sexual partners, as mothers)? The dot/period holding the place of the "au" in Baudry's name suggests an iron typeface forged of just a single shape: a punctuation mark in the abstract, a potential keloid in the material world. Some group of artisans in Saint-Domingue would have had a business forging metal letters for livestock and human branding. From these women's vantage point, a brand across their chests would have appeared like this:

**ZOY LOZ
B.DRY LOZ**

Though registered as upside down and reversed according to the left-to-right reading pattern of Romance- and English-language readers, these marks would not necessarily have registered thusly to Thérèse and Magdeleine. Probably Yoruba speakers, they might have been untrained to read or write in their native or adoptive languages, although Yoruba itself has a written tradition dating back to Ajami script in the seventeenth century. However, conceiving of these two women, and by extension other African-born enslaved peoples, as "illiterate" obscures the reality that they might have been well versed in reading other bodily markings—what came to be called country marks in the Americas—a reference to scriptural body practices employed in Africa. Scarification rituals served "aesthetic, religious, and social" purposes and were "widely used by many West African tribes to mark milestone stages in both men and women's lives, such as puberty and marriage. [Scarification] is also used to transmit complex messages about identity; such permanent body markings may emphasize social, political and religious roles. . . . [They are] ways of showing a person's autobiography on the surface of the body to the world." In other words, the links between marks on the body and questions of belonging, identity, and community would have been a familiar concept for these women—in a different context.¹⁴

The physicality of a branding wound would have had psychological ramifications. The curves and straight lines that corresponded to shapes—unfamiliar

letters—had symbolic and real-world associations. If those lettered names were not in a language / sound pattern one recognized, the internal calculations explaining such disfigurement could have ranged from bewilderment to anger to shame. Slavery as an institution led to the development of multilingual, multimedia (if flesh can be deemed a medium) reading and scriptural practices that converted flesh wounds to letters, then letters to names. The length of time it would have taken each African-born person to know that the figures / names impressed into her / his flesh were synonymous with *de facto* authority over her / his body would have been an intensely personal and individual experience. In this example, internal thought processes linked script to terror.¹⁵

PAIN 1. the terror of being pinned in place and waiting for a heated branding iron to sear through one's skin 2. the branding's aftereffects: discoloration, chapping, possible infection, necrosis, shock, nightmares, nervousness; the lingering smell of burning and charred flesh its own source of anxiety and repugnance.

On a scale measuring the effects of the personal desecration of one's flesh for someone else's purpose, did someone stamped **TIBO** consider him- or herself more fortunate than someone branded **JEAN CASTELBON** or **L G DE BRETIGNI-BOISSEAU ST M**? Or consider the aforementioned Louis, Baudry's Kongolese enslaved man who had **LAMAND** branded on the right breast and **RCDAB** on the left. His entire chest was marked with letters indicating a succession of owners. A shorter name or set of initials would have resulted in less burned skin, which in turn would potentially have taken less time to heal. The Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Labat, casually commenting on how brands were applied in early-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue, noted that a person "who had been sold and resold several times would appear in the end as covered with characters as the Egyptian obelisks."¹⁶

Regardless of the name or initials used, the scarring was intended to be permanent, and marks were burned onto prominent places such as the chest, cheeks, stomach, and back. Over the course of multiple owners (multiple brands across an ever-increasing body area) or even in the event of manumission, one exhibited the letters forever as one cooked, cleaned, made love, planted cane, picked coffee beans, harvested indigo, or shared a meal with friends. Even when those who were "stamped" (*étampé[e]*) bore marks that were "illegible" (*illisible*), their scarred bodies were witness to their humiliation and commodification. That such illegibility is a characteristic noted in hundreds of advertisements for people who ran away suggests that these same people attempted to deface their brands as a strategy of deliberate obfuscation.

The series of signs in the pictures **ZO1 YRQ B** and **BVDAB RCDAB**, perhaps more than the *colon*-sponsored violence captured in **B.DRY LOZ** and **LAMAND RCDAB**, reminds us of the thought and affective process imposed on a person becoming someone different as a result of enslavement. Understanding these signs entailed an embodied, painfully acquired literacy. This interpretation process underscores a series of upside-down inversions—of the scriptural markings, of the subject, of the logic of print, of the world. We (contemporary readers are implicated in this process, as well) can read for knowledge embedded in and beneath the surface.¹⁷

Interiorized Natural History

Spring 1783

The air was dry, and there was no shade to be had for miles. No cover apart from the tall cane stalks that stretched as far as she could see. She knew that she must steer clear of them; the harvest was in process. X—, just shy of her twentieth birthday, struggled to walk the few remaining feet to a ravine where she could hide. If she could just make it to Morne Pelé . . . Y—, her father, would be there, waiting to help her. He might come with food. The promise of his presence kept her moving. She had heard *blan* calling this region the “*terre promise*”; the quality of the sugarcane growing around her was a constant topic of conversation when they gathered. The conversations she heard most often in snatched conversations with friends concerned sleepless nights due to the *mòde moustik*, overcrowding, the meanness of the *commandeur* at the Chatenoye plantation, or the sudden furies of the *maître* at Habitation Portelance.¹⁸

The open air and green of the fields contrasted to the oppressiveness of her lodging in Le Cap. The building where she cooked meals and occasionally sorted supplies for M. Curet, the medical practitioner from whom she had escaped again, was not her home, and she dreaded being forced to return. This time she had fled once more to the outskirts of Le Cap, heading to the Quartier Morin. She knew she could not risk returning to the vicinity of Habitation Gravé to find her sister. But these roads were of good quality and well traveled; it was dangerous to come this way.

Rosette—he had insisted on that name. His clumsy flirtations always began with compliments about her beauty before he became aggressive. His little flower. The *r* sound was hard to form her mouth around, and it sounded flat and unimaginative. Her mother had been born across the sea where names indicated when one was born and how one was connected to one’s *egun*. She had been named accordingly within her community.



I must keep going. The river is close, murmuring. How to cross? Hide the knife. Hide the knife. If they find it, I will be condemned. Its weight is comforting; I am condemned already. His expression as I shoved it in his face . . . his shock as I slashed at his arms.

I begged him to sell me. He always comes after me, each time I run, whatever I do. I will not live with the dread—him catching me by the latrines or on my palette come dark. Why won't he sell me? If not to the Gravé habitation, somewhere anywhere somewhere. If I can make it to the next morne, Y— will hide me.



ESCLAVES EN MARONAGE.

Une Nègresse nommée *Rosette*, âgée d'environ 19 ans, de moyenne taille, rouge de peau, estampée CURET, est partie marone depuis trois mois : on soupçonne qu'elle est sur l'habitation *Gravé*, où elle a des relations. Ceux qui la reconnoîtront, sont priés de la faire arrêter & d'en donner avis à M. *Curet*, Maître en Chirurgie au Cap : ceux qui la rameneront auront 66 l. de récompense.

October 16, 1782

Une Nègresse nommée *Rosette*, rouge de peau, de moyenne taille, ayant un enfoncement au front, sérieuse, parlant peu, est partie marone le 8 de ce mois pour la centième fois. On avertit de se méfier d'elle, volant & menaçant du couteau ; en un mot, c'est un sujet rempli de vices. Elle a emporté pour six portugaises de marchandises. M. *Curet*, M^e en Chirurgie au Cap, récompensera ceux qui auront occasion de lui ramener ladite Nègresse.

March 26, 1783

Rosette, de moyenne taille, jolie de figure, rouge de peau, ayant au milieu du front un trou très-remarquable & qu'elle a soin de cacher, est partie marronne depuis un mois, on dit l'avoir vue sur l'habitation de M. de *Charite*, au Quartier-Morin. Ceux qui en auront connoissance, sont priés de la faire arrêter, & d'en donner avis à M. *Curet*, rue Conflans. Il y aura récompense.

October 27, 1784

A Black woman named *Rosette*, around 19 years old, of medium size, reddish skin, stamped CURET, ran away three months ago: it is supposed that she is on the *Gravé* habitation, where she has family. Those who know her are asked to arrest her and to give notice to M. *Curet*, Master of Surgery in Le Cap; those who bring her back will have a 66-pound reward.

A Black woman named *Rosette*, reddish skin, medium build, having an indentation on her forehead, serious, speaking little, ran away on the 8th of this month for the hundredth time. One is warned to beware of her, stealing and menacing [people] with a knife; in a word, she is a subject full of vices. She left with six *portugaises*' worth of merchandise. Mr. *Curet*, Master of Surgery in Le Cap, will award those who have the opportunity to bring back the said *nègresse*.

Rosette, of medium build, pretty face, reddish skin, having a very remarkable hole in the middle of her forehead that she takes care to hide, ran away a month ago. She has been spotted on the habitation of Mr. *Charite*, in Quartier-Morin. Those who have knowledge about the situation are asked to arrest her and to give news to Mr. *Curet*, Conflans Street. There is a reward.¹⁹

In hurricane season, Rosette ran away from her owner, a surgeon in Le Cap. She was gone for at least several months. Networks of family and friends in the vicinity likely helped to hide her.

He has caught me. I will not return to his control. I will run again and again and again (one hundred times if need be). Next time he comes close I will take his knife and kill him.

Curet captured Rosette again, despite his assertion that she was “full of vices”: a thief, an enslaved woman who dared assault her master. However, two years after he advertised for her return in 1782 and after an unknown number of times she had run away and been recaptured in the subsequent interval, she went missing yet again.

Twou modi sa a sou fwon mwen fè li enposib pou mwen kache. This damn hole on my forehead makes it impossible to hide. Tout moun konnen mwen isit la. Everyone knows me here. I will not go back to that house willingly.

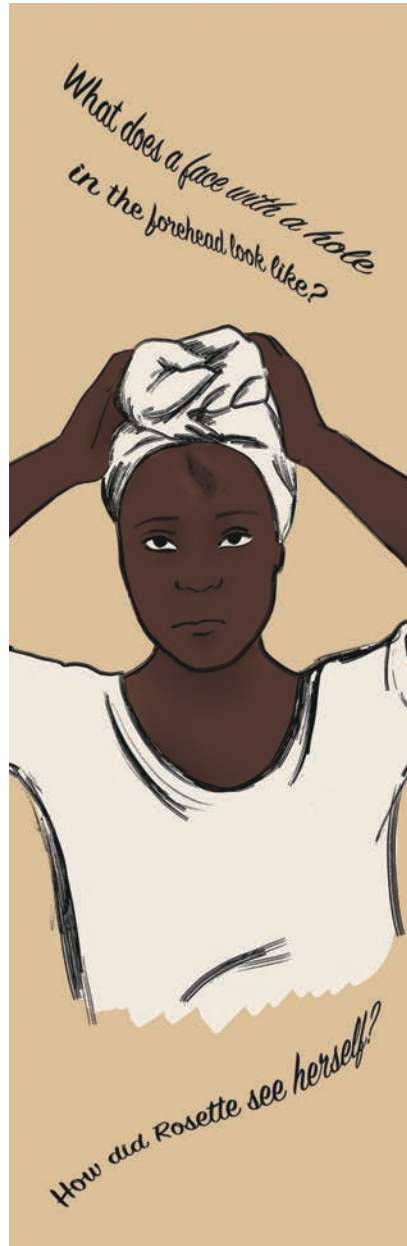


FIGURE 49. *Rosette*. By Sara E. Johnson and Luz Sandoval. 2020.



A phrase catches my attention: elle est partie marone . . . pour la centième fois. On avertit de se méfier d'elle, volant et menaçant du couteau; en un mot, c'est un sujet rempli de vices. *One is warned to beware of her, stealing and menacing [people] with a knife; in a word, she is a subject full of vices.* The "she" in question was called Rosette. Could her master's phrasing of "the hundredth time" be hyperbole? What would give a woman cause to escape so often? Rosette's force of character and resilience must have been formidable as she set off each time despite the punishment that was likely inflicted upon her when she was recaptured. The logistics of pulling off such a series of escapes required ingenuity and determination. Absolute determination. She welcomed waywardness, to use Saidiya Hartman's formulation, engaging in a "practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by *smashing out*, are foreclosed."²⁰

We can imagine the anxiety that Rosette must have felt to disguise herself given what seems to have been the "very remarkable hole" on her forehead. How might she have acquired such a hole, what Curet earlier described as an indentation? Was the change in semantics—"enfacement" (1783) to "trou très-remarquable" (1784)—a sign of escalation through injury? Curet was a surgeon—did he experiment on her? Trepanning? Was there an assault involved? Was the hole open and subject to infection? Did the "care" she took "to hide" it necessitate a headcloth, inventive hairstyles? She must have employed various modes of self-reinvention to override this remarkable physical trait. Here we have a description of Rosette's forehead: it has entered the historical written record. Yet I do not know what such a description means, let alone what the hole would have meant to her.²¹

Curet pursued Rosette relentlessly over a number of years, despite her obvious determination to steal away. Why not sell her? The announcements he placed in the local newspaper hint at obsessiveness; he desperately wanted to have this woman, as "full of vices" as he claimed her to have been, under his direct control. What conditions existed / festered / typified their shared living space?

Rosette was reserved. If we take some of Curet's description at face value, she was quiet and serious in his presence, planning for a future without him in it. Mention of her ties to friends and family in local communities points to the strength of relationships that were beyond the purview of her owner. That she was recaptured many times suggests that she never went too far; someone or

some set of people must have kept her from fleeing due east from Le Cap “à l’espagnol,” for example, across the Spanish border that served as refuge for many escapees.

Unlike the people in the first two examples, Rosette had no direct relationship with either Moreau or Baudry. Like Louis, Thérèse, and Magdeleine, she also escaped and lived for an unknown period of time *en marronage*. As was the case for others like her, she would have had her own rationale and opinions motivating her behavior. These thoughts could have included self-interest, pain, desperation, anger, hope. I presume no uniformity of thought between Rosette’s motivations and those of others, but I search for logical subtexts that could explain life choices. It is a truism in the field of slavery studies that information about what people were thinking and feeling is not readily available in the historical record; this is especially the case for those who left few written records of their own.

This lacuna of information does not preclude the need to reconstruct the possible intentions of the protagonists we write about. The stakes in these examples are high. For students of slavery writ large—its print cultures, languages, and psychotic, psychological, and material legacies—Moreau, Baudry, and Curet cannot have undisputed narrative authority. Informed speculation can disrupt this legacy of dominance, in part through an exploration of interior life worlds. I take interiority to cover a wide spectrum of thought: from calculated analysis, intention, and motivation to the realm of emotions. Rather than being impassive ciphers who are acted upon, people with their own will emerge. Mediated text and images offer hints of subjectivity; in these cases, sensory input from hearing, seeing, and bodily touch is plumbed for how it might have stimulated a person’s understanding of themselves and the world. Close attention to grammar and diction—who is designated as the subject of sentences, what words are used to describe people and their environment—is facilitated when the “what if” for these historical actors is centered. The process of surfacing these possibilities, the practice of wondering, is itself a method of inquiry that serves as a compass to ground a type of scholarship that demands accountability to those we study. This type of critical creative exercise need not always make it into the final drafts of our work in order for a reorientation of perspective to occur.

Speculation thrives in the graphic, from every word cluster in M. NourbeSe Philip’s poetry collection *Zong!* to Kyle Baker’s retelling of Nat Turner’s story to John Jennings’s and Damian Duffy’s deliberation about the appropriate color palette to illustrate Octavia Butler’s work. My attempts herein function alongside other mobilizations of the visual to creatively flush out alternative stories and interpretations. The reality imposed upon the world by those who treated Louis,

Magdeleine, Thérèse, and Rosette as objects requires multiple narrative modes to circumvent and subvert. Visual interpretations of inner thought processes are one such mode of excavating lies as well as other potential “truths.”²²

Speculation also thrives in anecdote. Moreau’s widely cited natural histories relied on anecdotal observation as a form of evidence, and it is a defining characteristic of his narrative style. Some of his anecdotes—describing the geographic boundaries of a neighborhood, its number of churches or local personalities—seem harmless enough. Others are much less so. A formula emerges, although there are exceptions: in such and such year, in such and such place, an enslaved woman or man named A did B, and this is *why* they did so and *how* they felt. The man at the “center” of this book was a serial embellisher, someone who operated in a world of planter fantasies about enlightened slaveholding and “bon maîtres.” We must question, refuse, take back his assumed authority to speak on the enslaved’s behalf. My own use of anecdotal information, most common in the book’s more experimental chapters, is a necessary counterweight to Moreau’s invocation of anecdote as “documentation” of the motivations, thoughts, ideas, and sentiments of the enslaved. Unlike him, I eschew pronouncements and generalizations. I claim no authority over their thoughts.

This chapter’s third example of interiorized natural history crosses the line between fact and fiction most directly. My rendition of Rosette’s story is fictional, however much its creation is based on inference and some verifiable context; the feelings and ideas I project onto her are likely anachronistic. Writing about her and others throughout this book in the third person—a mode that involves extensive use of the conditional verb tense (what might she or he think or do) and using diction such as “perhaps,” “maybe,” “it is possible”—is infinitely easier than evoking/imposing the first person. A blatant eruption into the headspace of an imaginary “I” is a mode that literary historians, as much as “Historians” with a capital *H*, shy away from. However, this brief but methodologically intentional “I” and the clearly speculative “she” have a potential benefit. My hope is that they signal the need for a critical interpretive process that sifts and weighs the veracity of truth claims and that spots the discordant and discomfiting. I aim to draw a parallel between my quite obvious conjecture and Moreau’s and Baudry’s. They, too, were involved in “critical fabulation,” in “speculation,” in “fiction writing.” Their work is replete with outright lies.



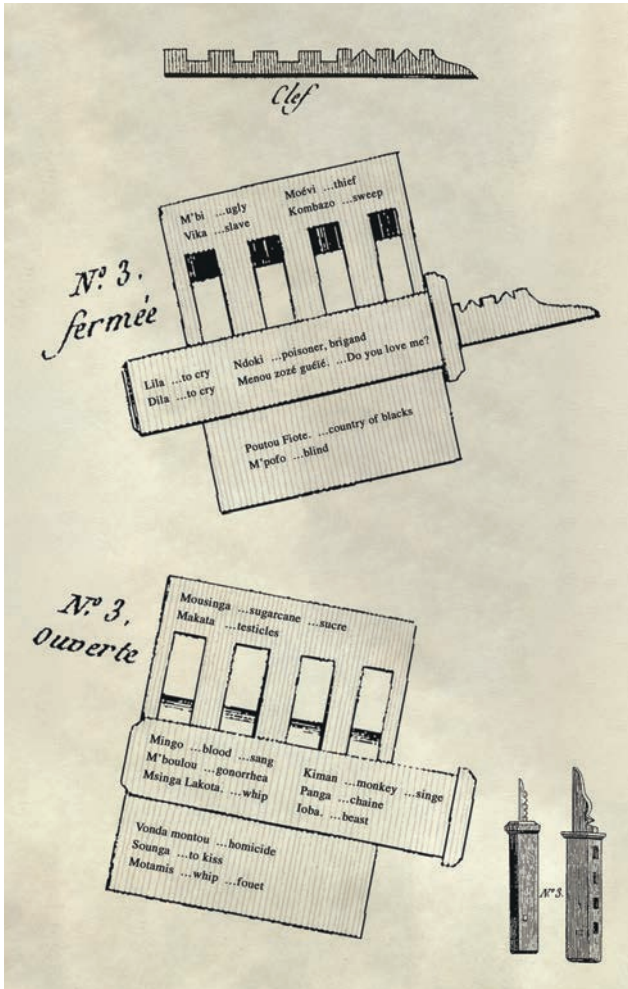


FIGURE 50. *Clefs et serrure, a Puzzle Key*. By Sara E. Johnson and Luz Sandoval. 2020. Adapted from images in Moreau de Saint-Méry, “Note sur les serrures de bois, dont les nègres se servent aux Antilles,” *Mémoires d’agriculture, d’économie rurale et domestique*, I (Winter 1789), 24.

The three keys shown in Figure 50 fit into a wooden lock “employed by Blacks in the Antilles” (dont les nègres se servent aux Antilles). The idea of the enslaved using locks on their doors feels generative, a fact of material culture that upends some of my hitherto subconscious assumptions about privacy and security (of oneself, of one’s belongings). In this example, locks were employed to secure the

entrances to people's living quarters when they were away at work. When considering the existence, perhaps commonness, of these locks in Saint-Domingue, I wondered if they were only fastened to the outside of a building and used when people were absent. In other words, could people enter a space and affix them from *inside* their lodgings to lock people (masters, others) out? Was there a mechanism for them to create an interior space that they could control to their satisfaction?

Moreau wrote a 1789 essay and supplement for an agricultural periodical that described these wooden locks and keys, and he included detailed drawings of four different sets with their interior and external spring mechanisms. I reproduce and modify the keys and lock "number three" in its "open" and "closed" forms. On "well-ordered plantations" (les habitations bien ordonnées), masters had their carpenters provide these locks so that "the unhappy" (ces malheureux) would be able to safeguard their "meagre belongings" (les chétifs objets). As he put it, this was a necessary precaution because "once a workgroup contracted the habit of theft, this penchant did not limit itself to things that belonged to the enslaved; masters and neighbors would feel the effects soon enough" (Lorsqu'un atelier contracte l'habitude du vol, ce penchant ne se borne pas aux choses qui appartiennent aux esclaves, le maître et les voisins s'en ressentent bientôt). According to Moreau's logic, it would evidently not do to have those whose lives were stolen from them try to steal from the system.²³

I have altered Moreau's diagrams so that these keys and lock could visually serve as a key to words contained in the listening puzzle that opened this chapter. The people considered herein would not have had the benefit of an accessible cheat sheet explaining rough word correspondence between languages. They learned through trial and error, close attention, or deliberate attempts *not* to show what they might have comprehended in the new idioms and rituals of slavery that surrounded them. The drawings also function as a visualized metaphor underpinned by material culture. Closed-off space (keeping some parts of the mind and of the body off-limits) contrasts with decisions to allow comprehension and access. This negotiation of one's surroundings is mirrored by the wooden mechanisms that closed or opened access to the locks and what they guarded.