

## What's *in* a Name? Unfolding the Consequences of a *Mistaken* Identity

The tension between statist and non-statist readings of Vastey's writings, or propagandistic versus humanist understandings of his work, can be at least partly attributed to conflicting assertions about Baron de Vastey's personal history. A quick gloss of Vastey scholarship reveals numerous contradictions and inconsistencies, mostly in attempts to narrate his biography. According to the archive of Vastey scholarship, the future Baron was either born in 1735 (Val, 129; Berrou and Pompilus, 1: 73) or 1781 (Nicholls 1990; Daut 2008; Bongie 2014); and his name was either Pompée Valentin Vastey, the name which has been used in virtually every article published about him in the twentieth century (and is the name under which he appears in Walcott and Rodman's plays), or Jean Louis Vastey, the name listed on the baptismal certificate that I located in 2011 in the Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer in Aix-en-Provence (Daut, "From Classical French Poet").

The date and nature of Vastey's death has also provided matter for controversy. Karl Ritter, a German geographer, who composed a "sketch" of Christophe's palace of Sans-Souci eight days after the king's death (Trouillot, *Silencing*, 35), wrote that Vastey had been murdered in October of 1820 and that his body was subsequently thrown into a well, "where I myself saw it" (*Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1838, 93). Ritter's observation is in some senses confirmed by the Swedish artillery officer, Johan Albrekt Abraham de Frese, who reported in his 1821 handwritten memoir, that after the execution of Christophe's son, Vastey had "prayed" and "begged" for his life, but to no avail. Vastey was subsequently "hit in the head with an axe" and then thrown into a ditch to be left for dead (qtd. in Thomasson).

The British traveler James Franklin claimed, however, in his 1828 *The Present State of Hayti* that “De Vastey is now living at the Cape in retirement, and is exceedingly attentive to the English residents, for whom he has a very high respect and veneration” (198).

There also exists confusion concerning Vastey’s social and legal status in Saint-Domingue under French rule. Many scholars have reported that Vastey had been enslaved in Saint-Domingue (McCune Smith 1841, 5; Farmer, *Aids* 156, *Uses* 479; Heintz and Heintz, 127; Wirzbicki 2014), but Vastey’s baptismal certificate (see Fig. 2.2) lists him as the “fils légitime” of his father, Jean Vastey, and his mother, a free woman of color, Élisabeth “Mimi” Dumas. Moreover, recent research into Vastey’s biography suggests not only that Vastey was born with free status but that he had been a slave-owner himself, rather than merely the son of a slave owner. Vastey’s cousin, Michel Vastey, wrote of the future Haitian baron in 1802, for example, “The fortune of his wife, joined together with his own, which consists of five plantations, would have provided him with a great deal of revenue if it were not for these insurrections” (qtd. in Quevilly 249).<sup>1</sup> Finally, several sources, likely influenced by nineteenth-century writers, including William Woodis Harvey, assert that Vastey had been educated in Paris (Maffly-Kipp, 56; Griggs and Prator, 44; Harvey 221; Williams-Wynn, 188), while others suggest that Vastey was an autodidact (“Hayti,” *North American Review*, 1821, 112; Esterquest 174). Vastey himself indirectly acknowledged having some formal education, intimating in his *Réflexions sur une lettre de Mazères* that he was at a disadvantage vis-à-vis his French adversaries since he had not even finished “sixième” or the first year of junior high (33).

The idea that Vastey had been an enslaved person with no formal education was partly supported by the circumspect way he wrote about (or rather did not write about) his life in colonial Saint-Domingue. Vastey rarely mentioned his personal life in his prose works but in November of 1819 he wrote a letter to the British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson stating that he had been born in 1781 in a small province of Saint-Domingue named Ennery and was therefore nearly thirty-nine years old. He also mentioned joining the revolutionary leader Toussaint

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<sup>1</sup>Quevilly’s biography is based on a rather miraculous gift to him of well over 100 letters from the French descendants of the Vastey family in Normandy dating from 1759 to 1835 (Quevilly 10). For an explanation of how these letters came into Quevilly’s possession see Quevilly’s *Le baron de Vastey* (9–13).

Louverture's army at the age of fifteen and having two daughters, Aricie and Malvina (rpt. in Griggs 181–182).<sup>2</sup>

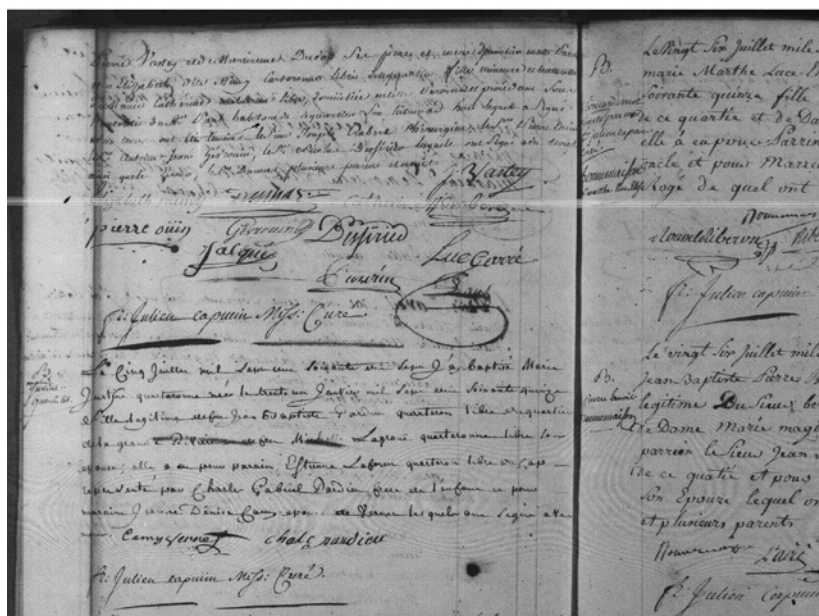
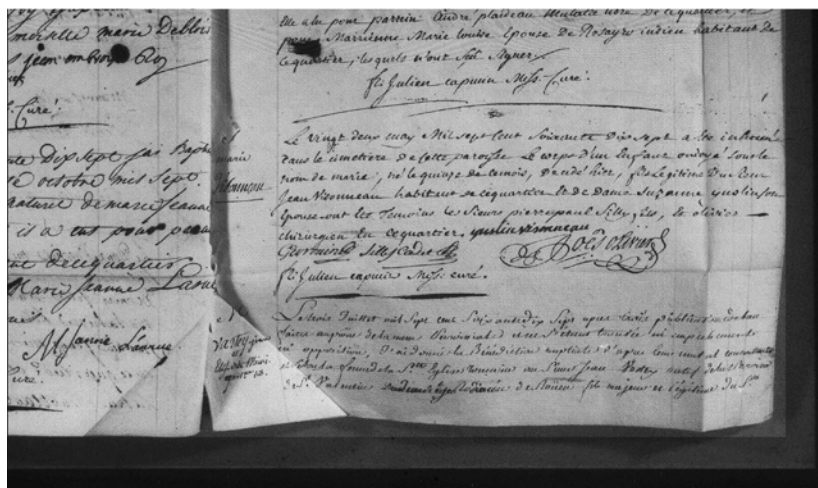
Although Vastey reveals little else about his family in the letter to Clarkson, in his *Réflexions sur une lettre de Mazères*, he did speak of his mother, referring to her only as the “Africaine” who “gave [him] life” (31). This “Africaine,” according to Vastey's baptismal certificate, dated 29 March 1788, was actually a free woman of color named Marie Françoise Élisabeth Dumas from the wealthy Dumas family of planters. Further information about Vastey's mother and maternal grandmother can be distilled from his parent's marriage certificate. This document, dating from 3 July 1777 (see Fig. 2.1), lists Vastey's mother, “Élisabeth dite Mimi,” as a “Carteronne libre [sic],” “minor and natural daughter of Marie-Catherine, a free mulattress” (“Acte,” 1777).<sup>3</sup> These seemingly minor details of the marriage certificate reveal that Vastey actually did write, although ambiguously, about his family in his published writings.

At one point Vastey mentions his mother in *Le Système colonial* without explicitly revealing his own connection to her when he tells a moving story about one “Élisabeth ‘Mimi,’” “fille naturelle” of “Dumas, settler, resident of Marmelade, and at present a property owner in France” (70). Vastey describes how this “Mimi” saved an infant slave named Laurent from being thrown into *le four à chaud* by her own father, Pierre Dumas (thus, Vastey's grandfather). Mimi apparently subsequently raised Laurent as if he were her

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<sup>2</sup>The Vastey family letters suggest, on the contrary, that Vastey was forced into conscription through what is called the “corvée.” Vastey's father wrote to his nephew, Pierre Julien Valentin Vastey, that the French troops under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture “bothered us a lot about joining the service. In particular, your cousin, *Cadet*, is burdened with a corvée tax” (qtd. in Quevilly, 223). In a later letter Vastey's father revealed that his son, Jean-Louis, *Cadet* (the future Baron de Vastey), had been “taken by command and suffered a terrible illness during the campaign” (qtd. in Quevilly, 227). An even later letter from October 1802 suggests that Vastey had actually initially fought against the “insurgents.” His cousin, Michel Vastey wrote, “My cousin *Cadet* was almost killed. He has escaped death a thousand times. He received a gunshot wound to the leg about a month ago” (qtd. in Quevilly, 246). Thus, Vastey may indeed have fought under Louverture, but perhaps under less voluntary circumstances than he had intimated in the letter. Quevilly writes that Vastey, along with his father and his cousin, Louis, were forced to join the French army in 1802, otherwise, they would be required to serve “one month in prison or hard labor at the arsenal” (249).

<sup>3</sup>Following the custom of the colony for children of color who were born to fathers to whom their mothers were not married, Mimi's father, Pierre Dumas, is listed on the document only as a witness. The document is housed at the Archives Nationale d'Outre Mer in Aix-en-Provence, France.



**Fig. 2.1** Acte de Mariage de Jean Vastey and Élisabeth “Mimi” Dumas, 1777

own child so that the enslaved mother could return to work. Of his mother's attempt to lessen the degradations of slavery, Vastey writes: "Mimi, virtuous and good, you are no longer with us! But you rejoice in the bosom of eternal beatitude, as compensation for your noble actions. Your friend here consecrates your name and your virtues, as a symbol of veneration and friendship for all kind and tender-hearted souls" (70–71). Vastey's decision to refer to Élisabeth Mimi as his "friend" rather than his mother speaks to the tensions involved in representing one's self as connected to enslavers in a post-slavery society. Even if the story of Élisabeth Mimi might have moved Vastey's nineteenth-century readers outside of Haiti, one imagines that the revelation that Vastey was the grandson of a reportedly cruel slave-owner might have infuriated some of his Haitian readers.

The large number of conflicting accounts of Vastey's life documented in subsequent historical writings about him expose the inherent unreliability and relationality of all biographical narrative. Biographical details about Vastey's life have been shaped in manifest ways by the motives of those who have written about him.<sup>4</sup> In order to produce a vision of Vastey as wholly divorced from the slave-owning life into which he was born, for instance, James Vandercook, who penned a fictionalized biography of Henry Christophe in 1928, implied that Vastey's seemingly incongruous allegiance to black people was because he hated his white father. Noting that Vastey "could 'almost pass for a white man'" and that his skin "was the color of old parchment," Vandercook described Vastey as the "bastard son of a white father whose memory he scorned and a mulatto mother he had forgotten" (114). Vandercook's emphasis on Vastey's supposed bastard "mulatto" status and his suggestion that Vastey held his parents in mutual disapprobation—to say nothing of his reference to Vastey as "the 'white nigger'" who "loved the blacks with a fierce, consuming love" and "hated all whites with a double fury" (114)—is not simply mistaken and deeply prejudiced, it also tells us something about the need for congruity when examining black writing.

It is partially the need for coherence that led to the assumption that Vastey had been a formerly enslaved person. James McCune Smith, for

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<sup>4</sup>The issue with Vastey's date of birth might have been easily cleared up without the baptismal certificate, owing to the letter that Vastey himself penned to the British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson in 1819, which confirms a birth date of 1781 (rpt. in Griggs 180–182, Nicholls 1990; Daut 2008).

example, claimed that Vastey wrote his *Réflexions politiques* “twenty five years after he had obtained his liberty” (5), and McCune Smith used the following passage of the English translation of the above work as evidence that Vastey had himself been “one of these slaves:” “We were one plunged...in the most complete ignorance,” he quotes Vastey as writing, “we had no notion of human society, no idea of happiness, no powerful feeling; our faculties both physical and moral, were so overwhelmed under the load of slavery, that I myself, who am writing this, thought the world finished at the spot which bounded my sight, and all my countrymen were as ignorant, and even more so than myself, if that is possible” (qtd. in McCune Smith 4–5). Thus, Vastey’s writing itself would also seem to encourage the belief that he was a part of the “we” narrative of the slave lives being described. Moreover, his œuvre might as well encourage a reading whereby the baron would appear to have been a self-taught intellectual. Vastey vaguely suggested that he had indeed educated himself when he wrote, “It is not useless to warn my readers that I have never undertaken official study of the French language. They will excuse, then, certain faults of speech and literature that will necessarily abound in the works of an islander, who never had any other teacher than his books” (*RM* 4–5). In another passage of the same work Vastey plainly stated, “I have not had the good fortune to attain an education” (*RM* 33).

Reconstructing the life of Baron de Vastey is crucial to any study of his contributions to Black Atlantic humanism. The ambiguities and contradictions in nineteenth-century era attempts to understand who he was as a person have much to tell us about how his contributions to the political and philosophical ideas of freedom and equality exalted in the modern world became silenced. In this chapter I suggest that the problems concerning Vastey’s name, his age, his education, and his social and legal status in French Saint-Domingue, are directly related to assessments of his character as “mercenary,” leading in turn to judgments of his writing as propaganda. What is partially under examination here are assessments whereby Vastey appears as merely a “mercenary scribe,” (Colombel, *Examen* 7) to use the words of one of his fiercest rivals, Noël Colombel, a journalist from Pétion and later Jean-Pierre Boyer’s republic.

Although it may seem of rather trivial importance whether Vastey died at the age of 85 or 39, whether he was educated in Paris, Rouen, or not at all, Colombel’s more damning claim that Vastey had been a terrorist in Nantes, France during the reign of Jean-Baptiste Carrier (Colombel, *Examen* 11), appears to be directly linked not only to the many confused ideas about Vastey’s life recounted above, but to contemporary readings

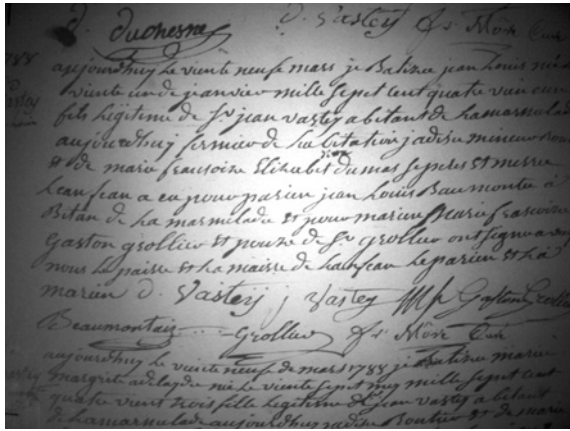


Fig. 2.2 Acte de Baptême, Jean Louis Vastey, 29 March 1788

of Vastey as a propagandist, an ideologue, and even a scribe—the very opposite of a humanist.

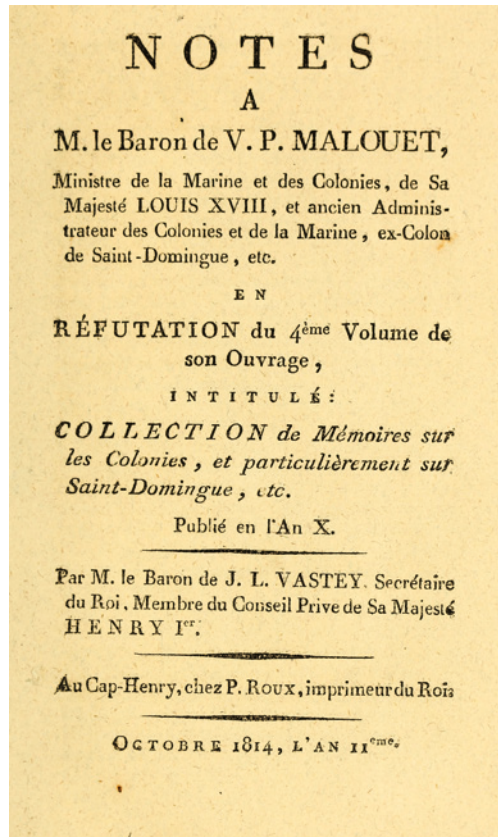
### VASTEY AS POET

The issue with Vastey's *Christian* name has been and will likely continue to be difficult to adjudicate, precisely because of the longitudinal implications of this error. Vastey's first and middle names are listed in nearly every library catalog across the world as Pompée Valentin. The unearthing of his baptismal certificate (see Fig. 2.2), however, reveals that his given name was Jean-Louis Vastey. More importantly this *discovery* also puts into question when and whether he ever used the name Pompée Valentin. Vastey signed all of his published works in Haiti with his title of nobility, for instance: "le Baron DE VASTEY." The only exception to this was Vastey's first publication, *Notes à M. le baron de V.P. Malouet* (1814), which was signed in part with the initials of his apparent birth name and reads: "Le Baron de J.L. Vastey" (see Fig. 2.3).

Conflicting, erroneous, and often confusing information in the archive has led every scholar who has written about Vastey down the path of biographical imprecision. In 2009, encouraged by discovering some poems in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, signed variously as V. Vastey and P.V. Vastey and attributed to Pompée Valentin Vastey, the name by which



Fig. 2.3 Baron de Vastey, *Notes à M. le Baron de V.P. Malouet* (1814). Reprinted courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library



Baron de Vastey had come to be known in virtually every source about his life, I suggested that Vastey had perhaps lived in France in the late eighteenth century and had potentially authored those poems (see Daut, “From Classical French”). Quevilly’s biography of Vastey, however, sheds serious doubt on the idea that Vastey could have authored the poems in question or that he had ever used the name Pompée Valentin (326).

The primary letter writers in Quevilly’s biography, Vastey’s father, Jean Valentin Vastey, and his uncle, Pierre Valentin Vastey, mention nothing about “Vastey fils” having written poetry, and his relatives never refer to him as Pompée Valentin, preferring to call him merely “Cadet,” a reference to Vastey’s status as a younger brother. The letters do reveal that



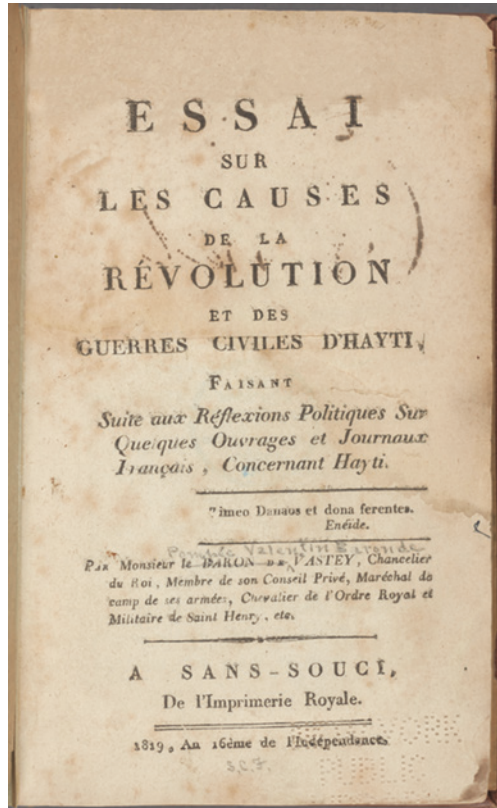
Vastey traveled to Rouen in Normandy with his father in 1791 where he stayed behind with his older brother to be educated under his uncle's roof until 8 March 1796 when the family traveled together back to Saint-Domingue (Quevilly 218). Quevilly is also able to place Vastey in Saint-Domingue in 1798, the year in which the first poem signed V. Vastey was published in France, owing to a letter signed "Vastey fils" from Ennery, Saint-Domingue and dated 23 May 1798 (Quevilly 222). An announcement posted by Vastey's father in the *Affiches Américaines* confirms the departure, but not the return, of Jean Valentin Vastey and two of his children (though the article does not mention the children by name): "M. Vastey, living in Marmelade, is leaving for France, with two of his children; he leaves his wife in charge of his affairs" (4 May 1791, 220).

Most of what we know about Vastey's father, "Vastey, jeune" or "Jean Vastey," is described on his *acte de mariage* to Élisabeth Mimi. The *acte* reveals that his father was born in Rouen, France and the elder Vastey's parents are listed as Pierre Vastey and Marianne Duval. While Baron de Vastey makes no direct or obvious mention of his father in his prose works, the baptismal certificate provides a few more details. The certificate confirms that Vastey's father was, in fact, a plantation owner in French-ruled Saint-Domingue. The elder Vastey is listed in the *acte de baptême* as "a planter in Marmelade, before that, at the minor Boutin's [plantation]." The certificate also reveals that Vastey's godparents were Jean-Louis Beaumont and Marie Françoise Gaston Grollier ("Acte," 1788). Although these Vastey family records from the Notariat de Saint-Domingue provide precious biographical information about a man whose verbosity rarely extended to his own personal history, they do very little to tell us how Baron de Vastey spent the early years of his life or how precisely he came to be known as Pompée Valentin.

The belief is so widespread that Baron de Vastey's *real* name was Pompée Valentin that the printed signature, "The Baron de Vastey," is scratched out of the title page of not only an original 1819 copy of Vastey's *Essai*, but also an original 1823 English translation, both held by the New York Public Library (see Fig. 2.4). It is precisely because Vastey's signature has been elided, crossed out, and written over that we must continue to sort out the genealogy of this biographical conflict.

Although this seeming case of mistaken identity is most manifest in library catalogs and contemporary scholarship, its roots appear in nineteenth-century French poetry; roots that would later indelibly link the militant Haitian statesman Baron de Vastey to Pompée Valentin Vastey's early career as a poet in metropolitan France. According to a poem entitled

Fig. 2.4 Baron de Vastey, *Essai sur les causes de la révolution et des guerres civiles d'Hayti* (1819)



“Représaille” [sic], or “Revenge” (1803), published in the famous French journal *Almanach des Muses* and written by the French poet Etienne Vigée,<sup>5</sup> someone named Pompée Valentin Vastey was “author of a poem entitled la *Cotinéide* [sic], and of a collection of poetry published [in France] in 1800 under the title of *La Cruche d’Hippocrène* [sic]” (251).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Louis-Jean-Baptiste-Etienne Vigée (1758–1820) was the brother of the famous French painter Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (May 73). According to an evaluation of his life in *Beautiful Thoughts from French and Italian Authors* (1875), Vigée’s poetical “works [we]re of no value” (358).

<sup>6</sup> According to a fragment of a poem signed by P.V. Vastey entitled “Les trois sœurs ou le Parnasse moderne,” published in 1808 in the *Journal des Arts, de Littérature, et de Commerce*, the collection was actually called *La Cotiniade, poème en 10 chants*.

In his poem, Vigée accused this Vastey of having chosen for a “patron” the reportedly vicious French poet and critic the Abbé Cotin<sup>7</sup> and of simply being a “swindling rhymers” (251). In 1789, Vigée had become the editor of the *Almanach des Muses* (*Revue Encyclopédique* 1820, 7: 291), and in 1803 he used that platform to author an additional entry about *La Cruche* under the pseudonym Le C. Syntaxe, which read: “To Pompée Valentin Vastey, *Author of a strange collection of poetry, published under this strange title: La CRUCHE d’Hippocrène, ou Mes Délassements*. Bees, at every opportunity, have chased you from their hive, little WASP; go die in your jug” (64).<sup>8</sup>

The source of Vigée’s ire and desire for “Revenge” against Pompée Valentin Vastey appears to be a poem published under the signature V. Vastey in the prominent opposition journal *La Décade Philosophique*: “Épître à Monsieur Syntaxe, *satire*: Sur Sa Rimomanie” (1802).<sup>9</sup> In this poem V. Vastey accused Vigée of a disease he called “rhymomania,” compared him to the Abbé Cotin, and suggested that Vigée was simply boring everyone with his poetry: “...tell me, Is it not ridiculous that an entire group of people who treat you like a friend/Must, too often, be put to sleep by your verse” (lines 10–12).

Vigée and V. Vastey’s equally provocative criticisms notwithstanding, the citation of a collection of poetry published under the name of Pompée Valentin Vastey, as well as a poem signed with these initials in one of the most controversial journals of the era (Trinkle 52–53), appeared to pose serious questions about a man who is usually believed to have lived all of his life in what is now present-day Haiti and who

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<sup>7</sup>P.V. Vastey’s poem *La Cotiniade* appears to be a reference to the Abbé Cotin. Simon-Augustin Irail’s *Querelles littéraires, ou Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des révolutions de la république des lettres, depuis Homère jusqu’à nos jours...* (1761) described the abbé Cotin as “le hibou de la littérature” or “the owl of literature” and claimed that “[t]oday none would dare to carry his name” (326).

<sup>8</sup>Frédéric Lachèvre’s *Bibliographie sommaire de l’Almanach des Muses* (1765–1833) notes that such invective was common in the *Almanach des Muses*, which Lachèvre wrote had always been a “mean press” (9).

<sup>9</sup>For more on the press see, *The Napoleonic Press: The Public Sphere and Oppositionary Journalism* (2002) and *Un Milieu intellectuel: La Décade philosophique* (1965). V. Vastey’s poem was reprinted in *Le Journal des Arts, de Littérature, et de Commerce* in 1807. In fact, many of the poems with this signature published after 1802 indicate that they are only fragments of earlier works.

many scholars have even speculated may have been a former slave.<sup>10</sup> Was the poet Vastey spoken of in Vigée's poem the same Vastey who would become Christophe's most valued administrator? Had Vastey, who never once mentioned traveling to France, let alone to Europe, lived in Paris and been a published and rather well-known *French* poet, as the attention from the *Almanach des Muses* suggests?<sup>11</sup>

Of a few things we can be reasonably certain: someone using the name Pompée Valentin Vastey was living in Paris and publishing poetry in the leading French journals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To that end, a *carte de sûreté*, which all citizens, residents and entrants to Paris were required to obtain after the law of September 19, 1792 (Faron and Grange 795), was registered under the name Pompé [sic] Vastey in 1794. The detailed *carte* lists the holder's height as five-foot tall, his profession as "commis" or "clerk," his address as Rue de Lappe, and states that *this* Vastey had already been in Paris for four years ("Carte"). The *carte* actually provides the first clue that the poet Vastey and the Baron de Vastey were perhaps not the same person at all. The *carte* lists Vastey's age as fifteen when he would have been only thirteen, and indicates that he was born in "Ducler [sic]" in Normandy when we know that our Vastey was actually born in Ennery in colonial

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<sup>10</sup>In addition to those I earlier mentioned, a number of reviews of Vastey's works in the nineteenth century stated that he had once been a slave (Lewis 326; McCune Smith 5; Mahul 322), while the *Anti-Slavery Record* (1819) wrote of him that "we do not know whether he was originally a slave" ("Anecdote" 129). This same confusion persists today. Hutton refers to Vastey as an "ex-enslaved man" (116), Hall calls him an "ex-slave," Farmer says that Vastey was a Haitian who had grown up a slave (*Uses* 479; *Aids* 156), while Heintz and Heintz also note that "Vastey had lived half his life as a slave" (127). Vastey, for his part, implied that he had never left Haiti when he wrote that he was a simple "Haitian, raised on the mountain peaks in the middle of the forest" and not a "man of letters" (*Système* viii). According to Hénock Trouillot, however, Vastey traveled to London where he met the Abbé Grégoire, whom Trouillot says was "the object of a cult on the part of the Baron de Vastey" ("Le gouvernement" 72).

<sup>11</sup>The *Almanach des Muses* had also advertised Pompée Valentin Vastey's collection in 1801 as *La Cruche d'Hypocrène, ou mes Délassements, essais poétiques; par Pompée Valentin Vastey*, providing only the following brief commentary: "*La Cruche d'Hypocrène! Strange title [singulier titre]*" (293). Incidentally, even though the *Almanach* was typically not favorable towards Pompée Vastey, his poem "Les fils de Mercure" did appear in the journal in 1814. Vastey's poem had already been published, however, in 1808 in the *Journal des Arts, de Littérature et de Commerce* and in 1809 in the *Journal de Paris*.

Saint-Domingue.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, four years after the *carte* was issued Pompée Valentin Vastey was still living in Paris since V. Vastey listed his address as Rue de la Loi, N. 26 in his 1798 poem “Derniers adieux.”

Because fragments from Pompée Valentin Vastey's collections *Le Pays de Caux* and *La Cotiniade* appeared under the signature V. Vastey in *La Décade Philosophique* and *Le Journal des Arts, de Littérature et de Commerce*, respectively, we can infer that V. Vastey and Pompée Valentin Vastey were the same person. But were Jean Louis Vastey of the birth certificate, the man who would sign his first work as “Le Baron de J.L. Vastey,” and each of his subsequent works as “The Baron DE VASTEY,” and Pompée Valentin Vastey, the poet who lived in Paris, also the same person? This is the real question. And circumstantial evidence linking the two names abounds.

There is a fragment of *Le Pays de Caux*, “Les Cauchoises,” which appeared in *La Décade Philosophique* in 1802, which was signed with the signature “J. Vastey.” This could suggest that P.V. Vastey's *real* first name, like Baron de Vastey's, may have begun with the letter J. In addition, the head of the Imprimerie Royale du Roi in Cap-Haïtien was a man named P. Roux and many of Vastey's poems appeared in the

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<sup>12</sup>However, due to the generally unreliable information on these identification cards, this discrepancy alone would not be enough to rule out a connection between these two names. According to L'Association Héraldique et Généalogique de Normandie, the most important indication on these cards was the date of entry in Paris since orthography, birth-dates, and places of birth were often “random”:

Until 1792, the French had as their only identification their baptismal certificate, which was moreover the only permitted identification. It was only if they crossed borders that they needed a passport or a safe-conduct, which was always for a limited duration and limited place. In 1792 the revolutionaries took the view that [the baptismal certificate] was insufficient and that every good citizen should have a *carte [de sûreté]*. The distribution of the cards was essentially a Parisian phenomenon. Inclusion on the register and the delivery of the card were made by the committee of the civil section. Many of its representatives barely knew how to read and write, that is why there is a lot of creativity in the orthography. In addition, departmentalization was new and determining the precise districts where births took place was often random. The most important indication [on the cards] was the date of arrival in Paris. Anyone male over the age of 15 years old, arriving in Paris had to go and obtain a card. However, it should be noted that the *cartes de sûreté* were only distributed in certain major cities. The entire population was not obligated to have one as they were in Paris (“Cartes”).

(For more about the inconsistent orthography of the *cartes de sûreté*, see also Faron and Grange, 81).

*Journal typographique et bibliographique, publié par P. Roux.*<sup>13</sup> Further circumstantial evidence appears in an entry in the nineteenth-century almanac *La France littéraire*. The entry reads that Baron de Vastey was, “at first, a writer in Paris, later a chancellor of the king of Haiti” (10: 65). The entry then lists Baron de Vastey’s publications as two works of poetry: *Anaïde et Alcidore, poëme érotique en quatre chants* (1800) and *Délassemen[t]s poétiques, ou la Cruche d’Hypocrène* (1799). Three of Baron de Vastey’s prose works are also listed in the same entry: *Essai sur les causes* (1819), *Réflexions sur une lettre de Mazères* (1815), and *Réflexions politiques* (1817). Joseph-Marie Quérard, the editor of *La France littéraire*, thus, believed that Pompée Valentin and Baron de Vastey were the same person, and he was definitely not the only one to have thought so.

At least one fragment of V. Vastey’s poetry was reprinted in the collection of poetic jokes and puns by the vaudevillist Armand Henri Ragueneau de la Chainaye (1777–1856)<sup>14</sup> entitled *Brunetiana, recueil dédié à Jocrisse* (1802).<sup>15</sup> Poems signed with the name of Vastey in this collection led one early twentieth-century critic to surmise that “the negro Valentin Vastey, later a Haitian official,” had been intimately involved in the creation of the collection and had been good friends not only with Ragueneau de la Chainaye, but with the vaudevillist Charles Henrion, the “future general

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<sup>13</sup>P. Roux was the official printer, by turns, of Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henry Christophe until 1816 when he was replaced for unknown reasons by one known only as Buon (Tardieu 4–7; Esterquest 174). According to Patrick Tardieu, the curator of Haiti’s Bibliothèque Haïtienne des Pères du Saint Esprit, there were two different P. Roux’s publishing works around the same time period, one in Haiti and one in France (7). Tardieu concludes, nevertheless, that although he believes “they were not the same person, regardless, nothing would stop us from researching any links of ancestry or perhaps the origins of their houses of commerce” (7). Tardieu also reveals that “A third person held the same name, it was one of the signatories of our Declaration of Independence. The biography of the *chef de brigade* Pierre Maximilien Roux, leaves no doubt that he could not have been our printer, because our character [P. Roux, the printer] established himself at Cap beginning in 1791 and finished his career there under King Christophe in Sans-Souci in 1816. The signatory of independence was residing at that time in Port-au-Prince” (7).

<sup>14</sup>Ragueneau de la Chainaye was coincidentally the brother of Alexandre-Louis Ragueneau de la Chainaye (1779–1836) who, according to Brière, was eventually sent to be vice-consul of Cayes in Haiti (72).

<sup>15</sup>Brunet (1766–1853) was a French actor and comedian famous for his “bons mots,” or jokes, according to Ragueneau (see the preface to *Brunetiana* iii, vi), and for starring in Dorvigny’s play *Le Désespoir de Jocrisse* (1798).



Claparède,”<sup>16</sup> and the satirist André Jacquelin, who also appeared in the collection (Plon-Nourrit 326). Plon-Nourrit, the author of this later volume, makes these assertions likely because P.V. Vastey had published numerous poems alongside Jacquelin and Henrion in the short-lived satirical French literary journal *La Mouche*, whose motto was ironically, “Je pique sans blesser” or “I sting without injuring.”

Even with Quérard’s earlier and Plon-Nourrit’s much later linkage of the statesman Baron de Vastey to the poet Pompée Valentin Vastey,<sup>17</sup> what remains missing is, as Chris Bongie has noted, something or someone who can connect the name Pompée Valentin to Baron de Vastey in his own lifetime (*The Colonial System*, 17). Even though catalogs and reviews of Vastey’s works during his lifetime consistently refer to him as Baron de Vastey, by the mid nineteenth century, his publications were starting to be regularly cataloged under the name of Pompée Valentin in England, the United States, and France. This is evidenced in transatlantic context by historic entries in the 1850 edition of Édouard Marie Oettinger’s *Bibliographie Biographique, ou, Dictionnaire de 26.000 Ouvrages* (283), the 1851 catalog of the Bodleian Library at Oxford University (953), and the “Alphabetical Catalog of the Library of Congress,” dating from 1864 (1147). All of which suggests that Vastey only became known as Pompée Valentin after Quérard’s dictionary entry yoked these two names, perhaps erroneously, together. Moreover, Baron de Vastey, had *dozens* of male cousins living in France, any one of whom could have been using the initials V. Vastey or P.V. Vastey to publish poetry. In fact, Vastey had several relatives with the names of Pompée and Valentin, and one of these male cousins was named Jacques Valentin Pompée Vastey. If the Baron de Vastey’s cousin Jacques was the author of the poems in question, this could account for the outlying poem signed J. Vastey (Figs. 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7).

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<sup>16</sup>Michel-Marie Claparède (1770–1842), incidentally, fought in Napoleon’s army as a part of the failed Leclerc expedition (1802–1803), which the First Consul sent to the colony of Saint-Domingue in order to reinstate colonial rule.

<sup>17</sup>William Woodis Harvey, a Methodist preacher, also claimed that Vastey had written some poetry. He wrote, “Another piece had proceeded from his pen, in the form of a play; the object of which was to represent the more remarkable and meritorious parts of Christophe’s life. Whatever were the abilities or acquirements of the author, this piece showed that he was totally unqualified to write dramatic poetry” (222). It is very possible that Harvey had confused Vastey with Juste Chanlatte who did write poetry and had authored several operas.

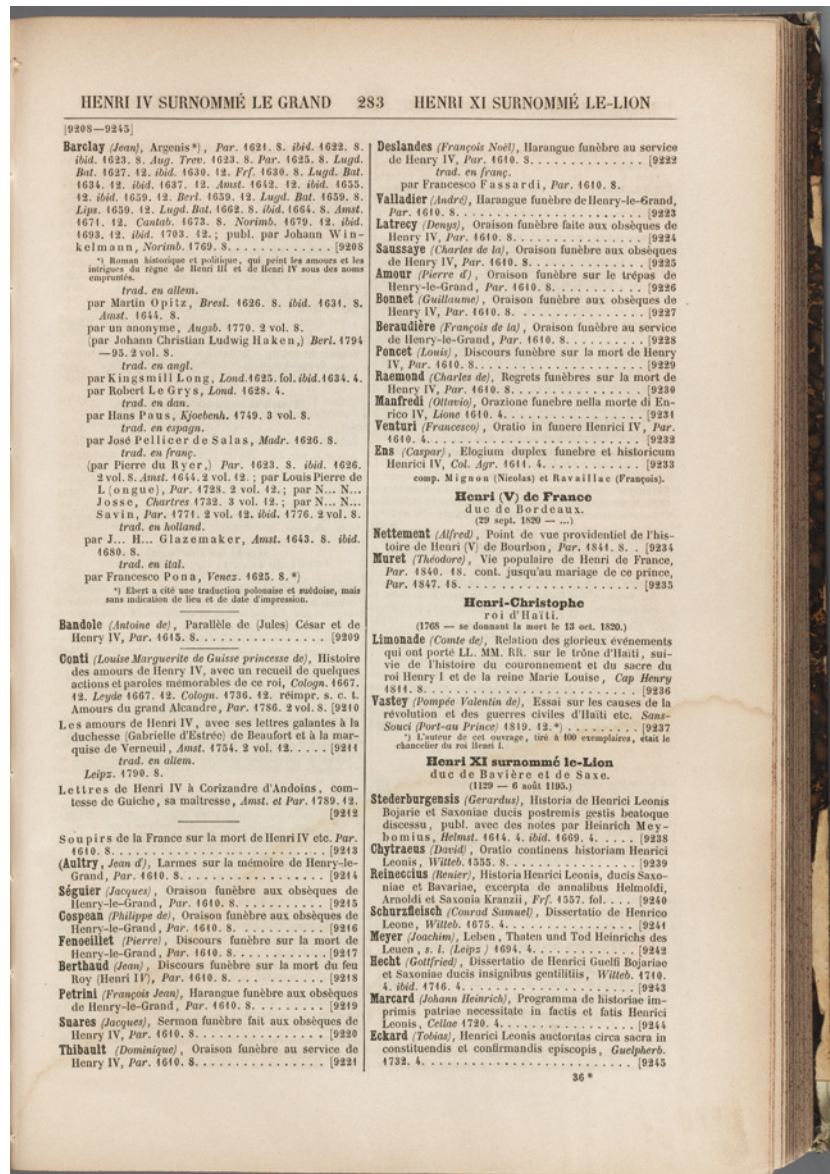


Fig. 2.5 1850 edition of Édouard Marie Oettinger's *Bibliographie Biographique, ou, Dictionnaire de 26.000 Ouvrages*

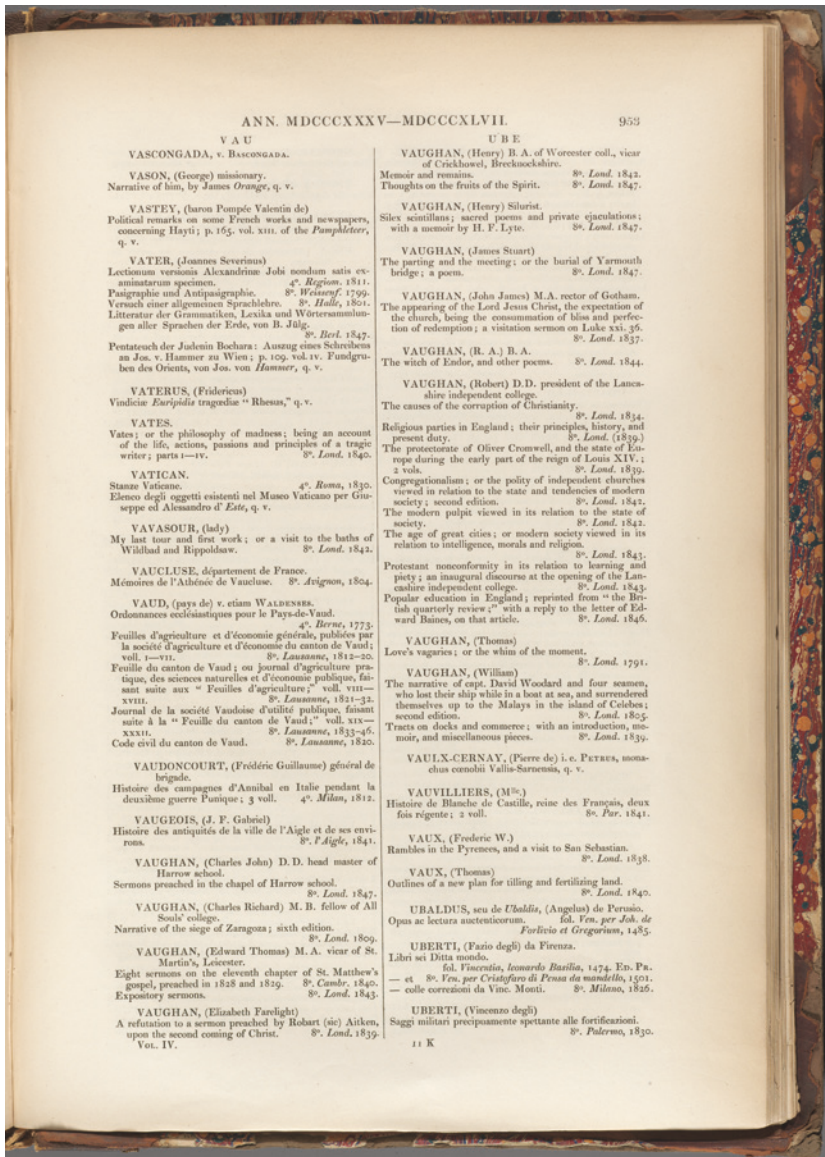


Fig. 2.6 1851 *Catalogus Librorum Impressorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae in Academia* Volume 4



## VARRO.

VARRO, (Marcus Terentius) *De Re Rustica*. 16°. Parisiis, 1543. (Libri de Re Rustica, v. 1.)

VARTHEMA. See BARTHEMA.

VASARI, (Giorgio.) *Opere*. 8°. Milano, 1540.

— Vite de' più eccellenti Pittori, Scultori et Architetti. 3 v. 4°. Bologna, 1647.

— The same. Illustrate con note. 16 v. 8°. Milano, 1807-11.

— Lives of the most eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects. Translated from the Italian, with notes and illustrations, chiefly selected from various commentators, by Mrs. Jonathan Foster. 5 v. 12°. London, 1850-52.

VASSA, (Gustavus.) *Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African*. Written by himself. 12°. Boston, 1837.

VASTEY, (Pompée Valentin, Baron de.) *Essay on the Causes of the Revolution and Civil Wars of Hayti*. 8°. Exeter, (Eng.), 1823.

— Political remarks on some French Works and newspapers concerning Hayti. 8°. London, 1818. (Pamphleteer, v. 13.)

VATER, (Johann Severin.) *Untersuchungen über Amerika's Bevölkerung aus dem Alten Kontinente*. 8°. Leipzig, 1810.

VATTEL, (Emmeric de.) *Droit des Gens, ou principes de la loi naturelle appliqués à la conduite et aux affaires des nations et des souverains*. 3 v. 16°. Londres, (Neuchâtel,) 1758.

— The same. *Nouv. éd.* 2 v. in 1. 4°. Amsterdam, 1775.

— The same. *Nouv. éd.*, par M. de Hoffmanns; précédée d'un Discours sur l'Étude du Droit de la Nature et des Gens, par Sir James Mackintosh. Traduit en Français par M. P. Royer-Collard; avec les notes et table générale par M. S. Pinheiro-Ferreira. 3 v. 8°. Paris, 1835-38.

— Questions de Droit Naturel; et Observations sur le Traité du Droit de la Nature de M. le Baron de Wolf. 12°. Berne, 1762.

— Law of Nations; or, principles of the law of nature applied to the conduct and affairs of nations and sovereigns. From the French. 4th ed. 8°. London, 1811.

— The same. 8°. Northampton, 1820. (4 copies.)

— The same. *New ed.*, by Joseph Chitty. 8°. London, 1834.

— The same. 4th Am. ed., from a new ed. by J. Chitty. 8°. Philadelphia, 1835. (2 copies.)

— The same. 6th Am. ed., from a new

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## VAUGHAN.

ed. by J. Chitty. 8°. Philadelphia, 1844. (4 copies.)

— The same. From the new ed. by J. Chitty; with additional notes and references, by E. D. Ingraham. 8°. Philadelphia, 1852.

— The same. 8°. Philadelphia, 1855.

— The same. 8°. Philadelphia, 1857. (3 copies.)

VATTEMARE, (Alexandre.) *Annual Reports of the Agents to the State of Vermont*. 8°. Montpelier, 1850.

— Exchanges between France and North America. 8°. Paris, 1846.

— Proceedings in the City of Washington relating to Exchanges. 8°. Washington, 1848.

— Report on the Subject of International Exchanges. 8°. Washington, 1848.

— Reports and Resolves of the State of Maine. 8°. Augusta, 1847.

VAUBAN, (Sébastien Leprêtre de.) *Traité de l'Attaque et de la Défense des Places*. 4°. La Haye, 1737.

VAUCIENNES. See LINAGE DE VAUCIENNES.

VAUDORÉ, (J. F.) *Bibliothèque de Législation et de Jurisprudence, pratique, rurale et urbaine*. 3 v. 8°. Paris, 1856.

VAUGHAN, (Henry.) *Sacred Poems and Pious Ejaculations; Sillex Scintillans, etc.* 16°. London, 1858.

VAUGHAN, (John.) *Reports and Arguments in Special Cases in the Court of Common Pleas, 1665 to 1672*. Folio. London, 1706.

VAUGHAN, (Robert.) *Causes of the Corruption of Christianity*. 8°. London, 1834.

— *History of England under the House of Stuart, including the Commonwealth*. (A. D. 1603-1688.) 2 v. 8°. London, 1840.

— John de Wycliffe; a monograph. 8°. London, 1853.

— *Memorials of the Stuart Dynasty, including the constitutional and ecclesiastical History of England*. 2 v. 8°. London, 1831.

— *Revolutions in English History*. 3 v. 8°. London, 1859-63.

Vol. 1. *Revolutions of Race.*  
Vol. 2. *Revolutions in Religion.*  
Vol. 3. *Revolutions in Government.*

VAUGHAN, (Robert Alfred.) *Hours with the Mystics; a contribution to the history of religious opinion*. 2d ed. 2 v. 12°. London, 1860.

VAUGHAN, (William.) *New and Old Principles of Trade compared*. 8°. London, 1788.

— *Memoir of W. Vaughan; with miscellaneous pieces relative to docks, commerce, etc.* 8°. London, 1839.

Fig. 2.7 *Alphabetical Catalog of the Library of Congress* from 1864

The question that remains is whether any of this purely circumstantial evidence can definitively tell us whether or not Vastey authored the poems in question and/or ever used the name Pompée Valentin? Somewhat ironically, the details provided in my earlier attempt to understand the connection between Baron de Vastey and Pompée Valentin Vastey are precisely what has allowed Vastey's biographer, Quevilly, to provide what he believes to be a final answer to this question: "Never in his lifetime, never," Quevilly writes, "was Baron de Vastey known under the pseudonym of Pompée-Valentin." (324).

Although many of Pompée Valentin Vastey's poems that appeared in French journals *after* Haitian independence had been previously published elsewhere or appear to have been merely fragments of his longer and much earlier published book-length works, Pompée Valentin Vastey was almost still certainly in France in the early nineteenth century, particularly in 1808, when Baron de Vastey had already assumed a prominent role in Dessalines and later Christophe's governments as secretary to the Minister of Finance, André Vernet. Gaspard Mollien, for instance, places Vastey at the home of Louis-Félix Boisrond-Tonnerre, secretary to Dessalines, in April of 1804 (23). There is also a document dating from May of 1804 and signed by "Vastey aîné"<sup>18</sup> who is listed as "Le Secrétaire du ministre des finances" to André Vernet. Vernet was the Minister of Finance under Dessalines (*Lois et actes sous le règne de Jean-Jacques Dessalines*, 33). Moreover, in a footnote to his *Essai*, Vastey said he had worked for Vernet, a former owner of slaves himself, who had died in 1813 (Quevilly 95, 282), under not only Dessalines, but Christophe. Vastey wrote, "I was the principal secretary for seven years in the département des Finances et de l'intérieur," which accounts for the years 1804–1811 (*Essai*, 202ftn).

While Vastey was busy assuming his station as a member of the newly minted Haitian state, his poetical counterpart was busy publishing poems in metropolitan France. Only three weeks after the publication of a poem entitled "Satire," published on 26 April 1808 in the *Journal des Arts, de Littérature et de Commerce*, Pompée Valentin Vastey wrote a letter to the editors that appeared in the same journal on 16 May 1808. The letter asks the editors to insert a footnote indicating that the following line from Vastey's own poem was borrowed from a verse by the French

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<sup>18</sup>Vastey's older brother had died by that time, making Vastey the oldest child.

poet Boileau: “The moment of which I speak is already far from me.”<sup>19</sup> Quevilly’s evidence rests primarily on the fact that none of Baron de Vastey’s family members refer to him by the name of Pompée Valentin and that he himself never appears to have used this name in Haiti. Quevilly also relies on this painstakingly constructed timeline that places Baron de Vastey in Haiti at the very moment in which I revealed Pompée Valentin Vastey to have been in France. Quevilly concludes, “One sole argument will destroy at last the thesis whereby Baron de Vastey is the author of the poems published in France. On 16 May 1808, in Paris, our famous V. Vastey published in *Le Journal des Arts* a correction concerning one of his poems that had appeared in the review only a few [weeks] before. That Jean-Louis Vastey, who was at that time first secretary to Minister Vernet in Haiti, could be the author of this corrective is materially impossible” (326).

Even if the issue of whether or not Baron de Vastey ever published poems in Paris under the names of V. Vastey or Pompée Valentin Vastey may be resolved in Quevilly’s eyes, many other questions remain. If it was Quérard who first made the direct link between Baron de Vastey and Pompée Valentin Vastey, what caused or encouraged him to make this association? What was known about the Vastey family’s connection to Saint-Domingue that would make Quérard believe that a French poet would not only remove to independent Haiti, but would be capable of ascending to a high ranking political position under the reign of a king who had been fervently described as anti-French in much of the transatlantic print culture of the Haitian Revolution?<sup>20</sup>

Although there is little that directly links Colombel to this particular error of naming, Colombel is intimately involved in the case of Vastey’s mistaken identity, a case that has everything to do with how Vastey has been read as not only an ideologue, and thus, the very opposite of a humanist, but as a terrorist.

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<sup>19</sup>The line published in P.V. Vastey’s original poem actually reads “Mais l’instant où je parle est déjà loin de moi” or “But the instance of which I speak is already far from me” (line 6).

<sup>20</sup>P.J.V. Vastey was apparently aware of his cousin Vastey’s (Cadet) connection to Christophe (see, Quevilly, 308).



## VASTEY AS TERRORIST

In November 1819, Noël Colombel, who described his own title as “Secrétaire Particulier de S. Ex. Le Président d’Haïti,” published an indignant response to Vastey’s *Essai sur les causes de la Révolution et des guerres civiles d’Hayti*, which had been published earlier that same year. In this pamphlet Colombel accused Vastey of having started a “war of words” [*guerre de plume*] (4) with Alexandre Pétion and later Jean-Pierre Boyer’s governments, and of having perpetuated, in general, “the most virulent” and “incendiary” lies about the southern Republic of Haiti. Colombel also insinuated that Vastey was simply a “mercenary scribe” who “enriched” his pockets “through spying and duplicity.”<sup>21</sup> He further suggested that Vastey, under Christophe’s murderous influence, could only be considered a propagandist who wrote “for his wages under the most ferocious if not the most bloodthirsty of despots” (7). Colombel’s ensuing descriptions of Vastey as a corrupt “scoundrel” would be immediately tied to this subsequent claim about Vastey’s early years. In a passage that is worth quoting at length, Colombel charged Vastey with have been involved in the Reign of Terror that fell upon Nantes in late eighteenth-century France:

Vastey, always following the impulse of his heart and attracted by his natural instinct to scenes where great misfortunes would afflict humanity, where crimes and monstrosities without number were to be committed, found in France at the time of the revolution, called the hour of terror, various theaters, where he was able to put his ferocity to good use. After having actively participated in the massacres of 2nd and 3rd of September<sup>22</sup> and having been among the assassins of those horrid days, he attached himself to such a one as Carrier, who fills our memories with horror. Returning to Nantes with this representative of barbarity, for whom he became a henchman and one of the most vile cronies, he found once again the opportunity to display his *savoir faire* in the arts of Néron or the Borgias. Nantes, because of its proximity to the Vendée, which had become the center of civil war, and was the administrative home of the

<sup>21</sup>Vastey had also used this word “scribe” to defame his enemies when he accused J.J. Dauxion-Lavaysse, a French spy, of being merely a “miserable scribe” (*À Mes concitoyens* 13).

<sup>22</sup>Colombel appears to have his dates mixed up. The *noyades* took place from November of 1793 to February of 1794. Carrier was tried and then convicted on the 2 and 3, respectively, of September 1794 and was subsequently guillotined in December of 1794.

Department, was to be the scene of terrible crimes. Only a little while after the arrival of Carrier in this city, thousands of individuals of both sexes [...] were thrown into prisons. The number of these innocent victims of the *réaction* grew every day with such a frightening rapidity that soon enough the jail could no longer contain them. Out of fear that some of them might escape, and in the absence of having any other place to lock them away, the cannibals of the Carrier clique came up with a way to accelerate their execution by killing a great number of these unfortunates all at once. To that end, they gave recourse to the *bateaux à soupape*<sup>23</sup>; they filled them with wretches who they had consigned to death, after having attached them two by two, woman and man, in what they call in their barbaric language, *les mariages républicains*<sup>24</sup>; afterward they abandoned the floating scaffolds to the river, and in a few short minutes, they were engulfed by the currents.

Colombel goes on to add, “In these days of death and destruction Vastey was under the influence of this murderous power who made everyone tremble!...Vastey was the favorite of Carrier!...What a great opportunity for him to deploy all the arts of his genius. For he was one of the first to disclose the appalling murders of which we have just spoken” (11).

Colombel’s tale about Vastey’s supposed involvement in the infamous *Noyades de Nantes* is shocking on many levels, not the least of which is that if these accusations were ever proven to be accurate, Vastey would only have been twelve years old at the time of his conscription. No, it is much more likely that the Vastey described in Colombel’s work was one of the many Normand relatives of the Baron de Vastey and, perhaps, even the same relative who is the subject of Philippe Goujard’s “L’homme de masse sans les masses ou le déchristianisateur malheureux” (1986).

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<sup>23</sup>The *bateau à soupape* was actually an invention of Carrier’s. In his *Nouveau dictionnaire français*, Richelieu described it as “A simple trap, placed horizontally at the bottom of the boat that could be raised or lowered by means of a hinge...After completely overloading the skiff and having arrived at the destination, one only needed to raise the trap so that an irruption of water would inundate the boat and drown at once the unfortunates who were crammed therein” (qtd. in *L’Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, 1896, 75).

<sup>24</sup>Another invention of Carrier’s (see M. Berriat Saint-Prix as quoted in *L’Intermédiaire et chercheurs curieux*, 1896, 75).

In this impeccably researched article, Goujard catalogs with detailed archival precision what he calls the “politique du terrorisme” of Pierre Julien Valentin Vastey (164), who was a paternal relative of Baron de Vastey’s. Pierre Julien Valentin Vastey (hereafter referred to as P.J.V. Vastey) was the son of Jean-Valentin Vastey’s brother (Pierre Valentin Vastey), and therefore he was Baron de Vastey’s first cousin. P.J.V. Vastey, a functionary in the Pays de Caux, where many of Vastey’s family members on his father’s side resided at the time of the French Revolution (see, Quevilly 2014),<sup>25</sup> is also the author of some of the letters in Quevilly’s possession. While Goujard owns that he had never been able to recover P.J.V. Vastey’s movements during the Revolution of 1789, he does locate his Vastey as an actor in the Reign of Terror that struck the Pays de Caux beginning in November of 1793. Was Colombel’s linkage of Baron de Vastey to the *terrorist* Vastey, then, merely another case of mistaken identity?

The French historian Alfred Lallié gives a detailed description of those closest to Carrier during these fateful events, including Carrier’s apparent spy, Lamberty, a former “adjutant-général” named Fouquet, Laveau, a former prisoner, Robin, “son of a wise woman from Nantes,” O’Sullivan, also a former soldier, and Foucault, who “ordered the last of the massacres” (10). A person named Vastey is not among the names listed.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of whether any of these claims may be true, the declaration that Baron de Vastey had been a *terrorist* in revolutionary France, a story Colombel claims was revealed to him by Vastey himself (Colombel,

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<sup>25</sup>According to Quevilly, Vastey did have a front seat to the events of the French Revolution, but as a spectator rather than an actor. Quevilly writes, “in Rouen, he resided in the shadow of the guillotine, situated only a few dozen meters from his window” (208).

<sup>26</sup>Perhaps it is ironic that even the tale that Goujard weaves out of his archive is plagued by prior biographical errors. In detailing how he came to know the proper first and middle names of the *déchristianisateur* under study in his article, Goujard writes, “In fact, one of the major difficulties that I experienced while undertaking this more biographical research concerns the identity of the personage—just as another rests upon his fate after his release from prison. The scholarly tradition of the late nineteenth century suggests that Vastey was a feudist....In reality, it seems that nothing could be farther from the truth. It was his father, Pierre Valentin, who exercised this profession in Bacqueville-en-Caux....it is possible to believe that our character [P.J.V. Vastey] had been helping his father in his profession as a feudist, and imagined, before the Revolution, that he would succeed him. However, some have confused the father and the son most likely because of the similarity of their first names, which has undoubtedly contributed to this confusion. If the father was called Pierre Valentin, the son was called Pierre Julien Valentin” (160).

*Examen*, 11–12), serves a statist reading of Vastey's works in a variety of profound ways.<sup>27</sup> Colombel uses this biographical detail not only to bolster his general claim about Vastey's essential moral depravity, but to prove his earlier assertion that the Haitian baron was a hagiographic opportunist who tied his fate to whichever power protected and paid him. Colombel wrote, "he is only doing his job, he uses his usual and favorite weapons in order to earn his infamous salary" (8).

As Colombel's charges reveal, there is much more than merely a potential historical or biographical error *in* the politics of Vastey's name. There is also an argument about *who* and *what* kind of person Vastey might have been; and therefore what kind of scholar he was in the past and can be for us today.

### VASTEY AS MERCENARY SCRIBE

In 1815 a pamphlet entitled, *Le Peuple de la République d'Hayti, à Messieurs Vastey & Limonade*, was sent to the northern kingdom of Henry Christophe.<sup>28</sup> The pamphlet styled itself as a response both to a letter written by Julien Prévost (Comte de Limonade), which was published as a part of *L'Olivier de la paix* (1815), and to Vastey's *Le Cri de la patrie* (1815). In Prévost's letter, which was addressed to Pétion, the Haitian count had urged the president to consent to reunite his republic under the rule of Christophe as their mutual and sovereign king. Alluding to the affair of Dravermann, Agoustine Franco de Médina, and J.J. Dauxion-Lavaysse,<sup>29</sup> the three French spies sent by France to the

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<sup>27</sup>In contrast, the notion that Vastey had been an enslaved person, promulgated by many nineteenth-century reviewers of his work, has served non-statist readings, principally by portraying Vastey as one who had been wholly humanized not only by his self-taught literacy, but by Haitian independence.

<sup>28</sup>The pamphlet was signed by several dozen men living in Pétion's republic, including, Bazelais, Boyer, Magny, Borgella, B. Inginac, and D. Chanlatte (Juste Chanlatte's brother). Ardouin, however, identifies this pamphlet as having been authored by Sabourin under the orders of Pétion (8: 153–154).

<sup>29</sup>There is a discrepancy in the spelling of Lavaysse's name. Sometimes Vastey spells his name Lavayasse, for example, which is one of the spellings we find in the *Gazette royale d'Hayti* and which is the spelling adopted by some nineteenth-century reviewers of his *Voyages aux Iles de Trinidad, de Tobago, & de Paris* (1813) (see, for example, "Professor Rudolph's Elements of Physiology," 165; and volume 5 of Joseph Sabin's *Bibliotheca Americana*, 1873, 233). I have adopted the spelling Lavaysse because that is the way the French spy's name was spelled in a work he himself published in 1813 entitled, *Voyage aux*

island after the Bourbon Restoration to promote dissension between Pétion and Christophe and to gather information that would help France to recover the erstwhile colony, Prévost wrote that the recent events that had transpired between Haiti and France regarding these spies required the reunification of the Haitian people under one leader<sup>30</sup>: “The schemes of Haiti’s implacable enemies having been discovered,” Prévost argued, “can no longer allow Haitians any hesitation with respect to reuniting, and we must compose a massive force capable of defeating as swiftly as possible the next attacks with which our oppressors threaten us” (3). Prévost went on to say that it had been their ability—the constituents of Pétion and Christophe—to briefly unify in order to ward off the French that had secured continuing freedom from colonial rule for both Haitis: “Have you forgotten that it was only by reciprocal Haitian aid that the French were driven from Port-au-Prince and other places in the island?” (6). Yet, despite what seemed like a friendly overture from the north to the south—Prévost writes, “come, hasten to us our brothers, Blacks and Yellows; come, and you will be welcomed with open arms by our mutual father....King Henry only has one enemy: white French ex-colonists” (2)—the response from the south was not favorable.

The collectively signed letter to Vastey and Prévost unequivocally stated that the inhabitants of the southern republic would rather die than find themselves under the rule of Christophe: “we must repeat it, we have no desire for royal peace with your master, we do not desire any communication with him; we declare once again in the presence of God, in front of the entire universe, that we will never subject ourselves to the French nor to him, and we will never bow our haughty republican heads under the yoke of anyone, whomever that shall be” (7).

Part of the reason for this ire against Christophe—of whom the authors of the letter write, “At least, Christophe is not Haitian. He is

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*Iles de Trinidad, de Tabago [sic], de la Marguerite, et dans divers parties de Vénézuëla, dans l'Amérique méridionale, par J.J. Dauxion Lavaysse.*

<sup>30</sup>According to the testimony of Franco de Médina, who was captured and interrogated by Christophe’s government in the fall of 1814, the three spies were sent to the island at the request of a letter they received in June of 1814, signed by Malouet (Vastey, rpt. in *Essai* 62). Médina was supposed to go to the northern part of the island, Draevermann to the south, and Dauxion-Lavaysse was supposed to stay in Jamaica to await a response from Pétion (rpt. in *Essai* 71).

a foreigner; this is without a doubt the reason for which he plagues [the country] with death and destruction" (2)—was almost certainly, at least in part, the insulting manner in which Vastey spoke of Pétion in *Le Cri de la patrie*. Not only did Vastey accuse Pétion of harboring a secret hatred towards "negroes" (*Patrie* 5) but he claimed that Pétion had a desire to be French, which for Vastey meant a desire to be "white." Vastey wrote, "Ah! Pétion, you are more French than white French people even" (*Patrie* 15). Perhaps, more seriously, Vastey had also claimed that Pétion had directly colluded with France in that country's failed attempt to restore French rule over independent Haitians.<sup>31</sup> Addressing himself directly to Pétion's constituents, on this score, Vastey said, "Haitians, my brothers of both colors, who did not have the intention to sell their citizens like general Pétion, read all of the newspapers and printed works published in Port-au-Prince under his orders" (16).

This "war of words," to use Colombel's phrase, which is at the heart of statist readings of Vastey's works, would continue all the way until the latter's death in 1820. In a separate pamphlet published in June of 1815, *Le Cri de la conscience, ou réponse à un écrit, imprimé au Port-au-Prince, intitulé Le Peuple de la République d'Hayti à Messieurs Vastey & Limonade*, Vastey responded to the letter addressed to him and Limonade/Prévost. In this response Vastey once again absolved his southern "compatriots" (5) of any involvement in what he saw as the crimes of Pétion vis-à-vis the three French spies: "Oh, no, it was not you, the work of a monster can not be imputed to all" (*Conscience* 11). For Pétion, however, no such absolution was in sight. Vastey wrote, "...the more I learn about the character of Pétion, the more I find him to be an unconscionable monster" (*Conscience* 31).

Enter Jules Solime Milscent, editor of the first Haitian review, *L'Abeille haytienne* and his sometimes collaborator, Colombel. In his *Essai*, Vastey had sharpened his verbal knives when he wrote that Milscent and Colombel, along with a series of "natives [*indigènes*], whose skin colors may have been black or yellow, but whose characters and principles were as white as that of the white French ex-colonists," (22) should be "treated like the ex-colonists, worse even, because they are traitors; they deserve to be slaves...we could only hope for as much!" (23).

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<sup>31</sup>As evidence for this claim, Vastey described the contents of a pamphlet written under the "baroque name of Columbus," which he said had urged among other things, less ire towards the French (*Patrie* 57).



One of the principal reasons behind Vastey's manifest and even poisonous ire was that Milscent's review, *L'Abeille haytienne*, published twice per month from 1817 to 1820, contains page after page of damning testimony against Christophe. In the second issue of the periodical, dated 16 August 1817, the editors write, "Hardly a week goes by without some of Christophe's people coming to rally behind the banner of the Republic [of the South]. It has only been a few days since more than twenty of these unfortunates came to live among us; they painted a horrific portrait of the state of degradation and misery under which that despotic *Bacha du Cap* holds the people of the north" (12). This kind of incriminating rhetoric was often deployed not only against Christophe himself, but was often directed toward anyone associated with his monarchy. Of Christophe's nobility, the editors of *L'Abeille Haytienne* write in the issue dated 16 September 1817, "these nobles who were invented right next door to us amount merely to minions doing the bidding of Christophe. If there exist among them some men of good faith, they must be at constant war with their consciences. By accumulating privileges and riches for themselves, they have stripped their unfortunate compatriots of the most sacred rights and have condemned them to a new slavery" ("Suite des Considérations" 4). The same article continues, "this elect nevertheless gives the impression that they have all the comforts of liberty; they are free without a doubt, but at the cost of their serf brothers... who are so oppressed that they cannot even hear the voice that calls them to rally under the banners of the Republic, which is our mother and theirs" (4).

As if the discursive assaults that filled the pages of *L'Abeille haytienne* were not enough to get out the message about the putatively ineffective and despotic rule of Christophe, in 1818 Colombel published a pamphlet entitled, *Réflexions sur quelques faits relatifs à notre existence politique*. Here, Colombel not only accused Christophe of ordering the murders of pregnant women, but he charged the Haitian king with having almost killed his own infant son simply because the baby was crying: "His own son, Monseigneur le Prince Victor, when he was only a few months old," Colombel writes, "was sleeping in the room where his father slept. The baby, experiencing some need, started to cry. Furious that the cries of his noble progeny had interrupted his slumber, [Christophe] rushed upon the poor royal offspring, like a madman, grabbed him by one leg and was going to throw him out the window when someone, who was right next to him, stopped his arm and prevented him from committing infanticide" (13).

In many respects, Vastey's *Essai*, while providing a general survey of Haitian history that could combat European representations, is also a direct response to the competing *histories* of Christophe's kingdom produced in the pages of *L'Abeille haytienne* and in the works of Colombel. Vastey spends a considerable amount of time discussing both Milscent and Colombel and what he viewed as the various calumnies they were spreading through their writing. One particular mention of both journalists in Vastey's *Essai* deserves more attention than the others precisely because it provides the perfect context needed to understand Milscent and Colombel's own statist readings of Vastey's works:

*Le Cri de la conscience* has never received, in the latest writings from Port-au-Prince, a response from our antagonists. They limited themselves to saying that it was a simple diatribe, fabricated in Sans-Souci; I agree with them that it is much easier to use this epithet than to be able to respond to it. (*Essai*, 300)

In other words, Vastey charges his detractors with using words like "scribe" and "ideologue" precisely so that they will not have to fully engage with his charges against them.

Although Vastey appeared to believe that Milscent and Colombel were behind the publication of *Le Peuple de la République*, Colombel and Milscent, who were not among the signatories of the document, denied any involvement. Colombel, in particular, claimed to have been in France at the time of the affair of Dravermann, Médina, and Lavaysse, and Colombel directly refuted the notion that he had returned to Haiti with the latter as a part of the Bourbon espionage (one of Vastey's charges against him) and declared that he was at that time totally "ignorant" of all political affairs in Haiti (22). Colombel's explanation of his whereabouts is in some senses supported by a brief biographical detail in a footnote written by Joseph Saint-Rémy in *Mémoires du Général Toussaint Louverture, écrits par lui-même* (1853), who notes that Colombel did not arrive back to Haiti from France until 1816 (129ftn). Nevertheless, if Vastey was dismayed to have never received an answer to *Le Cri de la conscience*, in November of 1819, Colombel certainly provided a spirited *réponse* to the former's *Essai* by publishing his *Examen d'un pamphlet, Ayant pour titre: Essai Sur les Causes de la Révolution et des Guerres Civiles d'Haïti, Etc.*

True to its title, Colombel, who claimed to have penned this work hastily and in a mere matter of days (1819, iiftn), described his motive for having undertaken such a project: “we must confess to [Vastey] that our conclusion about his work,” Colombel wrote, “which is our object of study, is that it does not have any of the qualities that characterize a history; that we find on the contrary, that there are only libels, those of a most virulent and incendiary pamphlet...” (6). While Colombel would go on to accuse Vastey of producing with his *Essai* “elaborate sophistries, erroneous conclusions, and slanderous and untrue assertions,” (10) the opening material of his *Examen* was actually devoted to describing Vastey as a morally bereft “mercenary scribe” who wrote merely at the behest of Christophe. In contrast, Colombel wrote that “my compatriot Milscent and I...do not write to please anyone in power, or out of this or that consideration, but only to promote the truth and to do so under the inspiration of our conscience” (7). Colombel is likely the first reviewer to suggest that the baron’s œuvre had merely been written under the orders of the state. As such, it is important to recognize Colombel as a crucial part of the genesis of contemporary statist readings of Vastey’s works.

The personal anecdotes that Colombel provides as evidence for his defamation of Vastey, including his claim that the baron had once admitted, “yes, I am a scoundrel” (9), promotes a picture of Vastey as the sort of “scribe” described by more contemporary critics, but that Vastey would primarily come to be known as *after* his death. As Chap. 3 of this volume will show, *during* his life (and for a long time afterward in anti-slavery and anti-racism circles), Vastey was considered to have been a voice of reason about anti-slavery issues and his writings were often used as examples of black humanity. Before moving on to consider how Colombel’s reading of Vastey flies against the grain of most prior nineteenth-century reviews of his œuvre, it is important to briefly set up the ways that humanist readings of Vastey’s works, which abounded *during* his lifetime, particularly in the transatlantic abolitionist movement, were undone by the kinds of statist readings performed by Colombel and that were reproduced largely *after* Vastey’s lifetime.

After Vastey’s execution in the fall of 1820, an entire cadre of historians and other chroniclers emerged, not only to banalize Vastey by claiming the unimportance, incoherence, and essential unreliability of his works, but to assault the baron’s character in a manner that eerily resembles Colombel’s writing. Starting with William Woodis Harvey’s

*Sketches of Hayti: From the Expulsion of the French, to the Death of Christophe* (1827), Vastey's career as an author once again became linked to the charge of terrorism. As in the case of Colombel's similar accusation, this judgment would come largely as the result of determinations about Vastey's personality rather than the contents of his writing. Harvey wrote, "Had the character of Vastey been as consistent, as his abilities were respectable, he would have deserved our admiration; but this unhappily was not the case. His fierceness, his duplicity, and his meanness, rendered him at once despicable and odious. He cheated whenever an opportunity offered, and afterwards boasted of his dishonesty. The hatred which he entertained for whites of all nations rendered him sometimes an object of terror" (223). Harvey goes on to charge Vastey not only with the monstrous crime of having "wantonly imbrued his hands in the blood of his nurse" (223), but with having "during the struggle for liberty [of Haitians]...coolly assisted in the massacre of thousands," which "he alone was capable of executing" (224).

While both James Franklin who published *The Present State of Hayti* in 1828 and Charles Mackenzie in his two-volume *Notes on Haiti: Made During a Residence in that Republic* (1830) also throw proverbial shade on Vastey's character and reliability (Franklin, 91–92; Mackenzie, 7, 84, 92), in 1842 James Candler more forcefully linked Vastey's purportedly depraved psychology to the supposedly unreliable content of his works. In his *Brief Notices on Hayti*, Candler wrote that Vastey was "a man of respectable literary acquirements, as his history of Hayti shows, but of a base and dishonorable disposition" (37). A manuscript entitled, "The Last Days of Christophe," published in March of 1856 and purportedly written by one of Christophe's former physicians, Jabez Sheen Birt, continued to paint Vastey as morally bereft: "The fiend Vastey died a miserable coward, as he had lived a tyrannical villain. I never knew a man more generally detested" (803).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>The note preceding this work published in *Littell's Living Age* notes that "the manuscript is furnished us by Mr. B.P. Hunt, a leading merchant at Port-au-Prince, and one of the most intelligent and cultivated of his calling in any country." The explanatory remarks lead to a second note by Hunt who detailed "the circumstances under which it came into his possession:" "The manuscript narrative of the death of Christophe, which I placed in your hands a few days since, was copied by me from the original about twelve years ago, at Cape Haytien. I found it in the hands of a shipmaster. The only account which he could give of it was, that it had been presented to him by a Haytian merchant of Port-au-Prince

Vastey's reputation, perhaps less surprisingly, was also surrounded by questions marks in metropolitan France. In 1819 a reviewer from the *Bibliothèque universelle* wrote of his *Réflexions politiques*,

The author is, as you can believe, under the influence of an extreme rancor against the nation of France, in general, and against the writers who have acknowledged the possibility of a return of another order of affairs than that which currently exists in the kingdom of Haiti. This writing is almost from one end to the other, a violent diatribe against the French, the ex-colonists, and certain individuals who played a role in Saint-Domingue. The work seems principally designed to encourage in the heart of the young royal prince a vigorous hatred against anyone who could attempt to bring a system of oppression back to the colony. ("Civilisation" 58–59)

The French explorer Gaspard-Théodore Mollien penned a history of Haiti published in 1830 in which he not only detailed the supposed involvement of Vastey in several lugubrious Christophean plots, including spying, laughing at indiscriminate murder, and assassination attempts (Mollien 2: 23, 119, 157–158), but he also connected two of Vastey's writings to the kind of statist reading performed in Colombel's work. Mollien wrote that after Pétion had himself re-elected as Président in 1815, "Christophe could no longer take it; he ordered his secretaries, Dupuy, Vastey, [and] Préseaux [sic], to destroy his adversary with the stroke of their pens; the presses of Sans-Souci, of Cap, of the Citadelle, would henceforth only be used to print 'le cri de la conscience,' 'le cri de la patrie'" (2: 136).

The connection between Vastey's personal character and the character of his writing also found its way into mid-nineteenth-century Haitian-produced historiography, almost certainly because of the pervasiveness of the transatlantic print culture of the Haitian Revolution. Indeed, as I have elsewhere written, Vastey was the most discussed Haitian author of the early to mid-nineteenth century (Daut, *Tropics* 136). Passages concerning Vastey from the writings of mid-nineteenth-century's Haiti's

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whose father, an American, had been in trade at Cape Haytien in the time of Christophe. This narrative is anonymous, but the text shows that it was written by one of the king's physicians, and on the making of inquiries of a Mr. Castel, an old officer of Christophe's household, I learned that the king had two physicians—namely, the Baron Stewart, a Scotchman, and the Chevalier Bird [sic]. The latter was no doubt the author" (799).

most important historians Thomas Madiou, Beaubrun Ardouin, and Joseph Saint-Rémy, are so telling with respect to how often they repeat, extend, and attempt to legitimate statist readings of Vastey's works that they are worth quoting at length. Beginning with Madiou, in volume five of his *Histoire d'Haïti*, the Haitian historian writes of Vastey, whom Madiou called "l'organe du Roi" (5: 421):

Among the most prominent of those who made up his entourage, reports indicate that the most cruel and the most perfidious were above all generals Richard and Joachin and Baron de Vastey. This last, educated, industrious, [and] effective, made himself indispensable to Christophe who only kept him closest, over all of the rest, because of his talents. Vastey, *homme de couleur*, had even tried to bring down Prévost and Dupuy, of whom he was jealous. He slandered and defamed them. He was feared by families throughout Cap[-Haïtien], because they regarded him as the most dangerous of the king's spies. He was often evil merely for the sake of being evil, without even being able to obtain any immediate advantage. (5: 240)

Ardouin tied Vastey's corruption, for his part, not merely to the reign of Henry Christophe, but also to that of the Emperor Dessalines. In volume 6 of his *Études sur l'Histoire d'Haïti*, Ardouin writes,

Most likely, the emperor had recognized that the corruption or negligence of certain functionaries had *compromised* the rights of public domain, and that the properties of the ex-colonists had passed into the hands of persons who were not qualified to receive them. But, in requiring a new justification of titles to be brought to the minister of finance, who was incapable on his own of understanding this material, he had to send the property owners back before Vastey, the author of this corruption of which we speak; this was, in effect, to give [Vastey] the ability to arbitrarily impose bribes upon the proprietors, even those who were entitled to a claim. (1856, 6: 164)

Later, in the same volume Ardouin paints Vastey, under Dessalines, as an opportunist, if not a manipulative thief:

It must be said that Dessalines was often of the most cheerful humor, and that he liked to amuse himself by playing jokes, whether with words or with actions, which were inappropriate for the rank he occupied. For example, recognizing the incompetence of General Vernet, as minister of finance, he said one day: 'My poor comrade only spends his time making lunch and making love; he relies entirely on Vastey whose purse is filling more every day.' (240)



Nevertheless, Ardouin, while recognizing Vastey's superior capabilities as a writer and historian, also, like Madiou, tied the former's publications to statist rather than humanist aims. Ardouin concluded, "Vastey published the best of his writing in *Réflexions*, in the form of a letter to a colonist named Mazères, on the topic of Blacks and Whites, etc. But counter to the ardent republicanism of H[érard] Dumesle,<sup>33</sup> it was accompanied by all the platitudes of a mind subject to the yoke of an atrocious tyrant." (8: 254)

Saint-Rémy was even more ardent in his criticisms of Vastey than Madiou and Ardouin. In volume 4 of his *Pétion et Haïti* (1857), citing the previous listed passage from Harvey as evidence of Vastey's character, Saint-Rémy wrote, "Vastey was himself one of the most corrupt and corrupting of men." (103)<sup>34</sup> While in volume 5 of the same work published in 1864, Saint-Rémy described Vastey (along with Juste Chanlatte) as one of Christophe's "monsters who merely doled out pompous praise" for the Haitian king in his writings because he sought to "save his own life" (5: 48).

Perusing contemporary criticism of Vastey produces a qualitatively similar narrative. Vastey's own twenty-first-century biographer, Laurent Quevilly, for instance, appears to believe Vastey's most ardent critics when he calls the baron an "idéologue implacable" (244). The baron as ideologue has also been the conclusion drawn by many of those who find his works of the utmost importance for Haitian studies. Jean Casimir refers to Vastey as "the most important ideologue," (2013, 17) while the literary critic Doris Garraway has variously called Vastey Christophe's "principal polemicist" ("Empire of Freedom" 9) and "the leading ideologue and apologist for Christophe's kingdom." ("Empire of Freedom" 10) Vastey is similarly characterized in the work of Nick Nesbitt who has written that Vastey's *Le Système* "might ultimately be called an ideological war machine rather than a scientific critique" ("Afterword" 296;

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<sup>33</sup>Dumesle was the author of a lyric prose poem entitled, *Voyage dans le nord d'Hayti ou révélation des lieux et des monuments historiques* (1824).

<sup>34</sup>Ralph T. Esterquest also appears to have been influenced by Harvey when he concludes of Vastey, "His writings show an intensity of love for the blacks and a fierce hatred of all whites" (178). Esterquest had elsewhere appeared to praise Vastey when he wrote, "The productions of the Royal Press [of Christophe] never got beyond the national propaganda stage, and yet, at least one royal author gave promise of literary ability, and it was the Royal Press that gave his writings to the world of books" (173).

*Caribbean Critique* 177). David Geggus has been more obviously critical of *Le Système* when he suggests, “Vastey’s book is a litany of atrocity stories, which indicts a large portion of Saint-Domingue’s famous names. As such it is easy to dismiss as a propaganda piece.” (“The Caradeux” 240) The celebrated historian, David Nicholls, also labored to produce Vastey as “the official ideologist and apologist of the kingdom” (1979, 43).

The idea of Vastey as mere ideologue, in fact, has become the filter through which most scholars see all of Vastey’s œuvre. Chris Bongie, for example, has produced several such statist readings of Baron de Vastey’s writing, among them a chapter in his 2008 book *Friends and Enemies*. After referencing Colombel’s categorization of Vastey as a “mercenary scribe,” (qtd. in Bongie, *Friends* 32) Bongie proposes that both Vastey and Colombel, “double the rival politicians in whose name they speak.” Bongie further argues that Colombel’s explication of the relationship of Vastey’s writing to the rule of Christophe “has much to tell us about the mutual dependency of (hierarchical) politics and (scribal) writing.” “In the case of the two Haitis’ deferent scribes and their political masters,” he writes, “this dependency is so obvious that it is virtually impossible for us to recuperate either writer as an ‘autonomous’ intellectual (much less a stylistically interesting author)” (*Friends* 32).

In the preface to his translation of *The Colonial System Unveiled* (2014), Bongie continues with this primarily scribal line of inquiry by writing that Vastey is: “Neither a recognizable *author* nor a producer of ‘authentically’ Haitian culture.” Instead, “Vastey as scribe exemplifies the discomfiting interstitial forms of ‘literary life’ that flourished in post/revolutionary Haiti” (9). Later in the volume, Bongie argues that we can *only* understand “Vastey as a *scribe*...that is to say as a writer whose subject-position can only with the greatest of difficulty be conceived of apart from the sovereign power it serves” (31). Bongie’s evidence for this claim is a letter written to Christophe by the British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson on 20 July 1820. The letter provides Christophe with explicit instructions to give to Vastey in order for the latter to pen a *new* work about the Haitian kingdom that would show the monarchy and its people in a positive light. “Permit me to say a few words more,” Clarkson writes,

concerning this little work, which, though little, I consider to be of great importance. In the first place it must be written by the Baron de Vastey. No one of your Majesty’s friends in England could write it, because all the documents are in Hayti; and no person could write it, who had not

witnessed the whole process of the improvement which has taken place in your Dominions, or who had not seen the wonderful change, which has been produced from the beginning of your Majesty's reign to the present time. Secondly, it should contain *a plain* statement of facts, without any extravagant embellishment from the flowery powers of oratory. Thirdly, it should be written in the most modest manner, and with the greatest temperance. Fourthly, nothing should be mentioned in it concerning Protestantism or any intended change of religion. Nothing of a political nature should appear in it. No reflection should be made upon France: indeed it would be better not to mention France at all, except in a respectful manner. (qtd. in Bongie, *The Colonial System* 34)

Bongie, who reprints a great deal of the letter, concludes, "What I hope emerged from my purposely detailed rendering of Clarkson's obsessively precise instructions is a clear sense of the institutional framework within which Vastey's œuvre was produced—or, in other words, a clear sense of the *scribal* conditions that...must be the starting point for any appraisal of him as a writer" (35).

We must remember, however, not simply that these instructions were given to Christophe only *after* Vastey had already produced 11 prose works that had circulated widely in the Atlantic World, but that Clarkson's mandates are actually themselves a *response* to Vastey's writings. While Bongie has linked these instructions to speculation about Clarkson's reading of *Le Système*, the British abolitionist is, at least in theory, responding to all of Vastey's written works by urging Christophe to instruct Vastey *not* to publish the kinds of works that he had already published. Vastey's publications, on the whole, perform every forbidden foible that Clarkson warned against, particularly, the *disrespectful manner* in which France is discussed throughout Vastey's writings, which Bongie acknowledged (*The Colonial System* 35). The letter itself, thus, suggests that Vastey's writings had not been entirely statist, even if commissioned by Christophe. Clarkson is clearly inferring that Christophe had not been able to properly rein in or instruct Vastey and that he *should have*. In fact, Vastey's already published response to previous calls for him to self-censor allows us to imagine precisely how he would have responded to Clarkson's later directives. In *Le Système* Vastey wrote, "What? They have had the right to publish base fabrications about us for centuries [...]! And good God! Now that we are capable of avenging and enlightening, you say that we do not have the right because we might offend white people, in general? What a miserable sophism, an absurd puerility!" (95).

Yet, in the end, the principal issue with *statist* readings of Vastey's works remains, as the next chapter will aim to show, that he was primarily read in this manner *after* Colombel's problematic and suspect designation of Vastey not merely as a "mercenary scribe" but as a terrorist. Much to the contrary, most readers prior to Colombel's published response to the *Essai*, who had no putative personal knowledge of Vastey's personality or character, read his works as the greatest expression of humanism and anti-slavery thought to have emerged in the Black Atlantic world. These early readings, in turn, greatly influenced nineteenth-century abolitionist accounts of Vastey's life and works in the broader transnational African American intellectual tradition.

What accounts, then, for the gap between the *statist* readings performed largely *after* his death by nineteenth-century travel writers, most of whom claimed to have known him or to have received first-person testimony about him, and the *humanist* readings performed largely during his lifetime by people who did not personally know him and only had his writings alone to guide their perceptions of his works? If, in fact, the error of Vastey's name may have unleashed the *statist* criticisms of his personal history enumerated by some nineteenth-century authors and repeated by many twentieth- and now twenty-first-century critics, Vastey's supposed immorality has negatively affected the importance of his writing.

Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic  
Humanism

Daut Zaka, M.L.

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