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Leonora Sansay Anatomic Imagination

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LEONORA SANSAY'S ANATOPIC IMAGINATION

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anatopism, *n.*

Pronunciation: /əʊnætəpɒz(ə)m/

Etymology: < Greek ἀνά up + τόπος a place + -ism suffix.

rare.

A putting of a thing out of its proper place, a faulty arrangement.

1812 S. T. Coleridge *Lit. Remains* (1836) I. 317 In arranging which [books] the

puzzled librarian must commit an anachronism in order to avoid an anatopism.

a1859 T. De Quincey *Memorial Chronol. in Wks.* (1871) XVI. 72 Geographical

blunders, or what might be called *anatopisms*.¹

Chris Castiglia has recently described how conflicts in nineteenth-century America were resolved by transposing external social problems into dilemmas of interiority. Thus, the great social reform movements of the 1830s and 1840s (abolition, temperance, sexuality) levied the primary responsibility for both the maintenance and transformation of civic ideals on individual self-governance. Such auto-orthopedics was often accompanied by mobility (slaves from south to north; drunkards from the bar to the home, onanists from privacy to the light of public scrutiny). The reforming subject was dually unsettled: neurotically hypervigilant as well as out of place. A Foucaultian reading would see such interiority as containing, as productive of manageable subjects and tamed identities.² I want to suggest that in the particular regional configuration of the Caribbean Sea and its chronically unstable colonial centers, this self-witnessing out of placeness was not so ideologically closed.

Leonora Sansay based *Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo* on the roughly 18 months she spent in preindependent Haiti between the fall of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the collapse of French rule toward the end of 1803. More than 30 years before Herman Melville's Ishmael would "keep the open independence of [the] sea" to escape "the treacherous, slavish shore," Sansay's protagonists wrestle with the contrary demands of place and placelessness in a moment of intense sociopolitical upheaval. In this struggle, the intimate interior of selfhood must constantly negotiate with the external social order in which that self operates and is recognized.³ Within this peculiar experience of selfhood, Sansay's characters, as one might expect, misplace their desires, confusing personal and social aspirations. Though Sansay's novel is not an obvious reform novel, neither abolitionist nor feminist, in its formal experimentation with a place both within (interiority) and between (mobility), it opens up the possibility that interiority need not simply conform to structural demand, but might also enable inventive self-fashioning and perhaps even approach freedom. At stake here is a richer sense of diasporic identity, one that is able to recode the trauma of physical displacement. This recoding may not cast what has been left behind in terms of loss, mourning, and relief or what lies ahead as compensatory, full of hope, or to be dreaded. Instead, we might add and appreciate the gap in-between departure and arrival to find politically charged moments of self-reflection that are then manifested in the creative arts.

One might understandably question why vexed white subjectivities ought to concern us when the history of the slave revolt on St. Domingue and its Black constituents remain underappreciated in the United States. But what Sansay points toward, if not accomplishes, in *Secret History* is an ethic not grounded in liberal theories of sympathy or enlightened paternalism, but rather one that emerges at the limits of self-consciousness and at the abyss of the Other. Such an ethic could only emerge in the interstices of geopolitics and, at the level of the subject, the body. This body in between, a subject unbound by prior codings of self-understanding, is what emerges in anatomic geographies.

Studies of place, geography, or architecture have generally concentrated on how place manufactures private and social experience. Equally compelling ought to be the instability of place since many places are semiotically as well as materially unstable. The colonial Americas represent this well considering that its urban centers and frontiers frequently exchanged imperial handlers and in the rare case of Haiti, completely overcame colonial submission. Here, multiplicity is not

latent—as in an archaeological dig site and its historical layering—but to varying degrees manifest. Add in the temporal element of rapid transformations, innovations, and reappropriations during periods of revolution, and we may better appreciate the challenges of fixing the semiotic coding of these particular spaces.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most studies of geography in these terms have aimed to reveal the social construction of place and its service to ideologies of nation, political economy, and empire. Such privileging, however, misses the mark when considering a place like St. Domingue/Haiti, or perhaps any other space in the midst of a state of exception, a crisis—like the revolution—where the norms and juridical rules become invalid, are in fact suspended by the dominant authority with the aim of self-preservation.⁴ As Agamben and others have explained, post 9/11 America may represent an era where such states of exception have become permanent, where transgression of law in the name of the law becomes the new norm. St. Domingue certainly *was used* in this way in other parts of the slaveholding Americas, its spectacular violence referenced to enact harsher penal codes for slaves, changes in law concerning importation, migration, and naturalization of foreigners, and the rereading of founding documents like the US Constitution as evidence of foundational hypocrisy. But what of the place itself?

The island of Hispaniola, like many of the Caribbean islands, had no indigenous population. The Carib and Arawak Indians, who migrated to the island prior to European colonization, were wiped out by the Spanish conquistadors and disease. Resettlement was coincident with the slave trade and the rise of sugar manufacturing. At the time of the revolution, some five hundred thousand black slaves labored on plantations and in towns governed by a white population of just over thirty thousand and a free black population of twenty-five thousand.

The natural landscape of St. Domingue was also transformed into the largest and most productive sugar manufactory in the New World, at its height producing around 40 percent of the sweetener consumed in Europe. Cap Francois, now Cap Haitien, became the region's busiest port. Figure 7.1 nicely captures a bifocal view of the Cap, the picturesque view from the sea above the bird's-eye technical plan below. Figure 7.2 shows the realization of that plan circa 1786.

Haiti continues to be a landscape in flux. The earthquake is but the most tragic embodiment of its long and complex history and the challenges to stability it has faced: corrupted and violent postcolonial elites, foreign invasion—among these were the US Marines, collapse of agricultural self-sufficiency, and the accompanying migration

of the rural population into already crowded and underresourced cities. Symbolically, we can see this manifest during the revolutionary period with the multiple renamings of the island. Colonial, slaveholding St. Domingue is also St. Domingo (a francophobic transcription). The adoption of Haiti after the revolution is itself a throwback to the original quasi-indigenous Arawak Indian name Ayiti, or mountainous region. Set within this moment of uncertain transformation, Sansay's novel begins with reference to a figure who was somewhat of a palimpsest himself. Sansay's protagonists Clara, her abusive spouse, and her sister Mary arrive on the very day that the black General Toussaint L'ouverture was embarked as prisoner to France. We should recall that Toussaint, a former slave who referred to himself when writing to Napoleon as the first of the blacks addressing the first of the whites, had once allied himself with Spain, but still imagined himself to be French during the era of quasi-independence under his own, self-authorized constitution (1801), a document that ended slavery and declared all citizens both "free and Frenchmen." While free indicates an unbound state of being, what might we make of Toussaint's insistence on Frenchness? At the least, it is clear that Toussaint saw Frenchness and residing in France distinctly. For Toussaint, the French revolutionary ethos remained tied to the state and guaranteed universal emancipation.⁵ Against Toussaint's notion of a cosmopolitan citizenry, emancipated and enfranchised within the French empire, the dominant myth about Toussaint aimed to bury him under the landscape. Such an unsubstantiated, but oft repeated tale appears on the novel's first pages: "A short time before [Toussaint] was taken, he had his treasure buried in the woods, and at the return of the negroes he employed on the expedition, they were shot without being suffered to utter a word" (63).⁶ Though the French have expropriated the labor of slaves to extract and profit from the resources of the land, this anecdote recodes that narrative. Here, Toussaint is the one who has appropriated the wealth of the island and turned it into the mass grave of the slave rebels. This legend is only one attempt to seal the history of the island.⁷

As Ed White and I have argued elsewhere, US citizens reacted to Toussaint and his constitution through a partisanly split prism, with pro-British Federalists viewing Toussaint positively for contesting imperial France, reestablishing state religion, supporting the plantation economy, and embracing trade with US merchants, while Francophile Republicans regarded Toussaint as a monster (though not a barbaric or animalistic one as prior slave rebels had been described). Rather, Toussaint was a "RINO"—Republican in Name Only—one

who had used violence to install himself as governor for life, grant himself the right to name his successor, and consolidate tremendous power in the executive branch. All of these, one should note, were part of the Republican critique of Federalism and, by extension, of the Washington and Adams administrations. Adams and Hamilton promoted the idea of American nobility and the Alien and Sedition Acts prefigured the Patriot Act.⁸ To cite again Lacan's Mobius strip, in the case of the US reception of Haiti, it is nearly impossible to separate reactions to the revolution itself as an event from the domestic politics that were its screen. We might also pause here to note that such reactions were far from the caricature of blanket repudiation of the "Horrors of St. Domingo." Thus titled, Sansay's *Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo* might be read as a pun: the horrors not being the spectacle of race warfare of which all reported events in the novel come second hand, but the depredations of Napoleon's agents on the domestic white population coupled with scenes of unwanted sexual advances and domestic abuse.⁹ In this way, Sansay redirects the legend of Toussaint's treasure. In her revision, the white Creoles are the victims along with the pillaged landscape. While the Creoles's interests are neglected, the native French "appear to regard the Island as a place to be conquered and divided among the victors." They have come to St. Domingue "to make a fortune and to return to France with all possible speed, to enjoy it" (66). As much as the revolution is about black violence, it also turns on the divestment of the white Creoles. Much later in the novel, this is underscored when a young Creole is murdered for failing to turn over twenty thousand dollars to the French treasury. He is killed by his friend, who Mary castigates for carrying out the sentence rather than resign his army commission. Feydon falls into his grave, but remains alive and begs for the soldier to "finish" him, a gory reminder that what is buried may not remain underground.

We may struggle to find Haiti here at all, lost in the shuttling of the novel's gaze back and forth from ballroom to battlefield. But rather than see Haiti as an occluded geography, and thereby question the historical value of Sansay's text, we might consider the novel's unstable, shifting gaze to be itself indicative of place. Particularly helpful here is the work of Doreen Massey, professor of geography at the Open University, United Kingdom, who writes of material space as a "sphere of multiple trajectories."¹⁰ She calls for an "imaginative opening up of space . . . to refuse that flipping of the imaginative eye from modernist singular temporality to postmodern depthlessness; to retain at least some sense of the contemporaneous multiple becomings" as

space is examined as something more than a surface and more than record of the past. Massey's conception of space invites us to think just about how many semiotic and historical codings can coexist in a single space, some privileged and others overlooked. It can help us understand revolutionary space not as a product of a temporal break, but as a multiply crossed topography of competing desires and trajectories. This, I will argue, is the logic of Sansay's narrative experiment.

Where best to begin but with *Secret History's* opening paragraphs, where the sea and the landscape of Cap Francois are juxtaposed. Mary, the primary epistolary correspondent of the novel, records her ambivalence about leaving Philadelphia and arriving at St. Domingo. At first too seasick to come on deck during the 40-day journey, as the destination approaches, Mary develops a romantic notion of the sea as refuge from both places of origin and arrival. She writes of the "profound tranquillity of the ocean, the uninterrupted view, the beautiful horizon," and fantasizes about building a dwelling for herself and those she loves "on the bosom of the waters" and thus separate from the "storms that agitate mankind." We might first note the regendering of the sea, at first storm tossed and masculine, but now sexually recoded as a woman's maternal breast. The sea pacifies in contrast to the "agitated" geography of men. Mary has to fantasize this place as exceptional, as if it were the last possible refuge. How stable is Mary's work to appropriate the sea? The atopic fantasy is fleeting.

Upon landing at the Cap and viewing the town and its landscape, Mary's perspective shifts radically. "We found the town a heap of ruins," she writes. "A more terrible picture of desolation cannot be imagined. Passing through streets choaked with rubbish, we reached with difficulty a house which had escaped the general fate." In place of the ingathering breast, a lone house is only reached after avoiding a heap of ruins. The "choaked" streets return us to the nausea of the first days at sea. Thus, the landing at Cap Francois reminds us that the sea is also the route followed by the slave ship and is figured in so many abolitionist texts of the era as wrenching children away from their mother's embrace. This new home is a place from which to witness desolation.

While the sea enables fantasy, the land disables the imagination. It is only in retrospect that Mary can retroactively code the island as having once been a place fostering the imagination. The white Creoles, she muses, once enjoyed the luxuriant pleasures and moments of reverie underwritten "by silent slaves" who fanned them to sleep. Is this notation of the slaves' presence necessary? Mary's fantasy is not her own per se, but one that belonged to an other, one who could enjoy in a place

that now for her signifies only terror and suffering. “When nostalgia articulates space and time in such a way that it robs others of their histories,” writes Massey, “then we need to rework nostalgia” (124). In my experience, readers seem to intuit about passages like this one from Sansay’s novel. They are often shocked by the fantasy. They are bothered by Mary’s seemingly cavalier attitude about the slaves and their thoughts wander to considerations of the life histories and present experiences of those silent attendants. I particularly like the way Sansay destabilizes and undermines Mary’s fantasy, allowing her to contradict it with a moment of clarity about the current situation in St. Domingue. Mary counterpoises this fantastical view of slaves with an acknowledgment of the rebels’ superiority. Viewing her own enjoyment as interminably postponed, Mary approaches the slave revolt in terms of competing desires. The slaves “have felt the blessing of liberty, for a blessing it certainly is, however acquired.” Landscape is also integral.

The climate itself combats for [the rebels]. Inured to a savage life they lay in the woods without being injured by the sun, the dew or the rain. A negro eats a plantain, a sour orange, the herbs and roots of the field, and requires no cloathing, whilst this mode of living is fatal to the European soldiers. (emphasis added)

Let’s place Mary’s description of the “savage” negro in context. During the reign of L’Overture, the black and mulatto elite continued to enjoy fine clothing, educational opportunities in France, and economic self-determination, while the former slaves were organized and regulated on the plantations, though now as free laborers. LeClerc’s arrival did cause the black army to retreat from the towns, many burnt as they were evacuated, into the interior. But there is a kernel of truth in Mary’s otherwise fantastic imagery: effect of climate on the French. Some twenty thousand French troops died not from black violence, but from disease. C. L. R. James writes that it was in Toussaint’s plan to wait for fever season and then to attack the French.¹¹ The autochthonous rebellion was further underscored by Toussaint’s famous last words as he was arrested and deported: “In overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep.” The ruined cityscape, choked with rubbish, is simultaneously familiar and manageable in the eyes of the rebels. And Toussaint capitalizes on the imperialist misprision that cedes ownership of the soil to the former slaves, who now enjoy the advantages that are usually the privilege of an indigenous population.

By contrast, Mary's description of the Cap is drawn against memories of an idyllic Philadelphia: "I feel like a prisoner in this little place, built on a narrow strip of land between the sea and a mountain that rises perpendicularly behind the town" (see figure 7.1). Neither conqueror nor native, Mary sees herself as a captive or, as the Creoles will see themselves in the second half of the novel, as a refugee. Such a view is not too different from how William Bradford describes his arrival in North America in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, another example of recoding a colonial landing to cast the migrant as victim: "The whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hew. If [the pilgrims] looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed, and was now as a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world."¹² In *Secret History*, we find continuously that enclosed spaces, whether a landscape, the interior of a house, inside a convent, or a hillside appear negatively containing. Mary always feels alien in these enclosures, and it is in them that the novel's sexual drama plays out.

The slippage from outside to inside occurs seamlessly. For instance, Mary is invited to visit Pauline Bonaparte, the wife of General LeClerc and sister of Napoleon, at her mountainside residence. Bonaparte, never having seen an "American," is grateful since Mary has "undertaken it to shew her an object which she probably expected to find in a savage state." But it turns out that it is Bonaparte herself who most approaches colonial declension, having adopted the casual dress of the Creole women, a muslin morning gown, and languorously rising only partially off her couch to greet her visitors. Bonaparte also conveys that sexuality is not to be kept to the private sphere, but that the gaze of the public is no check on sexual display. As notable as her dress is her flirtation with General Boyer, a game of undressing and invitation as she allows her slipper to fall repeatedly to the ground and Boyer dutifully replaces it on her foot. Mary will comment more extensively on the sexual culture of Creole society later in the novel, condemning its reduction of marriage to a rite of passage warranting adultery. Here, the closed space of the darkened room and the insipid sexual play ultimately bores her and she leaves. And once again, we witness the imagination recede in cloistered places on land. "Pauline," writes Mary, "has no society, no amusement, and never having imagined that she would be forced to seek an equivalent for either in the resources of her own mind, she has made no provision for such an unforeseen emergency." If the land itself deadens the imagination, then one who arrives on it ill-prepared has little hope but to become re-formed in its image. Creativity is the only antidote and Bonaparte, hating to

read and playing on no instrument, is drugged beyond the point of no return.

This is but the first of many enclosures made uncomfortable by unrestrained sexuality. A ball held shipboard is the tableaux for General Rochambeau's first advances on Clara. He later corners her on a winding mountain path, and at last attempts to cajole her into fleeing from her husband, who has already "locked her up" in a bedroom, by appearing at her window with a love letter and offering to remove her to his home. A second admirer, a man from whom Clara receives French language instruction, is not only deported, but, when it is discovered that he has dared to write a love poem about Clara which is then circulated by an associate, that associate is also sent from the island and his property seized and divided among Rochambeau and his officers. Thus is any recourse to imagination punished.

Notable as exceptions to the rule are the mulatto women, who claim aesthetic license for the carriage and dress of their bodies. These extremely beautiful "creatures" have been "taught to heighten the power of their charms by all the aids of art, and to express in every look and gesture all the refinements of voluptuousness." Before the revolution, the Creole women found the women of color to be such daunting rivals that they requested sumptuary laws to restrain their artistic liberty. But in response, the women of color refuse to leave their homes, an untenable cost for the Frenchmen, who rescind these restrictions. And regardless, Mary is convinced that nature, not art alone, has created such alluring beings, who "very feet [are said to] speak" (95). The Creole women are also beautiful, but in a dignified manner "acquired from the habit of commanding their slaves." But now "roused by the pressure of misfortune" new more expressive manifestations of beauty have come to the fore: "Many of them have displayed talents and found resources in the energy of their own minds which it would have been supposed impossible for them to possess." Though Mary would not "rely on their stability," she, nonetheless, finds them "the most irresistible creatures that the imagination can conceive" (71). For both women of color and the Creole women, volatility enables creativity; and, it is this capacity to charm under duress that fuels Mary's own creative impulses. But it is Clara who ultimately learns the lessons of adaptation through creative expression.¹³

Bored at St. Domingue and tiresome of her husband St. Louis, Clara seeks relief in the preparations and performances of the ballroom. Mary watches as Clara casually places a rose in her hair and transform into an enchanting figure. Dancing further enhances her beauty: "There is a physiognomy in her form! Every motion is full of

soul. The gracefulness of her arms," she writes, "is unequalled, and she is lighter than gossamer" (75). Unfortunately, she also inspires deep jealousy. In the end, the only resistance to the suffocating attentions of both Rochambeau and her husband is a tripartite escape, from each "lover" and from St. Domingue.

To explore Clara's flight and the very different spatial imaginary she encounters as she moves to Cuba, Jamaica, and back to Philadelphia, I want to look at two scenes where skewed perceptions and dramatic reversals occur in a mountainous setting. The first occurs early in the novel. The French have arrived with the aim of capturing Toussaint and the other black military leadership and reinstating slavery. From the coastline, the French admiral apprehends what to him look like black soldiers scurrying down the mountain to resist his landing. At the last moment, he is prevented from firing canons on them by the opportune arrival of two gentlemen in a canoe, who inform the admiral that those are the *white* inhabitants returning to Cap Francois following their forced evacuation by the rebels, who then leveled the town. This scene not only foreshadows the misery that the invading French army will impose on the white Creole population, but also anticipates a later one, now after Clara's escape from St. Domingue and her flight from St. Louis, who has raped her and then threatened to disfigure her face with acid.

Having found protection with a Creole refugee, Madame V, who understands her predicament and rushes her to the safety of a mountain retreat, Clara's imagination is set free and the ground beneath her is fundamentally transformed. There is a marked shift in syntax, too, as Clara reaches poetic as well as geographic heights after her escape:

The night was calm. The town, which lies at the foot of the mountain, was buried in profound repose. The moon-beams glittered on the waves that were rolling in the bay, and shed their silvery lustre on the moving branches of the palm trees. The silence was broken by the melodious voice of a bird, who sings only at this hour, and whose notes are said to be sweeter than those of the European nightingale. As I ascended the mountain, the air became purer. Every tree in this delightful region is aromatic; every breeze wafts perfumes! I had six miles to walk, and wished to reach the village before day, yet I could not avoid frequently stopping to enjoy the delightful calm that reigned around me! (140)

This from a woman running for her life! Up in the mountains, Clara also experiences a Catholic festival that inverts the corrupted religious institutions on St. Domingue. The church at the Cap had been transformed into a brothel, but here in the rarified sanctuary of the jungle, in this

“abode of wretchedness, there is a magnificent temple . . . picturesque, and the scenery . . . beautiful beyond description.” At one with the natural environment, the people and the church, whose white turrets “glitter[ing] beneath the palm trees that gracefully wave over it” have an “implicit power.” Clara enters the church and sees an image of Mary “appearing like the presiding genius of the place.” Her mind “filled with awe” despite having no truck for the “superstitious faith of the ignorant votaries.” And she creates a mental representation to “cherish” the setting, its effect on her “indelible” (142).

But lest Clara assume too great an attachment to the villagers, she is reminded most vividly that the landscape, though beautiful, is also alien to her. During the first night in the mountains, Clara is awakened by Madame V’s nearly inarticulate scream. A cold animal has crawled into her dress and, when she had tried to remove it, it “seized her hand” (145). These turn out to be land crabs descending the mountain to lay their eggs, but the description is redolent with racial and anticolonial language. It’s also reminiscent of Toussaint’s prediction of the roots springing up out of the earth. A guide then tells the women that when the British attempted to invade Cuba by land, they had captured a Spaniard, who led them to camp in these mountains. When the crabs began their loud descent, sounding as if soldiers clashing swords surrounded the camp, the British mistake the noise for the Spanish army and they release their captive to flee for their lives. The catastrophe of a British invasion is averted. After hearing this anecdote, Clara steps out to witness a “brown stream rolling over the surface of the earth.” Mirroring the autochthonous rebels on St. Domingue, these crabs and their “attack” are even more thoroughly naturalized and then nationalized. The crabs hide “themselves in holes during the day”; but their legend grows, as they become, according to Clara, akin to the “sacred geese to which Rome owed its preservation” (146). Thus do objects that initially surprise and disgust become figures of reverence. When the Cuban landscape is now observed, Clara’s initial disgust shifts. Though, from one perspective an “abode of poverty and dullness,” from another they are extremely “hospitable” with “the little they possess” and are, unlike her, “content with their lot” (147).

Though now separated from her sister, Mary also undergoes a profound shift in perspective once out of St. Domingue, where life was so consistently extravagant that it became ritualized in a series of always met expectations. At Jamaica, Mary communes with other refugees and narrates to us their stories. Some of these not only concern suffering they have endured at the hands of the black rebels, but some

also feature industrious and resourceful women whose trauma is much closer to home. For example, there's a father who refuses to recognize his wife and daughter and allows the daughter to die in poverty. In each case, consistency lies in the women refugees' capacity for art (singing or playacting). It is also in this out of placeness that readers meet another palimpsestic character, Don Carlos, a captain of a Spanish ship of war, but an Irishman by birth. As with an improvised tune, Don Carlos is able to play spontaneously on his identity on the Caribbean Sea.

To conclude then, placelessness seems to loosen the bonds on the imagination experienced in particular and unstable landscapes. Following Mao Zedong, we might say that though "there is great discord in heaven; the situation is excellent." These temporary Caribbean places, but stops on a journey with no resolved endpoint, seem to enable a broader sense of community—even spanning assumed racial segregation—and an unmooring from the norms of urban society. Clara finds her voice in the act of writing to her sister.

This leaves us with one loose end, the addressee of the majority of the letters in the novel: Aaron Burr.¹⁴ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the semiotic significance of Burr in detail. What deserves attention, though, is that no character in early American history better represents the palimpsestic character than he. Credited with enabling Jefferson's election to the presidency in 1800, Burr was enigmatic and both courted and feared. Drawn into an electoral tie with Jefferson, Burr refused to cede the presidency to him, leaving it to 36 separate votes in the House of Representatives to decide the issue. He is then briefly courted by New England secessionists, who overestimate Burr's attachment to Federalism. As if to underscore this, Burr kills Alexander Hamilton in a duel, annihilating the putative leader of the now minority party. Fantastically, Burr returns to the Senate to conduct the impeachment trial of a federal judge, leaves office with a farewell address that brings senators to tears, and then embarks on a supposed conspiracy to conquer the West and establish himself as emperor of the Louisiana Territory. He is acquitted of treason, though he never so thoroughly captures the public's attention after the trial. Historians generally have adopted the view of Burr adopted by those who were sometimes his enemies and at other times his admirers. He is the founder who left no substantial treatise of political philosophy or practice. Even his most vehement critics struggle to pin him down. "The character faithfully drawn of Mr. Burr in the following pages," writes James Cheetham, "is so complex, so stript of precise and indelible marks; so mutable, capricious, versatile, unsteady and unfixt, one

to which no determinate name can be given, and on which no reliance can be placed, that serious questions may arise from it.”¹⁵

We know that Leonora Sansay returned to Philadelphia in 1803 and, reuniting with Burr, had a small role to play in the still unclear project Burr initiated in the Mississippi Valley. Published in 1808, *Secret History* appeared in print after Burr’s acquittal and after he had gone into exile in London for the next four years. As much as Toussaint, Rochambeau, and St. Louis, the estranged husband, figure powerfully in Sansay’s plot, Burr, the “dear friend” resonates loudest. As unstable referent, ambiguously lover or friend, Burr is the object that sustains a fantasy of place, but always a place elsewhere. Burr, as object of desire, generates both Mary’s and Clara’s textual production. In the silence that followed Burr’s infamous public career, Leonora Sansay filled the space of his presence with writing, her own creative and indelible act of freedom.

NOTES

1. OED. *anotopism*, n. Second edition, 1989; online version March 2011. <http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/7180>, accessed May 10, 2011. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1884.
2. Christopher Castiglia, *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
3. Extimacy is Lacan’s neologism for this condition and is meant to indicate the difficulty of separating what is intimate, or inside, from what is external, or outside the subject.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
5. Tellingly, Jean-Jacques Dessalines’s constitution—which superseded Toussaint’s—would obliterate reference to Frenchness and replace it with blackness regardless of a specific citizen’s particular racial identity. We might best understand this against the backdrop of slavery in the southern United States, where blackness would become synonymous with servitude in the decades leading up to the Civil War.
6. All page references to the novel are to Leonora Sansay, *Secret History, or, The Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura*, ed. Michael J. Drexler, Broadview editions (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2007).
7. Carol Smith-Rosenberg has written of the gothic quality of Sansay’s text. See “Black Gothic: The Shadowy Origins of the American Bourgeoisie,” in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 243–69.

8. Michael J. Drexler and Ed White, "The Constitution of Toussaint: Another Origin of African American Literature," *A Companion to African American Literature* (Malden, MA, and Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
9. Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 165–82.
10. Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 117–18.
11. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989).
12. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Knopf, 1952), 62.
13. See also Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "The Secret History of the Early American Novel: Leonora Sansay and Revolution in Saint Domingue," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 40, no. 1/2 (2006): 89–90; and Gretchen Woertendyke, "Romance to Novel: A Secret History," *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (2009): 264.
14. Only on the title page is Burr mentioned in the book.
15. James Cheetham, *A View of the Political Conduct of Aaron Burr, Esq., Vice-President of the United States by the Author of the "Narrative"* (Denniston and Cheetham, printer, 1802), 5. See Ed White and Michael J. Drexler, *The Traumatic Colonel; or, the Burr of American Literature* (forthcoming), in which the public view of Burr's character is addressed at length.