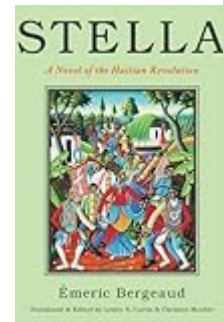


Emeric Bergeaud. *Stella: A Novel of the Haitian Revolution.* Edited by Lesely S. Curtis and Christen Mucher. New York: New York University Press, 2015. xxxviii + 195 pp. \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4798-9240-2.



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In writing *Stella: A Novel of the Haitian Revolution*, Émeric Bergeaud (1818-58) not only penned the first Haitian novel, but also wed fiction and history in a way that characterizes Haitian literature to this day. In their critical edition of *Stella*, Lesley S. Curtis and Christen Mucher recover, supplement, and translate this historical novel with a precision that conveys the richness of Bergeaud's original text. As Curtis and Mucher note, "[*Stella*]'s distinctiveness has led to confusion as to how to classify [the novel]" (p. xxvii). The confusion stemming from *Stella*'s blending of history and fiction is intentional, as Bergeaud intervenes many times to question the genre of fiction and its flaws vis-à-vis historical writing. For this reason, the translators present us with a multilayered text, including a critical introduction, the translation, a glossary, the original explanatory notes, and editors' notes. Perhaps the best way to evaluate *Stella* is to address the translation and the critical introduction separately in order to home in on the important contributions this work makes to numerous fields of study.

Stella is the story of the Haitian Revolution told through the allegory of Romulus and Remus. After their mother, Marie the African, is beaten to death by the Colonist, Romulus and Remus take to the hills and join

the maroon slave community of Saint-Domingue. A year later, they decide to exact revenge on the Colonist by burning his plantation and setting the country ablaze, beginning a long revolution. The brothers are aided in their revolution by Stella, the novel's namesake. The Colonist brought Stella to Saint-Domingue from France, granting the impoverished yet beautiful young woman a new start in the colonies. However, the Colonist proved to be a tyrant, not only for the enslaved, but for Stella as well, and she takes to the hills along with Romulus and Remus to seek refuge from him. Stella ultimately helps the two brothers as they wage war against their common oppressor. Stella also helps them spiritually: she is the light that guides the brothers from enslavement to freedom, from being colonial objects to being independent subjects. Stella frequently counsels Romulus and Remus, helping them forge strategies that will help to defeat the Colonist and liberate the island from the yoke of slavery. At times, Stella even participates in battles herself, incarnating the numerous, often unnamed women who bore arms and fought in the Haitian Revolution. In the Haitian historical context, Romulus and Remus incarnate the experiences of different revolutionary figures as the novel progresses from the years leading up to the beginning of the revolution to the declaration of Haitian in-

dependence, allowing the reader to follow the chronology of the revolution. Thus when Bergeaud delves into the alliances, but also the internal divisions between the brothers, he is directly referring to similar developments within the ranks of historical Haitian revolutionaries. For instance, in the chapter on the Civil War, the brothers each represent one of the warring factions of Toussaint Louverture and Andr   Rigaud in the 1799-1800 War of Knives. The Colonist also morphs throughout the novel: at the beginning, he is a part of the planter   lite in colonial Saint-Domingue; towards the end, he wages Donatien Rochambeau's genocidal campaign to reconquer the colony in 1803.

Published a year after *Stella: The Epic Saga of the Haitian Revolution*, the first translation of Bergeaud's novel, Curtis and Mucher's edition more efficiently sifts through Bergeaud's opaque style and deeply erudite literary references in order to present the reader with an immensely readable text.[1] Where Hossman haz- ardously attempts to recover the traces of nineteenth-century French literary stylistics in Bergeaud's text, Curtis and Mucher situate the novel in a Haitian literary and historical context. What is more, Curtis and Mucher's translation avoids the popular appeal of a sensationalist subtitle, choosing "A Novel of the Haitian Revolution" instead of framing the text as an "epic saga." As Curtis and Mucher explain in their introduction, they sought to maintain the flow of Bergeaud's prose, and only rarely altered the original order of sentences for clarity. This gives the reader access to Bergeaud's prose style and facilitates bilingual readings of the text with the French original available in the Digital Library of the Caribbean at the University of Florida.[2]

Along with a lucid translation, the editors provide helpful paratextual notes that guide the reader through classical, literary, linguistic, and historical references to the New World's republic of letters, such as travel narratives, classical literature, historiography on the Haitian Revolution, and nineteenth-century book history. Readers will find the glossary particularly helpful for understanding the linguistic evolution of Haitian Creole, as Curtis and Mucher provide historical orthography as well as contemporary Haitian expressions in modern Haitian Creole. Terms are always contextualized in ways that promote further understanding of Caribbean religion and culture rather than perpetuating stereotypes about Vodou and other forms of spirituality practiced in the Caribbean.[3] Another innovative aspect of the notes section is the references to Haitian cities. For example, when in the latter stages of the novel Romulus

and Remus wage their revolutionary campaign throughout Saint-Domingue, these notes allow the reader to trace their path from Gona  ves to Saint-Marc, on to the siege of Jacmel. Instructors could ultimately use these notes, with the help of Digital Humanities mapping tools and GIS, to develop lessons about the literary geography of the Haitian Revolution based on Curtis and Mucher's annotations.

In addition to their translation, the editors provide a critical introduction in order to present the history of   meric Bergeaud, *Stella* and the Haitian Revolution, and to contextualize the critical reception of the novel and the aims of the present translation. It provides a brief overview of the cast of characters and figures of the Haitian Revolution to elucidate the country's complex history, but also useful, nuance context regarding the complexities— notably in terminology— of the social strata of eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue. In the original "Author's Note," Bergeaud explained that he wished to attract more readers to the history of Haiti and its revolution that overthrew colonial slavery. However, partially due to its limited release and exilic, posthumous printing, but also because of dismissive critiques, *Stella* was out of print for more than a hundred years. Citing a dearth of research on *Stella*, the editors argue that Bergeaud's novel "deserves" to be reexamined because the studies that do exist confine the novel to a narrative of French literary imitation or Haitian *bovaryisme*. [4] As Curtis and Mucher point out, these types of critiques, leveled by Haitian and non-Haitian literary scholars such as Ghislain Gouraige and Leon-Fran  ois Hoffman, also deserve scrutiny for their role in defining the literary landscape of Haiti. [5] Curtis and Mucher provide readers with the most recent and relevant studies of Haitian history and literature that challenge many of the assumptions to which *Stella* has been subjected in the past— such as claims of mimicking a French style or lacking in originality or literary merit. Ultimately, this critical edition and translation of *Stella* is a crucial initial step in reframing debates surrounding literary production in nineteenth-century Haitian letters.

Lesley S. Curtis and Christen Mucher have produced a wonderfully edited and translated edition with *Stella: A Novel of the Haitian Revolution* by   meric Bergeaud. It is a timely book that provides an eloquent response to Gina Athena Ulysse's call for "new narratives," especially recovered narratives, for Haiti that challenge the perception of Haiti as the "enfant terrible" and the "  te noire" of the Americas. [6] There is nothing "new" about a century and a half-old novel, but with this edition *Stella* joins

the ranks of numerous studies and works of art that help bring to the fore the rich culture and history of Haiti, at a time when the Caribbean nation is constantly marred in discourses of economic and social disaster. In order for us to pry ourselves away from the kind of monolithic narratives of Haiti past and present to which we are exposed in the twenty-four-hour news cycle, we need to turn to works like *Stella* that provide the context and nuance mainstream representation of Haiti frequently lack. Curtis and Mucher's translation is a welcome addition to many fields, including Caribbean literary studies, Haitian studies, Atlantic studies, and the study of the Age of Revolutions, and could be easily taught in both undergraduate and graduate coursework.

Notes

[1]. Eric Bergeaud, *Stella: The Epic Saga of the Haitian Revolution*, trans. Adriana Umana Hossman (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2014).

[2]. For a link to the original text in the Digital Library of the Caribbean, see (<http://dloc.com/>

UF00089373/00001/1j).

[3]. Haitian Vodou is overwhelmingly misspelled in news media today, as was seen as recently as September 2015 when Vodou leader Max Beauvoir passed away. For more, see Kate Ramsey, *Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[4]. Michael J. Dash, "True *Dechoukaj*: Uprooting *Bovaryisme* in Post-Duvalier Haiti," *Politics and Power in Haiti*, ed. Kate Quinn and Paul Sutton (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 27-42.

[5]. For a similarly trenchant analysis of Ghislain Gouraig's critiques of Haitian literature, see Kaiama L. Glover, "A Woman's Place is in the Unhomely as Social Critique in Marie Chauvet's *Fille d'Haïti*," *Yale French Studies* 128 (2015): 115-130.

[6]. Gina Athena Ulysse, *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post-quake Chronicle* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015).

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