Marlene L. Daut, *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xxxix + 244 pp. (Cloth US\$99.99)

In the rousing prologue to *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism*, Marlene Daut combines a deep knowledge of nineteenth-century Black Atlantic intellectual and literary history with an incisive view of our present day to reveal that we all have much to gain by looking more closely at the life, writing, and legacies of the Haitian writer Baron de Vastey. Early postindependence Haitian writers lived, wrote, fought, and died to make manifest their black humanity—to make their black lives matter. Two centuries later, Daut shows us that a close reading of Haitians' early nineteenth-century discourse of black humanity "has never been more timely and necessary" (p. xxxix).

The book's most important intervention is Daut's rigorous conceptual genealogy of the philosophical movement she calls "Black Atlantic humanism." Critically engaging the work of Paul Gilroy, David Scott, Faith Smith, Deborah Jensen, and Chris Bongie, among others, she defines Black Atlantic humanism as "the discursive mode of challenging color prejudice and the strategies of argumentation deployed to contest the theories and material practices that have supported myriad forms of colonial violence against black people across the Atlantic World" (p. xxi). She maintains that it is a "modern" humanism, evinced in the work of twentieth-century Caribbean writers such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Édouard Glissant, but one that has its origins in Vastey's anticolonial, antislavery writing of the early postindependence period. Via Scott, Daut points to the importance of Vastey's vindicationist approach to black humanism and his "anti-colonial and black positivist writing" (p. xv) that revealed and refuted the unmarked (white) humanism of the Enlightenment.

Chapters 1–4 are dedicated to "unsilencing" the life and works of Vastey to reveal his forgotten but nevertheless foundational role in structuring the discourse of Black Atlantic humanism. In Chapter 2, Daut brings new archival discoveries to the case of Vastey's "mistaken identity," and meticulously documents how his writings were circulated, translated, and read in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Atlantic sphere. Chapter 3 analyzes nineteenth-century abolitionist "uses" of Vastey in the United States and Europe, tracing how the Haitian writer became part of an Afro-diasporic network of translation and circulation that cast Vastey and his writing "as the primary signs and symbols of African literacy and, therefore, of African humanity" (p. 69). Chapter 4 engages John Beverly's definition of *testimonio* to argue for a new generic understanding of Vastey's oeuvre beyond the dominant antislavery literary forms of his era.

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Chapter 5 and the epilogue take a different tack from the rest of the book, analyzing what Vastey *the character* represented for twentieth-century Atlantic playwrights. Daut tracks the “use” of the Vastey character through a diverse corpus of theatrical works that spans seven decades and includes U.S., Martinican, and St. Lucian playwrights. Based on her close readings, Daut argues that the Vastey character became a symbol for twentieth-century playwrights’ “anxieties” about the Caribbean, performing “the troubles with sovereignty after colonialism” (p. 139) and creating a vehicle for what she terms their “isolationist thesis of Haitian political leadership” (p. 138). She concludes that these Atlantic playwrights obscure Vastey’s actual written arguments about neocolonialism and instead use the Vastey character to isolate the “vindicationist king,” Christophe, and “the vindicationist humanism marked by Baron de Vastey’s writing” (p. 181). Daut’s analysis is thorough, but I found myself wanting more discussion of the Atlantic playwrights’ respective national and historical contexts in order to better situate their isolationist readings of Haitian independence. Similarly, while Daut’s critical examination of the Haitian spiralist René Philoctète’s *Monsieur de Vastey* (1975) in the epilogue is excellent and long overdue, I wonder if the reason that his play stands out from the others in its “critique of the neo-colonial system” (p. 194) is not precisely because Philoctète is a Haitian writer.

In all, *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism* is essential reading not only for the history of the Black Atlantic, but also for our present day.

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