

Curtis on Gouraud, ed. Little (2012)

Gouraud, Julie. *Les Deux Enfants de Saint-Domingue, suivi de "L'Esclave de Saint-Domingue" de Michel Möring*. Ed. Roger Little. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012. Pp. 202. ISBN: 978-2-336-00205-7

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The "Autrement Mêmes" series from L'Harmattan, edited by Roger Little, has made available over one hundred editions of out-of-copyright works written about the (post)colonial experience. The republication of *Les Deux Enfants de Saint-Domingue* by Julie Gouraud (1810–1891) followed by "L'Esclave de Saint-Domingue" by Michel Möring (1824–1880), presented by the distinguished series editor himself, deals with what is arguably the most momentous event of French colonial history: the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) and the declaration of independent Haiti in 1804. That Gouraud's text was originally published in 1874 and Möring's in 1860 reminds us that the subject of Haiti remained a popular one in the French imagination for generations.

Of the one hundred and fifteen editions currently published in the Autrement Mêmes series and the many more in progress, Haiti is a common topic of interest, but this edition is unusual in that the texts are part of a tradition of children's literature published well after Haitian independence (1804) and French recognition of Haiti (1825). In the nineteenth century, the French struggled to understand the loss of their prized colony of Saint-Domingue. Nostalgia characterized much of the French literature about Haiti published in the decades following Haitian independence. Yet, as the nineteenth century progressed, the French expanded their colonial presence into other parts of the world. With France's recognition of Haiti in 1825 and the second and final abolishment of slavery in the French colonies in 1848, the French grew to understand colonialism and slavery as two separate institutions. This evolution in thought—a common acceptance of slavery's end and a general enthusiasm for colonialism's potential—might lead some to understand French reaction to Haiti as a process of forgetting. Little's recent edition suggests otherwise. The French worked to create a narrative about Haiti's birth that made sense to them; their story of what caused the end of French colonial domination on the island was one that was created, told, and retold many times. Gouraud's and Möring's texts, both designed to be educational, provide particular insight into the process of generating this narrative and its role in the creation of colonial memory at a time when France was expanding its colonial endeavors in Africa.

Little's introduction educates the reader about the authors, their writings, the images used in the original publications, and the discrepancies between historical facts and the stories recounted. Little contextualizes Gouraud's and Möring's works as part of a larger corpus of French writing from the period about the Haitian Revolution. Descriptions of slaves saving their masters, for example, belong to a long tradition of representations of the "noble savage" dating back to Rousseau. It is important to note as well that these depictions also often helped the French define their colonial presence in Saint-Domingue in a positive light, which responded to a common French anxiety about their loss of power in the Americas. The titles of the two texts also refer to a time of French colonial prowess by using the name Saint-Domingue instead of Haiti, which further cements the relationship between the stories and a certain French conception of their own colonial power. That these texts were originally designed for children and written by authors of a generation born after Haiti's existence further demonstrate that French colonial memory involving Haiti was a product of active creation well into the nineteenth century. In fact, this edition would seem to contest the idea that France was successful in forgetting Haiti. It instead suggests that the specter of Haiti fueled French colonial thought for generations after the former slave colony's independence. Little's new edition therefore offers scholars and educators an important chance to return to the study of early post/colonialism in the French context with renewed appreciation for Haiti's long-standing impact.

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