

Account of a remarkable Conspiracy formed by a Negro in the Island of St. Domingo

The narrative presented here first appeared in September of 1787 in the *Mercure de France*, called “the most important literary journal in prerevolutionary France” by historian Jeremy D. Popkin. It appeared with the title “Makandal, Histoire véritable” (Makandal, a true story), attributed to a “M[onsieur] de C...” By November of the same year, it had appeared in at least one other French journal, *L’Esprit des Journaux*, and in the next few months it began to circulate outside of France. By February of 1788, it was reprinted in the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure* (London) as “The Negro Makandal, an authentic History,” by April it appeared in *The Gentleman’s and London Magazine*, and sometime that year it appeared in the German journal *Olla Potrida* (Berlin). Another German version, in the *Neue Litteratur und Völkerkunde* (Dessau and Leipzig) appeared in 1790. In January of 1789, it appeared in another British journal, the *Literary Magazine & British Review* (LMBR) with the title “Account of a Conspiracy in St. Domingo,” and again in the 1794 *New Wonderful Magazine and Marvellous Chronicle*, and so popular was the tale in Britain that an extended drama based on the story, “King Caesar; or, The Negro Slaves,” appeared in 1801.

Notably, the 1789 version in the LMBR made some significant changes. The earliest English translations had preserved a title close to the French—“The Negro Makandal, an authentic History”—but now the title was changed to “Account of a Conspiracy in St. Domingo.” A paragraph musing about Zami’s

love for Samba was removed, and sentences linking Makandal’s history with a broader conspiracy of race war were added (see notes 33 and 44 in the following text). The influence of these changes was focused in the United States, where the story found most of its English-language printings in the 1790s and beyond. The *Massachusetts Magazine* published the Makandal story in two parts in 1793 (January and February); the *New-York Magazine, or Literary Repository* published it in two parts in 1796 (August and September); *The American Universal Magazine* (Philadelphia) published it in January, 1798; and the *Philadelphia Repository & Weekly Register* published it again in 1802. It appeared in a few northern newspapers—in the *Washington Patriot* of Salem, New York, in September, 1795, and in the *Chelsea Courier* of Norwich, Connecticut in 1797, for instance—and would reappear again in 1823 (in the *New York Minerva*) and 1846 (in the *New York Illustrated Magazine of Literature & Art*). Every US version, with the exception of the *Washington Patriot* printing, seems to have used the version that appeared in the LMBR in 1789.

The US publications of the 1790s in part reflect a popular interest in the Haitian Revolution unfolding in what the French called Saint-Domingue or what was sometimes called St. Domingo. By the time of the first US printings, American readers would have been familiar with the 1791 burning of Cap François; by the time of the 1796 publication, they would have read about the thousands of refugees arriving in the United States and the British invasion of Saint-Domingue. François Makandal was a figure from an earlier moment, and likely became a way for readers then (as for historians later) to think about revolutionary actions and dynamics. In all likelihood, Makandal was born in West Africa and forcibly sold into slavery in Saint-Domingue as a young adult. According to 19C accounts, Makandal was fluent in Arabic, had significant religious training, and possessed rudimentary military experience before his abduction by European slavers. After his arrival in Saint-Domingue, he gained a reputation as a healer, especially for his knowledge of botanical cures. He lost an arm in a sugar mill accident, and after his recovery became a cattle driver, a position

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that provided the opportunity to escape to a maroon community of runaway resisters in the neighboring mountains. The length of his marronage is the subject of some debate, but he seems to have evaded capture for about twelve years. During this period, he became the leader of an insurgent resistance movement comprised of a network of agents who he taught to manufacture poisons. According to the historian Sylviane Diouf, Makandal's "reputation was such that a French document of 1758 estimates—with much exaggeration, no doubt—the number of deaths he provoked at 6,000 over three years" (217). He was captured by the French in 1758 and burned alive in the central square of Cap François; contemporary accounts of the execution claim that plantation owners from surrounding districts forced enslaved people to watch the spectacle as a reassertion of their authority. Makandal's name came to stand for attempts to emancipate Saint-Domingue by eradicating the French; various legends about Makandal also persisted, stressing his pledge to avoid death and return to liberate the island.

Both English and French versions of the Makandal story attempted to individualize resistance to slavery, making it a whim of a strong personality. The *LMBR* most explicitly attempted to make the widespread slave actions mere episodes in the scheming of a jealous, hypersexualized mastermind. But one also sees attempts to think more systematically about the culture of enslaved Africans, not only in the discussion of Makandal's artistic aptitudes but also in references to African or West-Indian culture: the *calinda*, the *fetiche*, dishes like *calilou* and so on. Again, it is noteworthy that the *LMBR* removed many of these references. The concept of the fetish was just entering European lexicons in the mid-eighteenth-century, specifically to denote African religious idols in the form of objects. The original French version made much of the fetish, and the earliest English translations used the term and added a footnote (see note 16 below); term and footnote were removed in the *LMBR*.

Yet what remained of the discussion of Makandal's religious and medical powers and his use of fetish objects does significant

work within the text. As William Pietz notes, the idea of the fetish arose out of "the abrupt encounter of radically heterogeneous worlds" at the dawn of the African slave trade ("The Problem of the Fetish, I" 6). Stories about fetishes, like other accounts of African religious and medical knowledges, helped to determine when and how these heterogeneous worlds overlapped. So too might we say that the Makandal story sought to determine how African, creole, and European powers and knowledges intersected in the shared space of the colonies. Despite their skepticism about African religious beliefs, colonial authorities expressed significant concerns about the powers figures such as Makandal exercised, passing laws that targeted both the herbal preparations and the empowered objects rebel leaders such as Makandal used. As it recodes Makandal's powers as individual strategems performed in the service of personal passions, the Makandal story we reprint here writes these powers out of the shared world in which politics happens.

We have here reproduced the 1796 text from the *New-York Magazine*, which used the *LMBR* version; the break in the text marks where the August installment ends and the September continuation begins. We have noted the more significant changes from the original French version. The variations may suggest the potential weight of even slight details in such works, not to mention the different tendencies of French and English writers and editors. Our summary of the printing history of this narrative is not comprehensive: very likely, it was reprinted more widely. We welcome any additional citations to those listed above.

Suggestions for further reading: The *Mercure de France*'s version of "The Story of Makandal" has somewhat surprisingly played an influential, and often unacknowledged, role in shaping the historiography surrounding François Makandal's unsuccessful 1758 rebellion. In one of the most influential scholarly accounts of the Haitian Revolution, C.L.R. James compares Makandal to "Mahomet" and then repeats many of the details from the *Mercure* text in framing Makandal's biography; see James, *The Black Jacobins* (Dial Press, 1938), 21. Carolyn E. Fick also discusses the *Mercure*

story in detailing the scope and scale of Makandal's conspiracy, seeing the French narrative as part of a retroactive whitewashing campaign "to interpret such acts [of resistance] purely in terms of individual interest: vengeance, jealousy, reduction of the workload, infliction of economic loss on the master" and so on, in order to erase the idea of black sovereignty from the operant understanding of slave revolts; see Fick, *The Making of Haiti* (Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1990). Colin (Joan) Dayan describes a 1758 French decree passed in the aftermath of Makandal's execution which "prohibited both free coloreds and slaves 'from composing, selling, distributing, or buying *garde-corps* or *makandals*'" which she describes "as 'little, coarse figures, of wood or rock representing men or animals' and thought to possess supernatural powers"; see Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (University of California Press, 1995). John Saillant situates the depiction of Makandal within an eroticization of black bodies in early US writing; see "The Black Body Erotic and the Republican Body Politic, 1790-1820," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (January 1995), 418. Sylviane A. Diouf demonstrates how the *Mercur*'s account is full of "obvious fantasies, inaccurate names, and other literary licenses," as she moves to uncover Makandal's actual political ambitions and legacies; see Diouf, *Servants of Allah* (NYU Press, 1998), 216-220. David Geggus notes how "a novelette-like story published in a Paris newspaper in 1787" influentially linked Makandal to both conceptions of "pre-1791 marronage" and "religious or magical practices"; see Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Indiana University Press, 2002), 75. Srinivas Aravamudan argues that after the quick suppression of 1758 rebellion, "the term 'makandal' in Haitian Kreyol became synonymous with 'poison packets' and 'poisoner'"; see Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans* (Duke: 1999), 322. While noting that Makandal was "not the first or only slave rebel to use poison" in Haiti, Laurent Dubois underscores how "the extent of his activities and the publicity they gained helped set in motion a cycle of paranoia and violence that continued" across the circum-Atlantic world "for decades"; see, Dubois, *Avengers of the New World* (Harvard University press, 2004), 52. Karol K. Weaver situates Makandal's knowledge of poisons within a larger

constellation of diasporic African medical and agricultural practices, and concludes that "Makandal and his followers initiated and implemented an ideology of resistance via occupational sabotage and the destruction of human and animal life"; see Weaver, *Medical Revolutionaries* (University of Illinois Press, 2006), 91. Christopher Iannini gestures to the popularity of information which circulated about Makandal when he describes how the creator of the first US museum of natural history "compiled a dossier of newspaper clippings, periodical accounts, and eyewitness correspondence" about the event which included a "herbal antidote for a local poison allegedly related by Makandal during his interrogation"; see Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 169. Diana Paton addresses the resonances between the Makandal conspiracy and British colonial conceptions of obeah, a creole religious and medical complex that figured prominently in English-language accounts of slave rebellion in the British West Indies in "Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 69.2 (3rd ser., April 2012), 235-264.

For more information on the culture of reprinting and serialization in the early Republic we recommend Jared Gardner's *Rise and Fall of Early American Magazine Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 2012). For an essential genealogy of the concept of the fetish in discourses about Africa and Africans, see William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I" in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 9 (Spring 1985), 5-17. For more information on non-Christian religious practices in the Caribbean we recommend Toni Wall Jaudon's essay "Obeah's Sensations: Rethinking Religion at the Transnational Turn," *American Literature* (2012) 84(4): 715-741; for a discussion of obeah and colonial forms of knowledge, we recommend Kelly Wisecup, "Knowing Obeah," *Atlantic Studies* (Fall 2013): 1-20; for more information about imperial discourses which linked obeah and poisoning we recommend chapter one of Iannini's *Fatal Revolutions*.

*Account of a remarkable Conspiracy formed by a Negro in the Island of St. Domingo.*¹

THE history of illustrious villains ought to be effaced from the annals of nations, did not a faithful picture of their crimes serve to render them more odious. Writers who have deigned to employ their talents in exposing the depravity of some monsters, have, perhaps, contributed no less to the happiness of mankind than those who have exhibited only virtues.

The negro who is the subject of the following relation, was not so fortunate as Mahomet or Cromwell; but from what he did, the reader may judge what he would have done, had he been placed in the same situation as these two ambitious fanatics.²— There is no need to exaggerate the truth, to shew how horrible and dangerous his projects were; for about twenty-five years past, the people of St. Domingo have always shuddered at the name of Makandal.

¹ The English source, *The Literary Magazine and British Review* of January 1789, adds the following note to the title: “The author may have embellished this story a little in the narration, but the ground work of it is undoubtedly true.” Many versions also included as an epigraph a line from the French writer and philosopher Voltaire’s epic poem “La Henriade,” “Le crime a ses héros, Perreur ses martyrs”; Crime has its heroes, Error its martyrs.

² The French original begins more simply, “The negro whose life I am about to recount was neither a Mahomet nor a Cromwell...” Criticisms of religious cultures were not uncommon in 18C French writing about colonization, and were sometimes indirect reflections on Roman Catholicism. Beliefs and how they are experienced become important throughout the narrative.

Born in Africa, in one of those countries which border on Mount Atlas³, this negro appeared to have been of illustrious rank, as he had received a much better education than what negroes generally have. He could read and write the Arabian language, and he is not the only negro, reduced by bad fortune to a state of slavery,⁴ who has possessed the same talents.⁵ Makandal had also a strong natural turn for music, painting and sculpture; and though only twelve years of age when carried to the West-Indies,⁶ he was well acquainted with the medicine of his own country, and with the virtue of plants, so useful, and often so dangerous in the torrid zone.⁷

Transported to St. Domingo, and sold to a planter in the neighborhood of Cape François⁸, Makandal soon gained the esteem of his master, by his knowledge and industry, and made himself respected by his fellow slaves, on account of the care

³ *Mount Atlas*: The Atlas Mountain range stretches some 1600 miles across northwestern Africa through what is modern day Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

⁴ The French original here includes the clause “and brought to our Colonies.”

⁵ The percentage of enslaved Muslims that were transported to the Caribbean and North America as part of the transatlantic slave trade has long been underestimated, and some historians now believe it was perhaps about 10% (or approximately 1.2 million people). Given the ways in which Islam emphasizes literacy, the percentages of these enslaved people literate in Arabic has likewise also been typically underestimated.

⁶ The French original uses the term “Amérique” instead of West-Indies.

⁷ *Torrid Zone*: the equatorial region between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn

⁸ *Cape François*: the capital city of the French colony of Saint-Domingue. The city was renamed Cap-Haïtien at the end of the Haitian Revolution in 1804.

which he took to procure them amusement, by multiplying their festivals, and to cure their disorders, after they had baffled the skill of the European physicians. In a short time he was the soul of all their assemblies and dances,⁹ and from one end of the island to the other, the sick who were deemed incurable, invoked the name of Makandal, sending to ask from him the leaf or root of some herb, which for the most part relieved them.

Young Makandal was known then only by his beneficence, and his great taste for pleasure. Happy! had he always employed his talents for innocent purposes; but they soon became the source of the greatest crimes.

At the age of 15 or 16, love began to inflame his breast and to rule with the most astonishing impetuosity. He did not, however, entertain an exclusive passion for one object, but every woman who possessed any charms, received part of his homage, and inflamed his senses. His passion acquired energy and activity in proportion as the objects which inspired it were multiplied. In every quarter he had a mistress. It is well known that among the negroes, enjoyment soon follows desire¹⁰; and that satiety and indifference are the usual consequences; but Makandal, on the contrary, appeared always to be more enamoured of those who had contributed to his felicity, and a proud jealousy defended the empire of his love.

The overseer of the plantation to which he belonged fell in love with a beautiful young negro girl, who had attracted the notice also of Makandal. The reader may readily imagine how much embarrassed such a female must be, to fix her choice

⁹ The French original here reads “He soon was the soul of all the Calendas, a sort of dance gathering that the Negroes passionately love...” The term *calenda*, or *calinda* as it more commonly appears, is Spanish in origin.

¹⁰ The French original uses the term “jouissance” which has a stronger implication of sexual behavior.

between a rigorous and despotic master, and the most distinguished of all the negroes in that part of the country: her heart, however, inclined towards her equal, and the offers of the overseer were rejected.

Enraged at this affront, he discovered that Makandal had been the cause of it, and he vowed to be revenged; but Makandal, notwithstanding his nocturnal peregrinations,¹¹ and the time which he devoted to pleasure, discharged his duty with so much punctuality and zeal, that he was never exposed to the least chastisement; a circumstance rather astonishing in a country where the lash is continually lacerating the bodies of the unhappy negroes, and where the soul of the European not yet enured¹² by custom to the most horrid spectacles, is filled with both terror and pity.

The overseer, eagerly desirous of surprising Makandal in some fault, redoubled his vigilance, but in vain; the slave was always irreproachable. His rival, however, seeing that he could find no cause for punishing him, endeavored to invent a pretext; and one day, in the middle of a new plantation of sugar canes, he ordered him to be stretched out on his belly, and to receive fifty lashes. The pride of Makandal revolted at this act of injustice. Instead of humbling himself, and imploring the prayers and intercession of all the other slaves, who were filled with astonishment and pity, he disdainfully cast his implements of husbandry¹³ at the feet of his rival, telling him, that such a barbarous order was to him a signal of liberty, and immediately running towards the mountains, escaped, in spite of the overseer’s fury, and the pretended pursuit of the negroes, who gave themselves little trouble to overtake him.

¹¹ *Peregrinations*: ramblings, random movements

¹² *Enured*: habituated

¹³ *Implements of husbandry*: agricultural tools

When he had thus saved himself from the unjust punishment of an European despot, he united himself to the maroons;¹⁴ that is to say, runaway slaves; and twelve years elapsed before he could be apprehended. He still, however, kept up a correspondence with his former companions; never was there a festival of any consequence celebrated, at which he was not their Corypheus.¹⁵ But how came the negroes to betray their friend, their comforter, and their prophet? for he had address enough to make them at length believe that he had supernatural virtues, and divine revelations. Having carved out, with much art, upon the head of a stick made of the orange tree, a human figure, which, when pressed a little on the back part of the head, moved its eyes and lips, and appeared to be animated, he pretended that this puppet answered whatever questions were put to it, and uttered oracles, and when he made it predict the death of any one, it is certain that he was never mistaken.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Maroons*: self-emancipated former slaves (or their descendants) or communities thereof. There were many large scale maroon communities in the Caribbean and South America, some in North America (in Florida and Louisiana, for instance), and Saint-Domingue's mountainous region provided shelter to many marrons from the earliest moment of colonization until the successful end of the Haitian Revolution.

¹⁵ *Corypheus*: In classical Greek drama, Corypheus was the head of the chorus, the collective body providing commentary on the dramatic action of plays. By the eighteenth century it had become a generic term for principal actor of a company.

¹⁶ Makandal's carving—later referred to as his “image,” and called a “fétiche” or *fetish* in the French original, may have had roots in Sufi traditions from Africa. When the term *fetish* starts to appear in French dictionaries in the mid-eighteenth century, it is associated exclusively with “Nègres,” and is a pejorative term for primitive religious beliefs. Some of the earlier English translations—for example, that published by *The Gentleman's and London Magazine* in

The great knowledge which Makandal had of simples,¹⁷ enabled him to discover in St. Domingo several poisonous plants; and by these above all he acquired great reputation.—Without explaining the means which he made use of, he would foretel that such or such another male or female negro, who sometimes lived at the distance of fifty leagues¹⁸ from him, would die that very day, or next morning; and those who heard him utter this denunciation, soon learned with terror that his prediction was accomplished.

The manner in which he committed crimes which were not discovered till carried to excess, was as follows: The negroes in general are very fond of commerce.¹⁹ In our colonies there are great numbers of them who go about with European goods to the different plantations, like our pedlars.²⁰ Among these Makandal had his disciples and zealous partizans; and it was by their means that he executed whatever good or bad action he wished to accomplish. The negroes are accustomed also to exercise the hospitable virtues with the most religious care, and to partake of some food together when they see one another after

1788—did keep the term “fetiche,” adding the following note: “*Fetiche* is a name given in Guinea to their divinities; one of whom is supposed to preside over a whole province, and one over every family. The idol is a tree, the head of an ape, a bird, or any such thing as their fancy may suggest.” The term was relatively new in English-language writing, and the OED suggests it became more common in next two decades.

¹⁷ *Simples*: medical herbs and plant life.

¹⁸ *Fifty leagues*: with a league roughly equivalent to just over 3 miles, here a distance of over 170 miles.

¹⁹ The French original reads: “The negroes in general have a great aptitude for commerce.”

²⁰ The French original refers to these sellers as “Pacotilleurs.” The term *pacotille* referred specifically to lower quality goods sold for personal profit by sailors on trading vessels.

the shortest absence. When Makandal was desirous of destroying any one, he engaged one of these pedlars who was his friend, to present the person with some vegetables or some fruit,²¹ which he said would occasion death to whoever tasted it. The person, instead of imagining that Makandal had poisoned the fruit, trembled at the power of the image²² which he had on his stick, and executed the orders of the pretended prophet, without daring to speak to any one; the victim expired, and the prescience²³ of Makandal was every where extolled.

His friends always found in him a formidable avenger, and his rivals, his faithless mistresses, and above all, those who refused to grant him favors, were sure to fall a prey to his barbarity. But love, which had favored him so much—love, for which he incessantly committed crimes without number, at length caused his destruction, and brought him to punishment.²⁴

Makandal had with him two accomplices, or assistants, who blindly devoted themselves to his service. One of them was named Teyssele, the other Myombe;²⁵ and it is very probable that they alone were in part acquainted with the secret means which he employed to make himself feared and respected.

²¹ The French original reads “a fruit or a calaloo,” the latter a West Indian term for a number of greens used in cooking. The *Literary Magazine and British Review* version gives this footnoted definition: “Soup which the negroes make of a kind of plant.”

²² Here the original French “fétiche” is translated as “image.”

²³ *Prescience*: foreknowledge

²⁴ The French original reads “just punishment.”

²⁵ *Teyssele, the other Myombe*: Teyssele and Mayombé (as the names are spelled in the French original) were enslaved Africans (perhaps from West or Central Africa) who were captured and executed alongside Makandal, and believed by the French to be his chief co-conspirators.

It was generally to the highest mountains of Margaux²⁶ that he retired in the day time, and there, with these two chiefs, he assembled a number of maroons. Upon the summit of the mountains, almost inaccessible, they had their wives and children, with well cultivated plantations; and armed troops of these plunderers came down sometimes under the command of Makandal, to spread terror and devastation through the neighboring plantations, or to exterminate those who had disobeyed the prophet.

Besides this, he had gained over several young negroes, who were able to give him an account of whatever passed upon the plantations to which they belonged, and among the number was Senegal Zami, aged eighteen, beautiful in shape as the Apollo of the Belvidere,²⁷ and full of spirit and courage.

One Sunday, Zami having gone to an entertainment²⁸, which was given at a plantation at the distance of three leagues from that of his master, saw on his arrival, that the dancing was begun. A number of slaves, who stood in a ring, were beholding, with transports of pleasure and admiration, a young female of Congo, named Samba, who danced with delightful grace, and who, to enchanting looks, united the most engaging and timid modesty. Her figure was elegant, and in her motions, which were graceful and nimble, she resembled the tender and flexible reed, agitated by the freshening breeze.—Her sparkling eyes, half

²⁶ The French original reads “Margaux & le Liubé,” the latter seemingly a misprint for Limbé. Limbé (*Lenbe* in Haitian Kreyol) and Port-Margot (*Pò Mago*) are in the hills to the southwest of Cap-Haïtien.

²⁷ *Apollo of the Belvidere*: also called the Pythian Apollo, a celebrated marble sculpture from classical antiquity. By the mid-18C it was considered the greatest ancient sculpture by ardent neoclassicists.

²⁸ The French original again uses the term “Calenda” for what is translated as “entertainment.”

concealed by long eyelids, shot forth killing glances²⁹; the whiteness of her teeth exceeded that of snow, and her complexion, as black as ebony, still added to her incomparable charms. No sooner had Zami beheld her, than he felt in his bosom the first impressions of love. At the same instance chance directed the beautiful eyes of Samba towards Zami, and she was wounded by the same dart which had just pierced the heart of the young negro.

(To be continued.)

WHEN the dance was ended, these lovers sought each other's company, and enjoyed a few happy moments together; and when they were obliged to separate, they promised to visit one another as often as they possibly could. Labor employed each of them during the day; but when the sun sunk below the horizon, they met at a private place, where, amidst a grove of odoriferous orange trees, on the turf, ever crowned with verdure,³⁰ under a serene sky, never obscured by clouds, in the presence of the sparkling orbs of heaven,³¹ and favored by the silence of night, they renewed the ardent testimonies of their affection, and comforted each other, by the tenderest caresses, for the necessity to which their situation reduced them, of separating before returning Aurora³² should gild the skies.

This happiness continued for near six months, when Samba perceived that she was about to become a mother. It would be impossible to describe Zami's joy when he heard this

²⁹ "Killing glances" is not in the French original.

³⁰ *Verdure*: lush green vegetation.

³¹ *Sparkling orbs of heaven*: the stars.

³² *Aurora*: the dawn of the sun.

news.³³ He was still in the delirium of his intoxication, when, on quitting Samba, at the break of day, and entering his hut, he found Makandal, who was waiting for him. Makandal, who was ignorant of Zami's passion and good fortune, addressed him in the following manner:

'Zami, you know the formidable power of my image.³⁴ Rejoice, then, that you have found grace in its sight, and that you have merited its confidence. Go to such a plantation, seek for the beautiful Samba, who has hitherto disdained the vows of all her admirers, and who, for more than a year, has mortified me with continued refusals. Ask her to partake of some refreshment with you, and when she is about to eat, dexterously put this powder into her *calilou*. It will deprive Samba of life.³⁵

Zami, struck with these words, threw himself at the feet of Makandal, and bursting into tears, said, 'O! Makandal, why shouldst thou require me to sacrifice to thy vengeance the most perfect beauty, and the purest heart that can honor our country?'³⁶

³³ Here the French original reads as follows: "It is not when one starts to become familiar with one's mistress [maitresse] that one loves her the most; it is not even when she gives us the first proofs of her tenderness, but rather when she carries on her breast a pledge [gage] of our love. It then seems that she is going to double our being. She becomes a thousand times more dear & more precious. We quake at the tiniest danger that menaces her. Her slightest discomforts are for us the cruellest pains, & her simplest joys our delights." This is the largest body of original text removed from the *LMBR* version.

³⁴ Again, the French version uses "fétiche" here.

³⁵ In the French original, this paragraph concludes with the following sentence: "At the same time, he handed Zami a piece of banana leaf containing the deadly powder."

³⁶ While "our country" suggests something akin to a nation or homeland, the French original uses the word "climats," which is closer to "our regions."

Know that I adore Samba; and that I am tenderly beloved by her, and that her love will soon give the unfortunate Zami a title to the appellation of father.’

Whilst he was uttering these words, he embraced the knees of the ferocious Makandal, who, fired with indignation at seeing a happy rival, had drawn his cutlass, and would have doubtless sacrificed him to his vengeance, had he not heard the voices of some Europeans, who were calling the slaves to their labor. He had time, therefore, only to save himself with precipitation, and, without reflecting on the consequences, left the poisonous powder in the hands of Zami.

Zami immediately resolved to make a full discovery to the overseer; but he still feared Makandal, whose image³⁷ he dreaded, and on that account he thought it prudent to be silent.

The day appeared to him to be insupportably long. He was oppressed with sadness and uneasiness; but, at length, when his labor was ended, he flew to meet his beloved Samba, and repaired to the orange grove.

Samba had not yet arrived. Her lover waited a long time with inexpressible impatience, agitated between hope and fear. Every moment he imagined he heard the sound of steps; the least noise, the slightest agitation of the trees heightened his illusion, and made his heart beat with joy. But perceiving that the hour of appointment was passed, the most dismal forebodings took possession of his soul; he gave himself up to the most terrible conjectures, and he at length lost all hopes of seeing the dear object of his love, when the great bear³⁸ announced it was midnight. Stimulated by impatience, he hastened to the habitation of Samba; the fear of alarming a strange plantation did

³⁷ Fetish in the original.

³⁸ The French reads “le char de la grande ourse,” the Chariot of the Great Bear,” a constellation including but extending beyond what is often called the Big Dipper in English.

not repress his ardor,³⁹ and he could no longer delay to inform himself what had become of his mistress.

But who can describe the terror, the grief, and the despair of the unfortunate Zami, when, on approaching the hut of his adored Samba, he heard the lamentations of several negro women. He entered, and beheld Samba stretched out on a mat; he threw himself towards her, upon which, lifting up her dying eyes, she stretched out her hand and expired, pronouncing the name of Zami.

Zami fell motionless by her side; he was carried away senseless, and was not informed till next morning that a female negro hawker⁴⁰ had been on the plantation, and had dined with Samba. He then discovered⁴¹ what he knew of Makandal’s design, and he shewed the powder, which a chemist at Cape François examined, and found to be violent poison.

It was then suspected what had been the cause of an immense number of sudden deaths which happened among the negroes. People shudder at the thoughts of the danger which threatened the whole colony: the officers of justice⁴² were dispersed throughout the country to seize Makandal, but they despaired of being able to succeed, when Zami offered to secure him.

³⁹ *Ardor*: passion

⁴⁰ *Hawker*: peddler; the French uses the term “pacotilleuse,” the feminine version of pacotilleur (see note 20).

⁴¹ *Discovered*: revealed

⁴² The French term here is “Maréchaussées,” close to the English marshals, and the term for some French police. According to Stewart R. King, the “maréchaussées” of Saint-Domingue were all of African origin by 1733, and their primary responsibility was policing the enslaved population. See “The maréchaussée of Saint-Domingue: Balancing the Ancien Régime and Modernity” (*Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5.2, 2004).

He armed himself only with a club made of the wood of the guava tree, and lay hid to watch him in a narrow pass of the mountain to which Makandal had retired.—There he waited for five days, but on the sixth, before the dawn of day, he heard him marching along with two or three other maroons. Zami immediately starting up, knocked down Makandal's two companions. Makandal drew his cutlass to make a stroke at Zami, who, with a blow of his club, made him drop it from his hand,⁴³ and immediately rushing upon him, held him fast, and having tied his hands behind his back with his long girdle, conducted him to the Cape.

Some of Makandal's accomplices were arrested also, and when put to the rack, confessed the secret of the poison. They did more—they declared that Makandal's intention was to destroy privately the greater part of the planters, or to ruin them, by poisoning all their slaves who appeared to be attached to them; and lastly to exterminate the whole race of white men by a general massacre which would render him the deliverer and sovereign of the whole island. The truth of this dreadful conspiracy was confirmed by the evidence of several other confidants of Makandal⁴⁴; but he himself would never confess any thing; he retained his audacity and fanaticism even in the midst of the flames. He declared haughtily from the top of the pile, that the fire would respect his body; that instead of dying, he would only change his form; and that he would always remain in the island, either as a large knat, bird, or a serpent, to protect his

⁴³ The French includes the following clause: “and knocked him [Makandal] to the ground himself.”

⁴⁴ In the French original, this paragraph begins: “Among the accomplices of Makandal, Teyssele & Mayombé were also arrested and under torture confessed the secret of the poisons.” The sentences about the broader conspiracy appear to have been added in 1789 in the version published in the *LMBR*.

nation.⁴⁵ His discourse made the ignorant negroes believe that his image⁴⁶ would save him; a singular circumstance appeared even for a moment to favor such an opinion. A post had been driven into the earth, around which a pile of faggots⁴⁷ was raised, and Makandal was fixed to the stake by means of a wooden collar. The efforts which he made when fire was put to the pile were so violent that he tore up the stake, and walked ten or twelve paces with it in the midst of the spectators. All the negroes immediately cried out, a miracle! but a soldier who happened to be near, soon shewed by a stroke of his sabre, that he was more powerful than the pretended prophet; and he was once more thrown into the pile, where he suffered the punishment which he so justly deserved.⁴⁸

Such was the origin of the devastations occasioned by poison in the island of St. Domingo, where such practices are become more rare, thought they are not yet entirely eradicated.

As for Zami, when he had avenged the unfortunate Samba, he put himself to death, in hopes of meeting with a lover, without whom he considered life as an insupportable burden.

⁴⁵ This sentence was also added to the English translation. *Knat*: gnat

⁴⁶ *Again*, fetish in the original .

⁴⁷ *Faggots*: bundles of sticks, kindling.

⁴⁸ ...where he suffered the punishment which he so justly deserved. This concluding clause was also added in the 1789 British version, as was the next small paragraph about poisonings in St. Domingo.