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The legacy of Angélique in late 20th-century Black Canadian drama

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the complex issue of Black heroism through the legacy of the figure of the enslaved Portuguese woman Angélique, who set Montreal on fire in 1734. It looks into how late-20th-century artists have engaged in recuperating this figure through the analysis of two specific iterations, the plays of Lorena Gale (*Angélique*, 1999) and George Elliott Clarke (*Beatrice Chancy*, 1999). The article contributes to critical readings to date in arguing that these texts represent the enslaved subject as agent and not as victim, in line with recent changes in Black historiography, and that they constitute cultural interventions that aim to bring into focus the still largely unaddressed history of Black enslavement in Canada. Further, it adds a consideration of the plays' currency nowadays insofar as their plot and characterization stress continuities between past and present struggles against pervasive forms of anti-Black violence.

KEYWORDS

Black Canadian drama; Angélique; Lorena Gale; George Elliott Clarke; afterlife of slavery; anti-Black violence

Introduction: Marie-Joseph Angélique

Slavery in Canada has been obscured in ways that are difficult to imagine. As late as 1999, Maureen Elgersman (1999) reports calling a prestigious Canadian library requesting information, "only to be told that there had been no slavery in Canada" (xi). Another shocking experience is described by Katherine McKittrick (2006) when she was doing archival work for *Demonic Grounds* (91), thus leading her to conclude that the history of Black Canadians still remains largely unknown in the broader national discourse.[1] Historian Afua Cooper (2006) explains the erasure of slavery from collective consciousness: "Black history has less to do with Black people and more with White pride. If Black history narratives make Whites feel good, it is allowed to surface; if not, it is suppressed or buried" (8). Indeed, the wrongly held assumption predominates that Canada was and continues to be either safe haven (for refugees of southern slavery) or land of opportunity (for Black migrants from either the Caribbean or the African continent). Significantly, federal commemoration of Black Canadian history tends to privilege the 19th century, with the bulk of the recognition going to Ontarian sites before 1865; that is, before the abolition of slavery in the USA (Cooper 2007, 14). However, much historical evidence runs counter to this hegemonic narrative of Canada, like the record of the enslaved

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Portuguese-born woman Marie-Joseph Angélique, who allegedly set Montreal on fire in 1734 and was put to death by hanging, a cycle of brutality-resistance-incarceration-death that remains tragically familiar for many Black subjects to this day. Understandingly, these contradictory discourses coalesced in the 1990s and 2000s, coinciding with a period of extraordinary Black Canadian production in the years leading up to the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007. Cooper's own project to recuperate the figure of Angélique for Black Canadian memory – the first book-length study on the subject, *The Hanging of Angélique* (2006) – was completed in time for the celebration.

Many artists to date have become involved in the retelling of Angélique's life.Cooper, a poet herself, has dedicated a poem to the fearless enslaved woman who "in her heart [. . .] was free [and] preferred death to slavery" (Cooper 1992, 39) alongside other historical examples of female freedom seekers like Maria Weems, who at the age of 15 reached Canada by passing for a boy (42). Likewise, Black Nova Scotian songwriter Faith Nolan has sung her tale and Black Quebecker playwright Lorena Gale has told her story in rich detail. What these renderings have in common, as I will contend here, is that they choose to represent the enslaved subject not as victim but as agent, opting for highlighting resistance against enslavement. In that sense, these artists' approach matches current trends in African Canadian historiography that have moved away from the 1970s depiction of "victims who failed to overcome their disadvantages even when given the chance" and have more recently embraced the narration of stories that resonate "with pride, independence, sense of freedom, self-determination – with what we have come to call *agency*" (Walker 2007, 3–4; original emphasis). But providing an inspiring example of Black agency is a problematic notion in the case of Angélique, who was tortured until she confessed to arson, then hanged, and her body burnt to ashes. In fact, the only reliable source of information about Angélique is her trial confession, which covers the last four years of her life. On one hand, one may agree with McKittrick that Angélique single-handedly destroyed most of the city of Montreal, thus threatening "the spatial disposition, the racial codes, and the emblematic order of the colonial town [in what] was surely a radical form of geopolitical resistance and transcendence" (2006, 117). On the other, her public torture and execution illustrate "the lengths to which local communities will go to secure racial, economic, and gender hierarchies" (119), shattering in the process the illusion of a benevolent slave system in Canada. Black heroism in general has always been a complicated issue. The recuperation of Black *male* bodies for a white national imaginary has been predicated on two models, a "passive" one shaped by Harriet Beecher Stowe's character Uncle Tom and an "active" one built on the historic Nat Turner (Bernier 2012, 20).When it comes to Black *female* bodies, projecting a heroic figure has been even harder, for in the popular imagination the image of an enslaved woman tends to be that of a semi-naked, nameless body at the auction block (Foster 1994, xxix). Moreover, the story of Angélique resists a conventional telling as a "neo-slave" or "liberatory" narrative as defined by African American critics; that is, either as a narrative of the transit from enslavement to freedom (Bell 1987; Rushdy 1999) or as one providing readers with a liberatory experience (Mitchell 2002).

Yet, in their late-20th-century renderings, Black Canadian writers have made an effort to put the spotlight on resistance and determination rather than on the more immediately obvious narrative of failure and death.[2] The earliest example in Black Canadian drama of the period is Lorris Elliott's (1985) unfinished "The Trial of Marie-

Joseph Angelique – Negress and Slave",[3] which became a forerunner for the two other theatrical works discussed here. The plays *Angélique* by Black anglophone Montrealaise dramatist Lorena Gale and *Beatrice Chancy* by Black Nova Scotian poet George Elliott Clarke were both published in 1999, following one another very closely at the end of a period when Black cultural production was thriving and the object of much public recognition in Canada (Siemerling 2015, 6; Walcott and Abdillahi 2019, 12). Interestingly, Joanne Tompkins (2009) has placed Gale's *Angélique* together with other contemporaneous plays as responses to Rodney King's events.[4] Following Tompkins, I contend that Gale's and Clarke's works should be read against the persistent forms of violence against Black people that constitute what Saidiya Hartman (2008) named "the afterlife of slavery" (6) and that, both in form and in content, they aim at bringing attention to the continuities between the past and the present of Black communities in Canada.

In its current form, *Angélique* was staged in Calgary in January 1998 in Alberta Theatre Projects' prestigious PlayRites programme for new plays. However, by then a first draft had won the Du Maurier National Playwriting Competition in 1995, and it had gone through several workshops in locations as far away as Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, Galway, and Dublin. As for Clarke, he wrote the opera libretto of *Beatrice Chancy* for a chamber opera to James Rolfe's music which premiered in Toronto in 1998; it was published in *Canadian Theatre Review* the same year and a verse drama version followed in 1999; I cite here from the latter. Lorena Gale's oeuvre works much closer to the historical figure of Angélique than George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*, although the latter is significantly dedicated to her and to Lydia Jackson, an impoverished free woman who was tricked into indenturing herself for 39 years. Like Angélique, Jackson resisted brutal treatment and sexual assault from her new owner, seeking legal protection against him. When this was not forthcoming, she ran away. Her story has reached us in the account of John Clarkson, the English abolitionist who visited Nova Scotia in 1791 and led a group of free Black Nova Scotians to resettlement in Sierra Leone years later.[5] Clarkson lists other Black Loyalists who had experienced similar fates, so Lydia Jackson represents in many ways the quintessential Black female Nova Scotian experience of (re-)enslavement. Although Clarke does not provide specific information on either woman, he has inserted a short note on the general features of slavery in his province in which he underlines its far-reaching effects, but also, like Gale, its present currency, insofar as his own African heritage "was disrupted by a ship and ruptured by chains" (Clarke 1999, 8).

Both authors, then, draw from the historical figure of Angélique as a powerful icon of Black history in their aim to challenge the dominant narrative of the Canadian (white) nation state. It is worth noting that, as Angélique is a gendered icon, an important component of the texts is the representation of the sexual violence that African women routinely endured in their enslaved situation. Drawing from many insightful critical readings of the plays to date, my own discussion will centre on plot and characterization, dwelling on the representation of the protagonist's agency or heroism as well as on the textual treatment of sexual violence against Black women in slave societies. A further aim of this article is to suggest that, in the current cultural climate in North America,

featuring continued and variegated forms of brutality against Black people and against women, these portrayals of Black female heroism remain not only current but also extremely pertinent.[6]

Rebellious enslaved women in *Angélique* and *Beatrice Chancy*

Lorena Gale's *Angélique* is divided into two Acts. Act I spans 18 scenes, starting with her purchase by François Poulin de Francheville and ending with his death. Act II features the Montreal fire, Angélique's escape, capture, torture, and execution in 24 increasingly short scenes, whose pace grows faster as the climax approaches. The performance evokes the historical continuities between past and present by means of the use of modern as well as 18th-century costumes; for example, in Scene 16, where Francheville undresses Angélique, discards her modern garments, and dresses her up in those of her own time, including a corset whose laces Francheville holds as if they were reins, while "he pumps her, as if he were fucking her from behind" (Gale 1999, 31). The scene makes a powerful statement about the sexualization of Black women's bodies up to the present, as well as about their double jeopardy under slavery, due to their race and their gender. More generally, the playwright also stresses continuity in the play's opening remarks, which describe the time as "The present and 1730s. Then is now. Now is then" (Gale 1999, 2). The interchangeability of time periods suggests the continued status of Black people as expendable commodities in the west. Likewise, there is an emphasis on Black genealogy and a solidarity of suffering in Gale's dedication to

> my mom, the late Lillian Madden, who *slaved* all her life for minimum wage and still managed to house, feed, clothe and educate 5 children. And to my son Clayton Cooper. May he never know *the hardships previous generations have endured*. (Gale 1999, n.p.; my italics)

Moreover, although there is a general continuity of action in the 1730s, Gale's stage directions recommend modern performative techniques and anachronistically introduce modern objects among the props, like a Bic lighter or a boom box, so audiences are reminded of the links between past and present. The same point is made in the first scene of the play – where a large history book occupies the background – and in in the last one, in which Angélique takes the book from the clerk who has read out her sentence and closes it, putting an end to her story. This device highlights the historicity of her experiences and the truthfulness of the account, while, more generally, theatrical anachronism is meant to bring the past to life, closer to audiences' modern perceptions. In Act II, for example, information about the Montreal fire and the ensuing investigation is given on video in a reporting style "not unlike 'Current Affairs' " (Gale 1999, 60) and the cast are supposed to behave "like the specious and ridiculous eyewitnesses often seen on many sensational news programs" (64).

Gale's play sets out to provide a comprehensive picture of slavery in 18th-century New France for contemporary audiences by means of three interrelated households. Angélique belongs to the Franchevilles, François and Thérèse, still grieving for the loss of their only child, who also own an indentured white worker, Claude. Nearby lives François's business partner Ignace Gamelin, owner of an enslaved African, César. Finally, the De Berays are served by Manon, an Aboriginal bondswoman or *panisse*. This social organization is historically consistent. Between the years 1628 and 1833, slavery was an

institutionalized practice in those territories, whether under French or British rule. Enslaved Africans and Indigenous people (known as *panis*) performed a range of duties for colonists of all social ranks in their homes, farms, and businesses.[7] The three families belonged to a merchant middle class rapidly rising in Montreal, New France's trading hub. The biographical details mentioned in the play are similarly reliable (Cooper 2006, 11). For this social group, slave ownership was as much a symbol of status as a source of labour and a commodity that could easily be turned into ready money if pressed for cash. The stage directions emphasize the slaves' invisible presence, vital to maintaining the lifestyle of the three households:

> Unless otherwise stated, the slaves are working in every scene in which they appear, either in a modern or historical context. Although the specifics are not written into the text, what can be explored is the concept of witnessing. As servants and slaves are essentially invisible, experiment with who sees what, who knows what. (Gale 1999, 2)

The picture of chattel slavery comes to life throughout Act I, particularly in Scene 1, which presents the purchase of Angélique as the result of Francheville's lust, although he tries to delude himself (and the audience) by misrepresenting the act as a gift to his wife, Thérèse, to help her overcome her grief over the death of their daughter. Francheville has just secured a 20-year monopoly over the iron ore in St Maurice and feels intoxicated by the power afforded him by such wealth. His eyes dwell on the figure of Angélique, on her elegant shape, her shining skin, her large ebony eyes, her proud face (Gale 1999, 4), in a sexualized visual act of possession that anticipates the rape in Scene 5. Another key scene comes soon afterwards, when Francheville orchestrates a sexual encounter between Angélique and Gamelin's bondsman, César, to cover up his sexual abuse. The "mating" scene illustrates the dehumanizing practices involved in the institution of slavery, as well as the pervasive myths about Black people's sexuality. The masters – joined later by Thérèse – watch from behind a two-way mirror, and speak "in a clinical, scientific manner" exchanging brutal remarks on the "mating practices of the African in captivity" as Angélique and César stand at a distance and look at each other guardedly (Gale 1999, 14–15).

Nevertheless, Angélique's strong personality short-circuits the smooth course of chattel slavery through acts of resistance scattered in three solo scenes that establish an intense rapport between character and audience. These scenes showcase the character's development, making more explicit the changes induced in her by the experience of captivity, isolation from her family and peers, and sexual assault. The first solo scene (Scene 4) shows a naive Angélique, eagerly applying herself to her new chores and full of hope that

> [t]his time everything will work out for me. […] These folk will be decent and good. / […] I will give freely of myself. / Repaying their humanity with loyalty. / Earning their protection and their care. / […] This time will be different. / This time will be different. / This time will be different. (Gale 1999, 8)

The repetition and tempo of her words, synchronized with her movements as she cleans, turn this speech into a chanting prayer. For Alan Filewod (2005) this scene evidences how Angélique is deceived by the "depersonalised nature of this work, [which] promises a secure structure of duty which can be separated from the self and in effect disguises

slavery as a 'job' " (35). Accordingly, nobody hears Angélique's prayer. In the short space between Scene 4 and Scene 10, her next solo scene, she has lived through regular sexual assault from her master who creeps into her room every night, the "mating" ritual with César, and her mistress's mounting suspicion after the birth of a baby whose skin is uncommonly fair. In a second solo full of pathos, Angélique smothers her baby while she tells him a story about the struggle between Light and Darkness. Tenderly, Angélique parts with her son promising to join him soon.

Filewod believes this is a disconcerting moment because it comes too early in the play, "as an almost routine incident of daily life" (2005, 33), but I disagree. I see it as a scene that builds on the emotional impact of the above-mentioned dark scenes of sexual abuse. Gale manages to convey here for a contemporary audience the brutality of slavery in what is perhaps the most moving scene in the whole play, one that recalls the choice made historically by many enslaved Black women, as famously rendered in Toni Morrison's (1987) novel *Beloved*. For the enslaved, there is either slavery or death, and the latter may well be preferable to the former. Angélique has learned very hard lessons in a relatively short time and she is no longer the naive girl that she once was. Later scenes depict the growing tensions within the household: Francheville's stifling jealousy controlling Angélique's movements, Thérèse's regular beatings of a slave perceived as robbing her of her husband's rightful affection, and Angélique's own fantasies of escape and small acts of spite, like spitting into the glass of water that she is bringing her master (Gale 1999, 35).

No other solo scene appears until the very end, Angélique's execution. In this third, climactic solo, she addresses the audience directly, envisioning her brothers' and sisters' continued pain as well as how History will twist the facts of her story, until eventually, because truth cannot be silenced forever, "Someday, / someone will hear me / and believe … / I didn't do it" (Gale 1999, 72), a statement that reinforces the play's testimonial value at the same time as it brings it to its close by returning full circle to its beginning. Gale opts for an oblique staging of the execution, giving us only the sounds of the platform giving way and drums to accompany "her silhouetted figure dancing on the wall" (72). In this final scene a more mature Angélique, seemingly resigned to her fate, reaches out to the future to describe a continued cycle of violence against her brothers and her sisters: "Arrested for their difference. / Their misery / a silent scream, / rising to crescendo / and/falling on deaf ears" (71). Clearly these lines would resonate very deeply with contemporary audiences today, all too familiar with videos of police brutality against Black people, and particularly with George Floyd's dying words "I can't breathe."

Moreover, Gale's play supplies a wide-ranging examination of attitudes concerning how to live under slavery by means of the other enslaved Africans in the play. For César, who does not remember any family, perhaps because he was sold off and separated from them while still a baby, slavery cannot be helped and therefore must be endured. Angélique, on the contrary, pines for her Atlantic home in Portuguese Madeira, where, despite the hard work picking coffee, she was surrounded by her family and friends, and on days of rest they made a fire on the beach, danced, and told stories of the ancestors. As she sums it up: "I may have always been a slave. But I did not feel like one until I came to this land" (Gale 1999, 29). Compounding these different backgrounds is of course their gender, since César is free of the continued sexual harassment that Angélique is subjected to. He is happy to comply with his master's orders, even to the extent of switching his

affections from Manon to Angélique on his say-so. Following the Uncle Tom role model outlined above, César becomes the image of the submissive slave, in one scene standing by Gamelin's side as an illustration of his master's theories on how some slaves are like horses, who will return the master's care with loyalty (Gale 1999, 62).

George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*, a verse drama and opera,[8] manages to infuse still more locations and memories into the polyvalent icon that the historical Angélique has become in recent times. In this work, the Africadian poet sets out to correct what he has identified as a "paucity of martyrs in African Canadian literature" (Clarke 2012, 78) by creating a figure that taps into Angélique via European literature, intertextually drawing from Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1819 tragedy *The Cenci*. Clarke insightfully perceived striking links between the story of Beatrice Cenci in Renaissance Italy – a woman who killed her father for having forced himself on her, as told in Shelley's work among many others[9] – and the history of sexual assault of enslaved African women:

> The overt fact of sexual violence links the plight of Beatrice Cenci with that of black female slaves in the Americas. Her sufferings at the hands of an omnipotent, church-and-state-protected master would have been a story familiar to innumerable black "New World" slaves. (Clarke 2000, 175)

Beatrice Chancy is set in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia in 1801, during the period of anti-slavery agitation between the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself throughout the British Empire. As Amanda Montague (2012) has claimed, "[b]y reimagining Beatrice as the mixed-race daughter of white slave owner Francis Chancy, Clarke's narrative reconceptualization employs a European history of social and domestic violence in order to expose Canada's historic intimacy with racial violence and oppression" (136). In Nova Scotia free and enslaved Black people were thrown together; many had arrived with the Loyalist contingent after the American War of Independence (1783). In contrast to Lorena Gale's *Angélique, Beatrice Chancy* maintains a more conventional dramatic division into five Acts and a continuous historical action unfolding over one month (April) although the final two scenes skip to the date of Beatrice's execution in October 1801. While Shelley's original title *The Cenci* evidenced a larger focus on the collective family story, Clarke's emphasizes the female protagonist, in line with other accounts of Angélique, but the Black Nova Scotian writer goes even further in painting a comprehensive picture of the institution of slavery. The play opens with Beatrice's return to her father's plantation after being schooled in a convent for three years, and gives a relentless account of the young woman's descent into horror as she immediately becomes the target of her father's lust, in much the same way that Gale's opening scene featured Francheville's desire for Angélique. The oversexualization of Black women's bodies and the everyday sexual abuse they are exposed to is here compounded by incest.

The name "Paradise" is paradoxical for a slave plantation, which operates as what Achille Mbembe (2003) has called "death worlds"; that is, "unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (40; original emphasis). Living under a regime that denies them control over their own lives – and deaths – the enslaved inhabitants of Paradise are less than human because they experience "absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death" (Mbembe 2003, 21). In the play's opening scene, Lead, Deal, Moses, and Dumas establish the features of the miserable deaths-in-life they lead and recount the

story of Beatrice's mother Mafa, rescued from a sinking ship off Peggy's Cove that drowned 300 other Africans and sold for a pittance. On Paradise she was the object of sexual abuse by the master, Francis Chancy, and of jealous mistreatment by his wife Lustra (again, very much like Angélique), who contrived to engineer her death from consumption by shutting her out in the cold. Mafta's story epitomizes the slave's triple loss – "of a 'home', loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status" (Mbembe 2003, 21) – further compounded by the sexual violence that is women's lot. Not surprisingly, Lead concludes that "[t]his history's only good for anger" (Clarke 1999, 17), a statement one might also apply to Gale's play.

Dice, a young Black man who might be also Chancy's son, is another instrument of the regime of pain on the plantation. He oversees the state of exception from civil and spiritual laws that reigns in Paradise, where God has been replaced by Chancy. Dice keeps constant surveillance and abundantly provides regular physical discipline to ensure that the enslaved work without relief: "Like God, like Chancy – my one pa, I whack / Motherfucking bastards like snakes. I'll smash / Your faces till you learn to love tears real good. Mercy from Heaven, there ain't none" (Clarke 1999, 19). He pays particular attention to Lead because he challenges his authority and infringes the borders of the slave condition in his love affair with Beatrice, the master's daughter. Lead's subhuman existence, however, does not experience substantial worsening for being whipped and branded for his desires; after all, those punishments are often meted out arbitrarily within the plantation as a form of instilling terror and submission.

In contrast, in Beatrice Chancy the transformation of human subject to subhuman object brought about by physical pain is made visible owing to the fact that she partakes of both, being "equally [Chancy's] daughter and [his] slave" (Clarke 1999, 27). Having been sent to a convent in Halifax "to shape her more like us – white, modern, beautiful" (52), Beatrice returns to a home in Paradise, some rights over her own body, and a certain social status as Chancy's daughter. Yet these three conditions are redressed, together with her own human status, as soon as it is known that she is in love with Lead, thus thwarting her father's plans to use her to expand his political influence. Beatrice is put in chains and later disciplined by Dice, who, as he whips her, calls her a "mangy, stubborn, dust-coloured bitch" (70), terms that place her outside the realm of the human. Beatrice's descent into the hell of slavery is compounded by her father's sexual assault, meant to not just gratify Chancy's lust but to teach her the ways of terror and thus reinstate the balance of power that Beatrice's preference for Lead had disturbed: "My hands will speak horror to her body. / She'll learn what it means to be property" (82).

Chancy's sexual violence brings Beatrice down from the subject position of his daughter to the object position of captive flesh, defined by Hortense J. Spillers (1987) as "that zero degree of social conceptualization" (67) predating the body, an abject thing or being that is reduced to bare survival. Pushed by a harrowing experience close to the brink of madness, her disorderly behaviour and incoherent speech after the assault render apparent both the violence exerted and its symbolic meaning. As Elaine Scarry (1987) has put it, physical pain "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). This near-death ordeal in a death-world – Beatrice grieves: "I've died here in just four days" (Clarke 1999, 97) – and its ensuing descent from subject to object are nevertheless necessary steps for Beatrice to

fully comprehend how enslavement operates and is experienced by the enslaved, and thus to transform her into the liberator of her people as Clarke has designed. As Heiland (2007) remarks, the representation of pain is a first step towards imagining alternatives (129). The obverse process of becoming human again starts by overcoming the silencing effect of her abuse, articulating her suffering, and speaking out against its agent. This happens when Beatrice rejects Chancy's previous role as "father", renaming him as her "raper" (Clarke 1999, 109). For Montague, this is a key moment because

> Beatrice reconfigures the practice of naming as an imperial tool for ownership [and] reclaims her body and her past. In naming Francis as her raper, Beatrice remembers and articulates the violence that has been inflicted not only upon her, but also upon her mother and her ancestors. (2012, 145).

In the play's final act she takes command of her co-conspirators Lead and Lustra, designing and executing the murder of the tyrant. For Maureen Moynagh (2002), Beatrice comes to embody "a representation of subaltern insurgency" (116; see also Moynagh 2005).In this, Clarke's rendering of the rebellious slave wholly departs from Gale's by striking for an unambiguous heroism. There is no hesitation in Beatrice's actions, for which she accepts full responsibility. When Lustra, grieving over her husband's killing, wonders if water can cleanse the blood on Beatrice's hands, she replies with a sarcastic "Why not? It seems to work with rape" (Clarke 1999, 132). This exchange resonates with Lady Macbeth's self-torturing "out, damned spot!" and wringing of hands; but, unlike Shakespeare's character, Beatrice is unmoved in her strong belief in the justice of her deeds. Not surprisingly, the stage directions compare her to a number of female heroes, historical women who transgressed the requirements of femininity and mobilized others in the pursuit of justice. Beatrice's loyalty to her people is thus likened to the biblical Ruth, who did not abandon the Jews in times of hardship, while her struggle against tyranny bears comparison to David's against Goliath (146) and less conventionally to Tituba's, the enslaved woman accused of witchcraft in 17th-century Salem (120).

Beatrice Chancy, however, differs from those precedents. In the dramatis personae she is doubly identified as "a martyr-liberator". It is the fusion of two roles that might be considered antithetical because seldom found together that makes Clarke's re-embodiment of Angélique so arresting. Consequently, the text works at a double level too. On one hand, it establishes Beatrice as a liberator by showing her as belonging with the wronged and the enslaved, which entails showcasing the necropolitical aspects of the institution of slavery pointed out above. On the other, it strives to cast her as a martyr by invoking for her a Christian rhetoric of messianic sacrifice. This latter aspect can be more clearly perceived in the dignity she displays during her long ordeal. In prison she awaits her final sentence with resignation, once more invoking her connection to other rebellious women like Angélique (Clarke 1999, 140), and her final words address the slaves witnessing the execution, reminding them that she engineered their freedom and thus changed their future for the best: "I bring you fresh, blushing apple blossoms – / They waft the perfume of liberty. / I bring you pale, fragile apple blossoms. / It took violence to cut you these flowers" (147). Fittingly, the execution takes place on Thanksgiving Day, suggesting the bounty flowing from her sacrifice. This scene renders Beatrice as the martyr-liberator that Clarke designed, a heroine of tragic stature and poetic eloquence struggling against forces much larger than her. While it is true that Clarke does not make use of

anachronistic objects or other performative techniques to encourage connections with the present, he powerfully uses intertextual associations for the same purpose, as described above, by placing the protagonist's plight within a historical genealogy of Black suffering, thus opening up "a dynamic interrelation among Beatrice Chancy and the history of slavery" (Larson 2006, 110). Very significantly, her final gestures and words, like Angélique's in Gale's play, invite audiences to connect the past and present of Black lives in Canada.

Conclusion: Updating the archive of slavery and anti-Blackness in Canada

As critics before me have discussed at some length, Lorena Gale's *Angélique* and George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy* engage with the historical archive of slavery in Canada by way of the historical figure of Marie-Joseph Angélique, an act of recuperation that brings into focus the very existence of brutal practices of Black enslavement on Canadian soil for the best part of two centuries: "Angélique's ordeal permits us to see slavery as a system of power, violence, and brutality" (Cooper 2007, 21). My own analysis of plot and characterization in these texts argues that she is inevitably a figure of pathos, however inspiring her strong, spirited struggle may be. Angélique's heroic but ultimately ineffective resistance against slavery makes a martyr of her. Whether stressing her wrath, her misery, or her strength of mind, Angélique's story inevitably goes against the grain of so-called narratives of liberation. Yet, in both playwrights' renderings, Angélique embodies the most powerful statement against the deliberate cultural amnesia regarding Black history in Canada, thus helping undo the dispossession of history that Black Canadians have experienced to this day.

Moreover, the dramatic use of the figure of the rebellious enslaved woman by Gale and Clarke attests to the struggle, shared across the board by other Black Canadian writers, to build what I would call a solidarity of memory across the different Black constituencies in Canada; what Diana Brydon (2001) has termed "black Canadas" because they are "multiply constituted in ways that defy easy categorization" (106). Through repeated iterations, Angélique has become a mnemonic icon, potentially standing for many other of those contexts of racism and suffering that continue to make up Black culture in Canada. Remarkably, Angélique as a sign affords both a memory grounded in Canadian territory (slavery in 18th-century New France) and a transatlantic, diasporic memory (by virtue of her Portuguese birth and early life) that characterizes the African Diaspora in the New World. Angélique's body transits from Portugal to Canada and fixes Black Canada's position within the geography of the Black Atlantic, or, as Cooper remarks, her story "centres Canada as part of the African Diaspora and highlights it as a 'black gathering place' of the Atlantic world" (2007, 22). The latter goal is particularly pertinent because Black Canadian cultural production remains to date substantially unacknowledged within the critical framework of the Black Atlantic, as described by Paul Gilroy (1993) in his book of the same title, but also, very importantly, because it attests to Angélique's story's high potential to generate rapport in all Black subjects. The above analysis proves that the plays drag into the open many submerged life stories, bringing into being an intense, immediate connection to the events narrated on stage and thus opening up a firm path back into a shared past. Above all, the compelling final words voiced by their protagonists reach out to contemporary audiences to make them feel the weight of the afterlife of slavery and the urgent need to transform our present.

Notes

1. Throughout this article the word "Black" is capitalized in order to suggest the politically constructed meanings of race in general and blackness in particular.
2. This is in line with Keizer's own analysis of African American and anglophone Afro-Caribbean writing (Keizer 2004, 8).
3. In his introductory remarks, Elliott mentions that this is only one act in a play entitled *Who Was All There*, but no publication of the whole play followed.
4. In 1992, the acquittal of the police officers who had viciously beaten Rodney King allegedly for drunk driving led to riots in Los Angeles and other North American cities, like Toronto. Similarities with more recent events, like the George Floyd killing in Minneapolis and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement around the world can hardly be overstressed.
5. Jackson's story is currently available online on the Nova Scotia Archives website.
6. I am referencing here the struggle of the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements for social justice in the US and Canada. In the latter, many critical voices have been raised against anti-Black police brutality and arbitrary practices such as carding (Maynard 2017; Walcott and Abdillahi 2019; Cole 2020; Walcott 2021) as well as against sexual assault (concerning such high-profile cases as University of British Columbia (UBC) Accountability and Soulpepper Theatre, among others).
7. I am indebted to Afua Cooper's (2006) *The Hanging of Angélique* for the description of the institution of slavery in New France at the time, particularly in chapter 3 (68–106), as well as more generally for Angélique's story.
8. On Clarke's "restless genres" creative practice, see Pivato (2012).
9. Clarke (1999, 152–154) provides an exhaustive list of sources and creative texts on Beatrice Cenci in the Afterword to the play, here significantly entitled "Conviction".

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