The slave uprising of 1791 in the French colony of Saint-Domingue sparked the war for independence that ended in 1804 with the founding of the first black republic under the island’s original name of Haiti. Nearly concurrently, in 1788, one year before the French Revolution, activists of both genders established the Société des amis des noirs in Paris. The antislavery movement in France, which was suppressed in the wake of les massacres de Saint-Domingue, reorganized during the 1820s. Political debate that centered on the gradual versus immediate abolition of slavery spread to the literary realm. In Romantic era women’s writing, abolitionist and feminist currents overlapped without, however, always merging. Various political stances thus diversify the way women’s literary works archive the colonial past, as does the multiplicity of their poetic voices and individual legacies. As illustrated by the writings of Anaïs Ségalas (1811–1893; fig. 13), the ideological drift of individual authors further complicates the intersection between literature and history. The Parisian-born writer’s poetry in the 1830s and ’40s leaned toward the emancipatory projects that linked feminists and abolitionists. A Eurocentric view of history surfaces in this verse, however, which adumbrates Ségalas’s conservative turn at mid-century toward the civilizing mission declared by France under the Third Republic and the racist overtones of her related prose from the 1850s and later decades.

In this chapter I examine the colonial strand of Ségalas’s verse and prose, spanning the years from 1831 to 1885, to illuminate the impact of gender, memory, reading, and collective attitudes on her engagement with history. The Romantic era, which coincided with renewed abolitionism and the definitive end of slavery in France’s colonies in 1848, provides the broader context in which I analyze her poetry. Racial physiology emerged during the same period, however, bracing
aggressive empire building from the mid-century forward. Ségalas conveys this radical sociopolitical shift through her appraisal of race before and after the abolition of slavery, which I trace from her early verse to late prose. The depth and permanence of Ségalas’s interest in France’s colonial empire challenges the accounts of literary history that ignore her unique contribution to understanding the rise of French colonialism in the nineteenth century.

Women disputed the inferiority of blacks and females, beginning with the political activist Olympe de Gouges, the author of “Réflexions sur les hommes nègres” (1788) and “Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne” (1791). This intellectual element often mingled with empathy in French women’s antislavery prose and poetry. Only the sentimental aspect, however, prevailed for critics who later ascribed the colonial topics addressed by women writers in the 1820s and ’30s to the Romantic yearning for the exotic fueled by “le goût des voyages” and “la fièvre de lectures comme les Natchez ou Paul et Virginie” (Pilon, “Les muses plaintives du romantisme,” 207). Ségalas’s output, however, extends well past the issue of slavery, which captured the “distanced imagination” of male and female pre-Romantics as well as their successors. Her original path of thought tracks the rise of biological racism and its influence on French colonial expansion, expressing the individuality of creative genius.
Staël located her novella *Mirza; ou, Lettre d’un voyageur* (1795) within the French Atlantic triangle. Ximéo’s relationship with Ourika (a woman of his tribe to whom he was promised in marriage) and Mirza (a woman of an enemy tribe and a poet of “genius” whom he betrays) is the focal point of Staël’s commentary on how Africans’ lives were rent asunder by slave trading. The Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy during the British occupation from 1801 to 1802 is the setting for Desbordes-Valmore’s *Sarah* (1821). This novella exposes the inhumanity of slavery from a dual perspective: that of Arsène, a former slave who sells himself back into bondage to protect Sarah, the white Creole in his care, and that of his charge, who is tricked into thinking that she is a slave by a white foreman.

Entwined with the debate over slavery, which seized the literary imagination in the early nineteenth century, was the emergent “scientific” notion of race. Whereas proponents of monogenism, like Buffon, claimed that blacks and whites shared the same origins, polygenists followed Cuvier, arguing that blacks descended from a different ancestral type. In *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* (1801), Virey also drew on skull differences “du nègre et du blanc” to dispute the climatic explanation for different skin tones inherited from the eighteenth century. He theorized instead that color represents an organic difference, asserting that “le genre humain, dans sa totalité, doit se diviser en deux espèces distinctes”: the white and the black races (1:436). In a dictionary entry on “Nègre,” which invoked Pierre Barrère’s 1741 anatomy of black skin, Virey confirmed that “le nègre n’est donc pas seulement nègre à l’extérieur, mais encore dans toutes ses parties, et jusque dans celles qui sont les plus intérieures” (“Nègre,” 425). He thus refuted “les amis des noirs,” specifically Henri Grégoire (known as Abbé Grégoire), who had stated that blacks possessed genius (“Nègre,” 429). In the corresponding entry in the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*, Virey insisted that blacks’ muscles, tissues, organs, and secretions were all dark in color. Regarding “cette teinture noirâtre,” concluded Virey, “[i]l faut donc que cette qualité soit innée et radicale” (388). His physiology, which transposes physical traits into signs of mental capacity and moral attributes, carried through the debate over slavery as well as the biological notion of race that bolstered imperialism.

The question raised early in the nineteenth century about the meaning of race—ancestry versus color—hovers in the background of Claire de Duras’s *Ourika* (1823). Set in Paris during the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror (1793–94) that coincided with the rebellion in Saint-Domingue, the novella stems from the true story of a Senegalese girl. Ourika is rescued from a slave ship and raised by an aristocratic French family, whose perspective and experience of persecution she internalizes. Her discovery of her blackness produces a sense of shame and alienation from which she never recovers. While Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal* (1826) evokes the early months of the Saint-Domingue revolt, Sophie Doin’s *La famille noire* (1825),
published the year that France recognized Haiti's independence, takes place after the long revolution. Their narratives show the principal black male characters' humanity and intelligence. In so doing, they contest the narrative of “black terror” grafted onto Toussaint Louverture, the former slave who became a leader of the Haitian revolution. Ségalas's treatment of race does not fit squarely within either the feminist-abolitionist binary or the Romantic resistance to the slave trade and slavery by analogy. Rather, in considering the idea of race from multiple perspectives, Ségalas archives her century's push for the abolition of slavery and the paradox of its ultimate regression to scientific racism.

Although Duras and Desbordes-Valmore had firsthand knowledge of the Caribbean islands, Ségalas never traveled there. She learned about the French colonies from her mother. Biographers generally agree that Ségalas's mother, Anne Bonne-Portier, was a white Creole from Saint-Domingue and that her father, Charles Ménard, hailed from the Picardy region of France. No account mentions when Ségalas's mother arrived in France. Like other French Creoles, she likely fled from the island soon after the slave uprising began. In mistakenly recording that both parents were Creoles, Camille Delaville alludes to Ségalas's appearance: “Leur fille, née à Paris, très parisienne d'esprit et de goût, a physiquement l'aspect des femmes de nos colonies” (Mes contemporaines, 69). The British author Charles Hervey remembers Ségala in a similar fashion from a gathering he attended at Vigny's home: “Mme Anaïs Ségalas was announced, and a lady, apparently on the sunny side of forty, whose dark lustrous eyes and singularly clear complexion sufficiently denoted her Creole origin, entered the room” (“A Reception of Alfred de Vigny’s,” 486). The sense of Creoleness that Ségala exploits in her creative production is less obvious, however. The figure of “la belle Créole,” in particular, comes laden with ambiguity, for a mixed heritage mingles with a distinctly French European descent in Ségala's poetry and prose. Germaine to the various colonial sites evoked in Ségalas's poetry is the issue of racial identity she first raises in engaging with the history of French conquests.

**The Algerian Conquest**

Ségalas's interest in the Antilles was likely nurtured by memories of Saint-Domingue that her mother shared with her. Another major chapter in the history of French colonization, closer to home and to Ségala's moment, however, unfolds in her first poetic collection. Ségala's *Les algériennes: Poésies* (1831) commemorates France's conquest of Algiers the preceding year. In prefatory comments, Ségala invokes as her model Hugo's *Orientales* (1829), a volume inspired by the Greek War of Independence, which portrays the eastern Mediterranean's rich landscapes: “Je résolu de me hasarder dans ce monde nouveau dont M. Victor Hugo nous a montré le chemin; mais, trop faible pour marcher sur les traces d'un si vaste génie,
je consacrai peu de vers à la peinture des mœurs Africaines. Dans le reste de cet ouvrage, je n’ai parlé que de la valeur de notre armée, espérant que dans un tel sujet l’admiration m’inspirerait et suppléerait au talent” (Les algériennes, 2). Though Ségalas’s verse charts new terrain, she purports not to possess enough imagination to transport her readers there, as Hugo had. One can interpret the ambivalent way Ségalas authorizes her poetic work as a strategy to disarm her critics. This ambivalence can be also understood to mirror the uneasy encounter with the exotic other, an encounter that displaces the site of memory from personal experience to the collective domain.

Ségalas’s notes to Les algériennes add her knowledge of history and current events derived from print culture, including newspapers and books, to the ethos of sympathy highlighted in Romantic era women’s antislavery writing. She also nuances her opening treatment of slavery by considering the practice apart from race. In the first poem, “L’esclave,” the first-person speaker, not yet identified, challenges the reader to imagine what it means to be a slave: “Esclave! esclave! moi! . . . sais-tu bien, homme libre, / Ce que c’est qu’un esclave?” (5; ellipses in original). From chains to torment, shipwreck, torture, and captivity, servitude begets inhumanity. Ségalas’s portrayal condenses the nascent humanitarian argument for the immediate emancipation of black slaves: “Son âme plane aux cieux, son corps est dans la fange” (7). But here in “L’esclave,” the slave represents a universal, “un homme animal” (7).

As Ségalas’s speaking subject further states, regardless of race or context, once a slave, one becomes an object of exchange: “Être exposé, vendu! . . . mais devenir encor / D’intrépide soldat marchandise Africaine / Qu’un maître possède à prix d’or!” (Les algériennes, 9–10; ellipses in original). Ségalas charts an unconventional course for indicting the slave trade by attempting to enter the mind of a “guerrier Français” captured in Algiers. The anxiety about being sold into slavery, on the part of a white French soldier, projected what was a historical reality for black Africans. Even though England had banned slave trading in 1807 and France had followed suit in 1815, the practice continued. Firsthand accounts of the “bloody commerce,” to use the subtitle of the British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson’s tract, which appeared in French translation in 1821 (Les cris des Africains), circulated as part of the antislavery platform that had gained strength in France by the 1830s.28

In “L’esclave,” the protest against slavery as unjust and cruel drifts to the concerns of the ruling class in France:

Un maître! . . . Ce mot tue, et d’horreur il pénètre
L’âme du Français révolté,
Lui qui n’a point d’esclave et qui n’a point de maître,
Qui sous son drapeau voit paraître
La victoire et la liberté.

(Les algériennes, 10; ellipses in original)
Nationalism underlies the speaker’s cry for freedom from captivity. The banner of liberty shaken for the French male soldier extends the memory of past French victories. Linked with Napoleon’s military campaigns in subsequent poems, the thread of conquest develops the Eurocentric perspective twinned with Bonapartism in Les algériennes.

The issue of slavery merges with war in “La captive.” Unlike the tour of local color admired by Hugo’s subject in a poem of the same title in Les orientales, Ségalas’s speaker, imprisoned by her Algerian captors, remains fixated on thoughts of “divine France” and her “belle patrie” (Les algériennes, 17, 21). It is not that she is blind to the exotic paysage of Algiers, which the poet presents in detail. Instead, the landscape beyond the walls of her prison has no appeal because the prisoner cannot separate herself from the memory of the one who loved her “d’un cœur français” (21). The allegiance in “La captive,” as in “L’esclave,” is the abiding sense of Frenchness, which is conveyed as imperialism in the way Ségalas next imagines the encounter with the Algerian other.

In juxtaposing “L’arrivée des Français” with “Le cri de guerre des Algériens,” Ségalas envisions the battle from the perspectives of both the French and the Algerians. The daily press is the source she claims for locales such as the campsite in “Le jeune soldat,” a poem revealing what was at stake for the French. Placed at the heart of the battle, the first-person speaker boasts:

Le plus beau modèle est la France,
Et sa gloire est de s’égaler!
Quelle tâche imposante elle donne à mon zèle!
Quel plus noble héritage, ô guerriers d’Austerlitz,
Pouviez-vous, en mourant, confier à vos fils!

(Les algériennes, 57–58)

To spur the French to victory, the young soldier recalls another of Napoleon’s famous battles:

France, enorgueillis-toi de tes anciens hauts faits,
Frissonne de plaisir, comme au jour d’un succès!
Algériens, craignez notre ardeur meurtrière!
Soldats, de chants joyeux, frappons tous leur écho!
Et couronnons de fleurs nos armes qu’on révère:
Voici l’auguste anniversaire
Du jour sacré de Marengo!

(60)

The colonial dimension of the French invasion fades against the backdrop of the Napoleonic wars. So, too, the ground of combat shifts from race to gender as the poet extends the call to patriotic arms to all women and as she thinks across cultures.
In her notes to “La captive,” Ségalas comments, “Les Algériens, qui regardent les femmes comme des esclaves, ont soin d’en apparailler de toutes les nations et de toutes les couleurs” (Les algériennes, 131–32). Women’s condition was universal; the institution of marriage enslaved women in France, as characterized by Sand in Indiana (1832). In “Les Françaises à Alger,” Ségalas combats sexism by celebrating two French women who made headlines when they were decorated with the Légion d’honneur for their valor on the battlefield:

L’une, affrontant la mort, et s’offrant en échange  
D’un malheureux blessé, succombant sous les coups,  
À l’amour du pays joint l’amour d’un époux;  
Et son glaive à la main le remplace et le venge:  
L’autre a vu mutiler son corps noble et guerrier;  
Cette illustre victime est souffrante et meurtrie,  
   Mais pour battre pour la patrie,  
   Son cœur reste encor tout entier.  

In the alternative poetic space explored by Ségalas, nationalism and feminism are not mutually exclusive. To the contrary, women unite with their male counterparts to reclaim France’s glory as a European nation:

Les guerrières d’Alger, fières de leur licence,  
S’unissent aux Français, sous les murs assiégés;  
Leur courage enfermé rompt sa froide contrainte,  
   Et franchit la stupide enceinte  
   De la prison des préjugés.  

To root out her own country’s sexual bias, Ségalas refutes those who doubt that women possess the same courage as men:

Vous doutez du courage et de l’ardente flamme,  
Qui font voler la femme au milieu des combats!  
A-t-elle moins que vous, intrépides soldats,  
D’amour pour son pays et de force dans l’âme?  
Et de son prompt essor doit-on être étonné?  

The aspiring poet intervenes in the celebration of feminine patriotism to identify with these female warriors. Inspired by the example of the French heroines of Algiers, Ségalas reveals her desire to be crowned with laurels. In commemorating these soldiers, she invokes
another battle, the one waged by poetic women like herself to gain a foothold in another field dominated by men:

Mais qui peut à présent douter de notre audace?
Héroïnes d'Alger, votre éclatante ardeur
Doit rejaillir sur nous . . . que le laurier vainqueur,
Aux roses du plaisir sur nos fronts s'entrelace!
Que dis-je! où mégarait l'aveugle vanité?
O vous, dont la valeur me séduit et m'inspire,
Daignez pardonner à ma lyre
Son ambitieuse fierté.

(\textit{Les algériennes}, 68; ellipses in original)

The self-reflective writer covers her poetic aspirations with the same flag she raises to honor these women as soldiers of France: "Et nous nous abritons chacune / Sous les coins de votre drapeau" (68).

National pride dominates "Le drapeau tricolore" in which Ségalas evokes the history of the flag adopted in 1794. Hoisted to recall Napoleon's expedition into Egypt (1798–1801), the French flag also anchors the final lines of Ségalas's poem, which gesture toward Eugène Delacroix's painting \textit{La liberté guidant le peuple} (1830):

Mais lorsqu'on voit soudain, dans ces temps de malheur,
Les trois couleurs paraître en France,
Le peuple peut alors, d'ivresse transporté,
Saluer avec confiance
L'auror de la liberté.

(\textit{Les algériennes}, 77)

In portraying the revolution that brought Louis-Philippe to power in 1830, Delacroix elevated the figure of a working-class woman of the time as the ideal of freedom that guided the people's struggle. In Ségalas's "Le drapeau tricolore," Bonapartism and republicanism, though incompatible in political theory, align along the revolutionary axis to symbolize the modern French nation. France is situated alongside its colonial empire, now expanded to Algeria.²⁵

Ségalas had revealed her gift in 1829, at the age of eighteen, with verse published in the keepsake \textit{Psyché} and the literary magazine \textit{Le Cabinet de Lecture}. "La plus jeune des femmes poètes," Paul Jacob ("le Bibliophile") stresses, "Mme Ségalas s'est élevée tout à coup au premier rang" ("Mme Ségalas," 37). For Jacob, \textit{Les algériennes} exhibits the precise meter and careful rhyme she had acquired. In his view, her mind is as expansive as Hugo's: "Mme Ségalas trouva donc dans son imagination les couleurs que demandait ce voyage imaginaire en Afrique, et souvent elle s'élèva jusqu'au ton de l'ode en exprimant avec énergie des pensées toutes masculines, que le patriotisme avait transplantées dans le cœur d'une femme" (41).
In explaining “l’accueil empressé” enjoyed by *Les algériennes*, Francis Roch underscores the poems’ conceptual and creative power. Ségalas’s reputation soared, Roch recalls: “À partir de ce moment, revues littéraires et journaux se disputèrent à qui aurait le premier l’honneur d’insérer dans ses colonnes une production nouvelle d’Anaïs Ségalas” (“Mme Anaïs Ségalas,” 3). Her next collection, *Les oiseaux de passage* (1836), sold out in a few months, as did the second edition in 1837. Poems in this work weigh the nascent biology of race against abolitionism. The volume was republished under the title *Poésies* (1844), drawing her cluster of texts, which configure the colonial world through a series of encounters, historically closer to the final push for slavery abolition.

**The Other French Empire**

In “Le voyageur,” Ségalas imagines foreign lands where she will never set foot, having renounced all major travel early in her life because of a boating accident. Based on this biographical detail, one is wont to identify her as the speaker in these opening lines:

Je veux partir, je veux partir,
Et laisser ma ville en arrière,
Ses toits, son clocher, sa barrière:
C’est ma prison, j’en veux sortir.

(*Les oiseaux de passage*, 69)

The speaking subject projects herself across the Atlantic: “ce pont mouvant / Qui va du vieux au nouveau monde” (70). An armchair traveler, the poet aims to discover the diversity of the human race by using the mind’s eye to traverse unknown regions:

Peuples divers, j’irai vous voir;
Voir l’espèce géante, et noire, et blanche, et naine,
Et le moule que Dieu fit pour chaque pays;
Voir comment il tailla tous vos corps infinis,
Le grand sculpteur en chair humaine!

(71)

The virtual journey leads to the Antilles, where Ségalas’s poetic narrator imagines volcanoes, palm trees, and scented paths. She expects to see black people, who are pictured initially in terms that associate the color black with evil: “Nègre, ô frère des démons, / Nègre aux deux yeux ardens sur une face noire” (*Les oiseaux de passage*, 72). But does this race—said to be accursed according to the Ham myth—not share other human characteristics? The poet wonders whether “Tâme
change ou lance un même éclair, / Quand on la voit briller sous les masques de fer, / Sous ceux d’albâtre et ceux de cuivre” (72). This questioning of the view that skin tone determines moral fiber, reprised in the second edition of Virey’s influential *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* (1824), reiterates the stance developed by the abolitionist Grégoire.

In *De la noblesse de la peau* (1826), Grégoire recalls the first era of French colonization during the early seventeenth century, comparing the construct of the gentry or “parchment nobility” with that of the contemporary “aristocracy” of color: “La noblesse des parchemins était dans tout son lustre quand l’avarice coloniale établit la *noblesse de la peau*, car c’est une invention moderne” (39). The stigma of dark skin was added to the crime that whites had committed in tearing Africans from their homeland and enslaving them: “Ce préjugé parut aux blancs une invention merveilleuse pour étayer leur domination” (39). Grégoire pursues the racial implications of the counterdiscourse “l’esprit n’a point de sexe,” challenging the linkage of physical and mental characteristics: “Mais les âmes ont-elles une couleur?” (64). His query aims at the tenets of biological racism. In “Le voyageur,” Ségalas likewise assumes sexual equality as she probes racial diversity.

In exercising her imagination to visualize other worlds—“Toi, ma vaste pensée, à mon retour, je veux / Que tu rapportes tout le globe”—Ségalas ponders what separates yet unites the diverse peoples across the globe (*Les oiseaux de passage*, 73). Can the cultured Parisian bridge the distance between herself and her colonial double, who is and is not French, by constructing “an imaginative space for mutual alterity and mutual empathy” (Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, 42)? In “Le voyageur,” the sketch of the Creole has the contours of orientalism. The speaker transforms the primitive nature of the exotic other into an object of beauty, linking via word association the issue of color and racial identity:

Creole, odalisque, sauvage,
Oh! délice de vous aimer!
Mon cœur sera comme une cage
Où on se plaît à renfermer
Des oiseaux de chaque plumage.

(*Les oiseaux de passage*, 76)

In the original French usage, the noun “Créole” referred to whites of European descent born in the colonies. In adjectival form, the term denoted all island-born people and creatures as well as a manner, style, and temperament with no reference to color. Ségalas exploits this lexical difference through appositions that link the Creole with both the odalisque (a female slave or concubine in a Turkish harem) and the indigenous woman. The term “sauvage” also has a double meaning: the primitive viewed as either uncultured or barbaric (in the sense of cruel or bestial). In the context of romantic primitivism—which valued the simple and unsophisticated—the word promotes the Eurocentric conception of the “noble savage.”
construct works dialogically in Ségalas’s poem “Le sauveur,” which disputes coloni-
ization from the perspective of the native inhabitant untouched by “civilization”
and thus still naturally good.

Ségalas’s writing at the time of the slavery debate sharpens the dialectic by
turning from the sentimentalism associated with the Romantic imagination. “Le
sauveur” enacts an interior monologue to weigh the argument for and against
France’s colonial enterprise. The native denizen frames his encounter with the
white man by placing in opposition civilization and nature:

Il s’en va, l’homme à la peau blanche,
Qui disait: Viens voir ma cité.
Fuir mes forêts de liberté,
Mon enfant, mon hamac qui penche,
Fuir ma compagne au teint si beau,
Au pagne fin, au doux visage!
Qu’il rejoigne seul au rivage
Sa case qui marche sur l’eau.

(les oiseaux de passage, 127–28)

The periphrasis “Sa case qui marche sur l’eau” recalls the fetishistic “beau brick
L’Espérance,” symbolizing knowledge, which bewilders the mutinous slaves in
Prosper Mérimée’s Tamango (1829). This possible intertext introduces a note of
condescension toward the “sauveur” and his lack of culture. However, Ségalas’s
text resonates with the abolitionist current by defending the native inhabitants’
way of life.

Unlike the orientalist impulse to take imaginary possession of the other, the
view of colonization in “Le sauveur” maintains the difference between European
and indigenous cultures, the latter preserved by virtue of topography, vegetation,
species, and customs. Details suggestive of various regions of the Americas, such
as “ces savanes” and “ces long déserts” along with “gommiers” and “goyaviers,” on
the one hand, and “serpens,” “tigres rouges,” and “jaguars,” on the other, depict the
environment. Speaking for his people, the native dwells in harmony with the nat-
ural world and impugns the superiority attributed to material progress:

 Là-bas, une pendule, où l’aiguille s’avance,
Marque instant par instant chaque jour qui s’enfuit;
Ici, nous mesurons largement l’existence
Par le matin et par la nuit.
Tout le luxe mesquin de sa riche demeure,
Je le méprise, moi. Voici, dans ce ciel bleu,
Notre pendule à nous, ce beau soleil, où l’heure
Se lit sur un cadran de feu!

(les oiseaux de passage, 130)
The speaker rejects not only the white man’s technology but also his religion: “Le blanc voulut ici faire un temple de pierre, / Mais nous avons brisé son temple et son autel” (132). In discussing other examples of the value placed on wealth and physical possessions, the “sauvage” displays his ability to reason. He also expresses his humanity and capacity for love along with an aesthetic sense of his culture’s difference. In the last stanza, which echoes the first stanza, the person of color to whom Ségalas gives voice celebrates freedom (“À moi mes bois de liberté”) and the beauty of his people. This is exemplified by his partner “au teint si beau / Au pagne fin, au doux visage!” (132). Here, the respect for other cultures applies equally to the indigenous woman.

Ségalas’s poem “Un nègre à une blanche” expresses a further intervention in the discourse of black people’s inferiority. Up until 1818, the 1777 version of the Code Noir prohibited blacks or other people of color from entering France as well as interracial marriage. Love between a black man and a white woman was thus unthinkable. But this is precisely the possibility that Ségalas entertains, mixing empathy with thought. Her black speaker uses an apostrophe to his beloved to draw a parallel between the diversity of the human race and that found in nature:

O blanche, tes cheveux sont d’un blond de maïs,
Et ta voix est semblable au chant des bengalis!
Si tu voulais m’aimer, ce serait douce chose!
Un peu d’amour au noir, jeune fille au teint frais:
Le gommier n’a-t-il pas, dans nos vastes forêts,
Sur son écorce brune une liane rose!

(Leh oiseaux de passage, 255)

Passionate yet lucid, Ségalas’s speaker refers to himself in the third person, outlining the ideological work announced by the poem’s title. He counters the pejorative connotation of “nègre,” synonymous with “esclave,” by using the term “noir,” which had been adopted by the first abolitionist circle, the Société des amis des noirs, to refer to blacks. Ségalas’s text works for abolition, using semantic and imagistic synergy. The image of the ivy wrapped around the gum tree illustrates an adaptive harmony that allows different beings to coexist without dominating or assimilating each other.

“Un nègre à une blanche” also calls into question the color hierarchy established by Cuvier: “La race blanche, à visage ovale, à cheveux longs, à nez saillant, à laquelle appartiennent les peuples policés de l’Europe, et qui nous paroit la plus belle de toutes, est aussi bien supérieure aux autres par la force du génie, le courage et l’activité” (Tableau élémentaire, 71). Virey in turn portrays blacks at the opposite end of the spectrum as “une race, ou plutôt une espèce distincte d’hommes de couleur noire, à cheveux frisés, à nez épaté, à grosses lèvres avec des mâchoires prolongées en museau” (“Nègre” [1818], 422). As if to expose such offensive type-casting, Ségalas’s speaker compares racial physiognomies. He reiterates the coun-
terdiscourse in “Le voyageur,” that color is not a moral attribute, assessing black as beautiful:

Un nègre a sa beauté: bien sombre est ma couleur,
Mais de mes dents de nacre on voit mieux la blancheur;
Tes yeux rayonnent bien sous tes cils fins, longs voiles,
Mais regarde, les miens ont un éclat pareil:
Ton visage est le jour, tes yeux c’est le soleil;
Mon visage est la nuit, mes yeux sont des étoiles!
. . . Oh! suis-moi, blanche femme,
Afin que je te serve et te parle à genoux!
Qu’importe ma couleur, si je suis bon et doux,
Et si le noir chez moi ne va pas jusqu’à l’âme!

(Les oiseaux de passage, 256)

Could love, which inspires such blind devotion (“Afin que je te serve et te parle à genoux!”), also transcend the racial divide that now dominated science? The final lines disappoint the hope expressed in the first stanza: “Mais quoi! tu fuis le noir, jeune fille au teint frais; / Oh! plus heureux que moi, le gommier des forêts / Sur son écorce brune a sa liane rose!” (Les oiseaux de passage, 257–58). Abolitionism was a movement of the elite that polarized the French on the continent and, even more so, their Creole counterparts in the colonies, who turned a blind eye to the system that implicated them. Ségalas’s verse on slavery and race straddles the divide between the French in Europe and those in the colonies, presenting the same arc as her feminist bent, which grew increasingly conservative.

**Literary Abolitionism**

Ségalas’s writing examined to this point conveys the remove from which she considered the racial question along with her evolving position as a moderate feminist. Poems about the institution of slavery and the construct of race as color show her to be more of a thinker stirred by current events than an activist directly championing abolition. In the absence of an explicit statement from Ségalas, one can only speculate how, through her collaboration with the *Journal des Femmes*, she may have reacted to Mme Letelier’s “Mœurs coloniales,” which the newspaper published in 1833, just months before England abolished slavery. The fact that this sketch of colonial manners was brought forth under a pseudonym, and appears to be the author’s only work, may explain why Letelier has not been included in critics’ discussion of women’s literary activism during the decades that led to slavery’s end. Referenced in the push for immediate abolition, however, Letelier’s portrayal of colonial Guadeloupe suggests an unacknowledged source of the site to which Ségalas returned again and again in thinking about the effects of abolition.
In 1833, Letelier used the pseudonym Mme Aline de M*** to publish her “feuilleton” (serial story) over six installments, condemning slavery while revealing French Creole women’s cruelty toward their black slaves. Letelier was in Paris at the time, on extended leave from Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, where she lived with her husband, an administrator of the French navy. Republished in Revue des Colonies (1835–36), Letelier’s account incited protest in Guadeloupe in the summer of 1835 upon her family’s return from Paris. This direct impact is striking and in fact rare for women’s antislavery writing.

Letelier’s account incited protest in Guadeloupe in the summer of 1835 upon her family’s return from Paris. This direct impact is striking and in fact rare for women’s antislavery writing.

Fanny Richomme, the editor of the Journal des Femmes, later described the “émeute d’aristocrates”:

Il se fit un soir un grand tapage devant leur maison. Un “commando” de jeunes gens fortunés, fils de planteurs, que le journal local qualifie d’aristocrates s’était massé là et criait des injures ignobles. Ils forcèrent l’entrée de la maison et n’ayant pas trouvé Mme Letelier se portèrent en hurlant vers la maison d’une de ses amies de couleur, Mlle Reine Ledoux. On injuria celle-ci, brisa sa porte, la somma de livrer Mme Letelier ou de mettre le feu à sa maison. . . . Des scènes semblables se déroulèrent le lendemain à Basse-Terre. (quoted in Sullerot, Histoire de la presse féminine, 183)

The plantation owners saw only the price of abolition, not the moral implications of slavery, a system that corrupted both “master” and “slave,” as Letelier stressed.

At once a Romantic bildungsroman and a social critique, Letelier’s story unfolds over the period of a month. The protagonist, Charles Delacroix, long envisaged Guadeloupe as the ideal place to develop his artistic talent. When the young Parisian arrives in the French colony for the first time, however, he encounters the French Creoles’ inhumanity. Shortly after meeting his hostess in Pointe-à-Pitre, Charles is stunned when she refers to her slaves as “ces êtres dégénérés” (“Mœurs coloniales,” 92). An omniscient narrator mediates his thought that, to the contrary, she embodies the dehumanizing effects of colonization: “Ce qu’on voyait en elle d’absurde et de presque féroce, était avant qu’elle ne fût; cette nature ajoutée à la sienne faisait partie de l’air qu’elle avait respiré en naissant, de l’état social qui l’avait formée à son image” (93; emphasis in original). Charles later observes his hostess flogging an enslaved child. Appalled by other forms of cruelty and racism, he minces no words in declaring to Fournier, “Ces créoles! Oh! Je ne crains plus de les trop haïr” (182). A French naval officer stationed in Guadeloupe, Fournier observes that France is to blame for sanctioning the Creoles’ attitudes, having created territorial dependencies solely for its own gain: “Il serait injuste de punir les créoles d’un état social qu’ils ont trouvé tout fait. Ce qui est étrange, c’est que cet état, ces mœurs, subsistent dans un pays que la France possède et gouverne; mère indifférente, les enfans qui lui naissent aux colonies ne sont point appelés à partager ses lumières et sa civilisation” (182). Letelier develops this irony through a character named Maurice, Charles’s childhood friend, who hails from Pointe-à-Pitre. When reunited with Maurice in Guadeloupe via a chance encounter, Charles
recognizes him as having “la plus noble et la plus belle figure” along with “un front empreint de génie” (240). Letelier borrows Maurice’s voice to assess the moral consequences of slavery through a comment made to Charles: “Ce dégradant système, on l’a dit avant moi, corrompt le maître et l’esclave” (329; emphasis in original). This statement anticipates Lamartine’s 1836 call to action: “Une telle propriété [l’esclave], Messieurs, ne corrompt-elle pas la race qui possède autant que la race qui est possédée?” This is also the way Waldor portrays everyday life in the French colonies in the antislavery narrative “Clara,” which she published in *Pages de la vie intime* (1836).

Waldor’s father, one of the presidents of the Société de la morale chrétienne, established in 1821, likely exposed her to abolitionism. Because of her relationship with Dumas, whose paternal grandmother was a Haitian slave, and with her godmother the poet Hortense de Céré-Barbé, originally from Mauritius, Waldor had other sources of information about colonial culture. Recall that Waldor was also part of Richomme’s editorial team and, like Ségalas, may have read Letelier’s story before it went to press. Like Letelier’s hero, Waldor’s eponymous French European heroine, Clara, travels for the first time to a French colony, the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, and is shocked by her relatives’ attitude toward their slaves. Like Letelier’s protagonist, Waldor’s decries slavery for debasing all of humanity: “Les mœurs des colonies me révoltaient, l’esclavage, cette plaie honteuse de la civilisation, faisait rougir mon front et remplissait mon cœur d’une noble indignation. Je ne savais, ni ne voulais commander à aucun des nègres que mon oncle avait placés près de moi” (*Pages de la vie intime*, 1:12). Whereas Letelier’s work is radical in advocating for abolition, Waldor’s colonial narrative straddles the line between sentimental prose and social realism in treating abolitionism, in a similar manner to feminism, as a contemporary issue rather than a cause. The same could be said about Ségalas whose writing about these issues represents literary activism rather than political action.

The broader debate about race reproduced in Waldor’s “Clara” enriches understanding of how text and context interlock. Polygenism authorizes the colonists’ view expressed by Clara’s uncle: “[L]es noirs sont venus au monde pour obéir aux blancs” (*Pages de la vie intime*, 1:13). The opposing idea of monogenism underlies the stance articulated from memory by the female slave whom Clara befriends: “[L]es âmes étant sans forme, n’ont point de couleur” (19). This statement, made in reference to Catholicism, establishes a possible link with a literary source. Duras’s *Ourika* is the subject of a subsequent exchange between Clara and her uncle. He mocks her choice of reading material, calling it “un roman de femme” (24). To break the ensuing silence, he asks Clara: “Avez-vous apporté de France beaucoup de livres de ce genre?” (27). The male character takes the book and quickly exits the room, leaving Waldor’s heroine and the reader to ponder his reaction. This scene can be read as a comment on “littérature féminine.” Waldor contests this category, defined as strictly sentimental, by hinting at the sociopolitical dimension of Duras’s novella. The corresponding element in the first part of
Waldor’s own story broaches miscegenation, the cultural gap between France and its colonies, and the racial prejudice common to both. Upon Clara’s return to the continent, however, the theme of unrequited love overtakes the narrative, which isolates the colonial theme in Waldor from the broader corpus devoted to abolitionism.

The influential statesman Victor Schoelcher, however, drew Letelier’s narrative into the political arena. After a second trip to the Antilles from 1840 to 1841, Schoelcher rejected the planters’ economic concerns and promoted a humanitarian platform calling for the immediate abolition of slavery. In 1842, Schoelcher detailed the conditions in which he had observed the population of black slaves in France’s Caribbean colonies, emphasizing the effects of slavery on women: “elles si bonnes, deviennent aux colonies d’une cruauté spéciale” (Des colonies françaises, 88). Having witnessed French Creole women beat enslaved children, along with other forms of abuse, Schoelcher declares: “L’esclavage rend les femmes cruelles, vous voyez bien qu’il faut détruire l’esclavage” (89). On this point, he cites Letelier’s analysis: “Il y a dans les rapports des créoles avec leurs esclaves une barbarie qui s’ignore elle-même et qui, si l’on peut profaner cette expression, a quelque chose de candide” (89). At considerable remove from the lived experience of slavery exposed by Letelier and Schoelcher, among others, Ségalas considered the idea of its gradual abolition, redressing the image of “la belle Créole” in a colonial space fraught with racial and political conflict.

**Slavery and “la belle Créole”**

In the colonial context, the Romantic figure of “la belle Créole” embodies the ideals of civilization, as in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie* (1787). As a carrier of European Frenchness (a white yet island-born woman), this archetype also mediates between colonization and slavery. For example, in Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal* (1826), the character Marie, who exemplifies the virtuous white Creole woman, is contrasted with the violent backdrop of the 1791 slave revolt in Saint-Domingue: “Elle était rayonnante, et il y avait dans sa douce figure quelque chose de plus angélique encore que la joie d’un amour pur: c’était la pensée d’une bonne action” (49). She asks her father, who has promised to grant whatever she desires as a wedding gift, to free the slave who saved her life: Pierrot, also known as Bug-Jargal. However, Sand’s *Indiana* (1832) destabilizes the image of “la belle Créole” with a racial ambiguity that conveys a shadow sense of cultural contamination. A global crossing *à rebours*, from the French colony of Réunion to Europe, enmeshes three characters in a fatal love triangle: the beautiful noblewoman Indiana (“une créole nerveuse et maladive”), her *sœur de lait* Noun (“la jeune créole aux grands yeux noirs qui avait frappé d’admiration toute la province”), and the handsome Raymon de Ramière (Sand, *Indiana*, 73). In a narrative aimed at emancipating women, if only psychologically, Sand also has in mind the black people
Anaïs Ségalas subordinated to the building of the French empire. As she expresses in prefacing the 1842 edition of her novel, “Le malheur de la femme entraîne celui de l’homme, comme celui de l’esclave entraîne celui du maître, et j’ai cherché à le montrer dans Indiana” (Sand, Préfaces, 93). By associating women’s lack of civil status in a patriarchy with slavery, Sand echoes Olympe de Gouges. To the contrary, Ségalas rejects republican feminism to reinvigorate the French Creole woman’s civilizing mission on the eve of slavery abolition, as if sensing the political shift that will follow the short-lived Second Republic proclaimed in 1848.

In prefacing the fourth edition of Enfantines: Poésies à ma fille in 1845 (it was first published in 1844 without introductory comments and saw two editions that year), Ségalas depicts the place that society reserved for women at the time: “Aimer, prier, rêver, voilà l’existence de toutes les femmes; au lieu de suivre la colonne de vapeur et de fumée du dix-neuvième siècle, elles suivent la colonne de feu qu’on appelle la foi” (vi).

She dedicates the new edition, “qui n’est faite que d’amour et de croyance,” to mothers (vi). Religion and education remain central to the way Ségalas approaches the issue of assimilating former black slaves as French citizens in her narrative poem “La Créole (L’esclavage),” published twice in 1847, first in Le Magasin des Demoiselles, then in her collection La femme: Poésies.

Ségalas opens her preface to La femme with two questions, which reveal the hostile reception a woman writer anticipates: “La femme, se dirait-on (si toutefois on jette un coup d’œil sur cet ouvrage), que nous promet ce titre? L’auteur veut-il nous peindre une esclave révoltée qui jette un cri de Spartacus ou de Saint-Simonienne?” (9). Her vocabulary, linking feminism and abolitionism as threats to the social order, suggests a form of ironic distancing, which allowed her to avoid censorship, real or imagined, at a time of backlash. Ségalas associated with groups, such as Éducation mutuelle des femmes, that sought educational reform in the late 1840s.

Yet she was clearly more circumspect as an author who, at the same time, promoted the bourgeois ideals of womanhood. Women’s poetic work was part of a broader mission “d’adoucir, de purifier, et, en quelque sorte, de spiritualiser ce monde que l’homme dirige, fait mouvoir, rend plus puissant et plus riche,” Ségalas writes (10). Although making women’s poetic influence spiritual or moral, she nonetheless celebrates the work of her imagination: “Ses pensées les plus caressées, ce sont de poétiques rêveries ou des élans vers l’infini: c’est une grande voyageuse qui part tous les jours pour le pays des rêves” (11). Ségalas envisions a way for women to promote social reform via poetic production, including slavery among “les grandes plaies de la société” they needed to treat (13).

In “La Créole (L’esclavage),” Ségalas advances the moral platform for gradual abolition without, however, addressing racial inequality. The title associates, yet more clearly separates, the French Creole woman and the institution of slavery. In the first printed French text, the second term is aligned underneath the first. So, too, the parentheses mark off a space. This discursive interstice structures the poem, which privileges the aesthetic figure before addressing its political dimension in situ. In the opening stanza, a first-person plural speaker portrays the
Creole as the “perle des mers.” This association between natural beauty and motherliness (via homophony with “mère”) alters the French epithet for the former colony of Saint-Domingue: “la perle des Antilles.” In so doing, the speaker reclaims via the image of “la belle Créole” a positive link between France and its remaining empire in the Americas:

Oh! nous t’aimons ici, notre sœur d’Amérique,
Blanche aux yeux noirs, perle des mers.
Nos aïeux sont les tiens, Française du tropique
Nous vivons sous des cieux divers:
À toi les bananiers, les palmistes immenses,
À nous le chêne au large front:
Dans deux mondes, ma sœur, nous habitons deux Francs
Qu’un navire unit comme un pont.

(\textit{La femme}, 201–2)

A common heritage of Frenchness bridges the geographical distance between the speaker and the Creole woman. The gap between them then closes further, the speaker calling the island-born woman “ma sœur,” as if she presents an idealized reflection of her European self.

Stanzas 2 and 3 move away from the ode-like tone of the poem’s start. They peel back the layers of the aesthetic figure, inviting readers to look past “la sirène” envisioned from afar as well as “la déesse” behind “la moustiquaire en gaze” (\textit{La femme}, 202, 203). In the fourth stanza, the speaker draws even closer to the French Creole woman and the enslaved blacks in her charge:

Dans l’habitation, maîtresse étincelante,
Tout un peuple noir suit tes pas;
Ton trône est un hamac, ô reine nonchalante,
Et ta couronne est un madras.

(203)

This close-up produces a hybrid figure, “creolized” by her environment. The Creole of arresting beauty and sensual indolence, powerful yet weak, fuses with her surroundings and thus exudes the apathy induced by the tropical climate. However, the “sœur d’Amérique” must assume a new role as abolition looms.

A space in the text signals a break in Ségalas’s narrative and a shift toward “la belle Créole” as a political figure. The time has come for “la belle Créole” to shed her island accoutrements and exhibit her European roots, for she has a duty to fulfill toward her slaves:

C’est assez te bercer, et vivre avec paresse
Entre ton perroquet, ton singe et ta négresse.
Du hamac, enfermant ton corps souple et douillet,
Sors comme un jeune oiseau s'échappant du filet;
Car ta main doit sécher des pleurs, briser des chaînes.
Prends pitié de tes noirs, marchandises humaines.

(La femme, 203)

Ségalas’s poetic narrator expresses sympathy. Yet the word “pitié” (from the Latin pietas), repeated twice more in subsequent lines, also gains the etymologically related sense of piety or self-righteousness. In addressing the Creole, the narrator implores her to have mercy on “la nourrice . . . / Qui donne à ton enfant, malgré sa couleur noire, / Un amour toujours pur et du lait toujours blanc” as well as “le bon nègre . . . / Qui, la nuit, à son tour, vient veiller à ta porte” (204). The moralistic tone nevertheless conveys a sense of superiority along with anxiety rooted in the deeper memory of the massacres in Saint-Domingue.

The speaker expresses a primal fear of the male slave, whose “coutelas” (large knife) symbolizes the potential vengeance of the oppressed:

Un coutelas reluit dans sa main large et forte,
Mais son arme protège au lieu de massacrer:
Femme, l'esclave armé pourrait te déchirer
Comme un tigre, et pourtant te garde comme un dogue.

(La femme, 204)

Here, the ambivalence about the colonial other registers scientific racism à la Virey: “En tout pays le blanc est supérieur au nègre sensuel, le civilisé dompte le barbare” (De la physiologie dans ses rapports avec la philosophie, 175). “La Créole (L’esclavage)” reflects simultaneously the campaign among the “French abolitionists from the Amis des Noirs [and] the Morale chrétienne [who] stressed the need for gradually preparing slaves for freedoms in order to avoid the disruptions and upheavals that had occurred in the 1790s” (Jennings, French Anti-Slavery, 22). In approaching abolition as a moral action that requires the French Creole woman’s intervention, Ségalas’s poetic narrator transposes the white-black binary into virtue versus vice: “Tu ne peux de ton front lui donner la couleur: / Oh! du moins donne-lui la blancheur de ton âme!” (La femme, 205).

Ségalas’s narrator maps the rhetoric of colonization onto the native topography to elucidate the path the Creole must clear for the population of uneducated black slaves, soon to be assimilated as citizens of France. She thus expresses “la mission civilisatrice avant la lettre: “Fais marcher aux vertus ce peuple encor farouche; / À ton tour, sers de guide, et, de ta blanche main, / Écarte la broussaille et trace le chemin” (La femme, 206). Sympathy mixes with cultural imperialism. Ségalas’s European speaker envisages that slaves placed under the tutelage of the Creole—the agent of the motherland—would eventually be liberated from vice as well as from ignorance, given instead “une vertu dans l’âme, un livre dans la main” (208).
The Creole, whose moral purity is transposed into a sign of immaculate whiteness ("beau cygne"), is further solicited to halt the inhumane treatment of slaves: “Mais entends-tu ces cris, douce blanche, beau cygne? / On châtie un esclave! . . . Oh! fais tomber d’un signe / Le fouet du commandeur, ce nègre aux yeux ardents!” (208; ellipses in original). The color binary, “douce blanche” versus “ce nègre aux yeux ardents,” shifts to concentrate the locus of cruelty. Ségalas’s gesture of making a black overseer the oppressor, though historically accurate, separates the Creoles from such brutality and ultimately from blame.

The fear of the oppressed, projected onto the overseer’s fierce gaze (“ce nègre aux yeux ardents”), nonetheless persists. This fear prepares the split in Ségalas’s thinking about the problem of slavery and its abolition:

Dans un duel hardi, le nègre, cet atome,
Peut contre un fouet sanglant croiser son coutelas:
L’homme sait se plier, et se courber bien bas;
Mais c’est comme l’acier qui bientôt vous échappe,
Qui se ploie un instant, se redresse et vous frappe.

(208–9)

In a final command to her Creole sister, the speaker presages French imperialism during the Second Empire (1852–70) and the neocolonialism it would spur under the Third Republic:

Femme, viens détacher tous ces colliers de fer,
Et ces chaînes blessant leur âme avec leur chair.
Épure, élève, instruis ces cœurs bruts. Va, courage!
Plus tard la liberté finira ton ouvrage:
Le nègre, libre un jour, sous tes beaux cieux brûlants,
En brave travailleur, viendra servir les blancs.
À l’œuvre! Sois la main qui délivre et protège.

(209)

Even in promulgating abolition for humanitarian reasons, Ségalas’s text inscribes a racial hierarchy. Whereas the first four lines recall the universal condition of the “homme animal” in “L’esclave,” the final three lines add color to the figure. No longer a slave, yet not entirely free as a worker, the black person becomes an indentured servant to whites in the postcolonial realm Ségalas presaged at mid-century and would develop in her later prose.

“La Créole (L’esclavage)” intersects historically with Les Créoles (1847) by the lesser-known poet Louise de Lafaye (née Arbey). The latter’s personal memories of Guadeloupe contest the myth of “la belle Créole” pivotal to Ségalas’s treatment
of the colonial past. The Guadeloupe-born Lafaye composed her collection while overseas. However, she resided in Paris, the source of the exile expressed in her verse, which counters the perspective on Creole roots developed by Ségalas. Lafaye’s nostalgic poems about her childhood, such as “Souvenirs d’enfance” and “Rêverie,” dwell on Guadeloupe’s natural beauty, from its native vegetation (“l’orange,” “baraguette,” “goyavier”) to its topography (“morne”), which supports the plantation economy (“nos champs de cannes”). A cluster of poems offers a glimpse of the political aspects of Lafaye’s poetic reflections on her colonial heritage. In “Le nègre,” for example, Lafaye’s speaker recognizes how naïve she was as a child by expressing belated sympathy for the black slave, as if to prick her Parisian readers’ conscience:

Nègre, ne pleure plus, car voici ta maîtresse,
Me voici de retour, plus de jours de tristesse;
Car je veux ton bonheur.
Ton bonheur! j’y croyais aux jours de mon enfance,
Et je voyais, hélas! avec indifférence,
Ton sort et ta couleur!

(Les Créoles, 10)

Like Ségalas, Lafaye places the Creole woman, identified by her “blanche main,” in a tranquil setting: “Un hamac et des fleurs!” (17). In adding depth to the aesthetic figure stirred by the verse she’s reading—“Elle pense, rêveuse”—Lafaye evokes her own thinking through poetry (17).

Lafaye’s “La nègresse” contradicts the image of “la belle Créole” seen in Ségalas. Instead, Lafaye portrays a Creole mistress who threatens to sell her black female slave’s son, whose father she suspects to be her own husband. The black woman’s plea opens the poem: “Ayez, ayez pitié de la pauvre nègresse, / Oh! ne le vendez pas, chère et bonne maîtresse! / Son bras est faible encore, ses pas sont chancelants, / Mon Paul hélas! n’a pas sept ans!” (Les Créoles, 17). She protests that her son’s father left in search of gold to buy their son’s liberty, but she refuses to reveal his identity. Overcome with jealousy and suspicion, the Creole gazing upon the child’s “teint, cette blancheur, à sa race étrangère” sees only “les traits de son époux” (18, 19). The black woman, given critical agency, exposes the mistress’s indifference to her slaves’ experience as a crime against blacks’ humanity:

Femme blanche, oh! de vous comment pouvais-je attendre
Quelque pitié pour nous! Votre sort est si doux!
Favorites du ciel! vos fils seront à vous,
Et vous n’auriez jamais, dans leurs bras enchainée;
Baisant leurs blonds cheveux, maudit leur destinée,
Oh! vous ne craindrez pas, vous, qu’un maître brutal,
Sur leur corps frémissant lève son fouet fatal!
Vous ne les verrez pas, oh! comble de misère!
Plaintifs et tout pleurants, arrachés à leur mère!

(21)

That Lafaye, unlike Letelier, published her volume in Paris without using a pseudonym suggests that abolitionism had gained force by that time. After abolishing slavery in all its colonies in 1848, France expanded its empire in Africa and elsewhere until the turn of the twentieth century. Travelers of both sexes logged forays into Algeria and West Africa. Ségalas, however, remained focused on the French Caribbean colonies, albeit with an increasingly conservative view of racial identity. Prose that Ségalas devoted to colonial themes from the mid-1850s onward recycled slave names from “La Créole (L’esclavage),” remapping the terrain she had covered in favor of abolition to promulgate instead various phases of France’s official “mission civilisatrice.”

Remapping the Colonial Empire

Three years into Napoleon III’s reign, the Exposition Universelle of 1855 was held on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. The exposition reflected his desire to prove France’s industrial supremacy while displaying the new empire building under way. As the French colonized North Africa, the general Louis Faidherbe, whom Napoleon had appointed governor of Senegal in 1852, directed the push into the interior of West Africa. The Palais de l’Industrie was constructed for the international exhibition in direct competition with the British venue of 1851. This is the setting and framework for Ségalas’s collection of stories Contes du nouveau Palais de Cristal (1855), which opens by inviting readers to enter the exhibit hall: “Allons voir l’Exposition universelle!” (1).

An omniscient narrator populates the entrance with visitors from around the world, transforming Paris into “la tour de Babel” and a parade of nations or peoples of different colors (Contes du nouveau Palais de Cristal, 3). Recall that Ségalas evoked the tropics in her earlier poetry without specifying a site. At the exposition’s entry, however, Guadeloupe is named and then transformed into the creolized female character Andrèse de Rozan: “Elle avait un petit accent traînant, nonchalant, et grasseyait comme une Parisienne qui n’a pas pris de leçons au Conservatoire. Elle passait volontiers la moitié de la journée à ne rien faire, et l’autre moitié à se reposer de n’avoir rien fait” (3–4). The beautiful yet languid Creole, whose attributes recall the opening lines of Ségalas’s 1847 poem, joins a group of French visitors who are spending a week touring the exhibit halls. Authorial intrusions that describe the characters also frame or comment on the stories they tell during their visit. This narrative mode enables the author to distance herself not only from the various characters, but also from the views they express.
On the final day of the group’s visit, Andrèse chances upon Adonis, a former slave “de la teinte la plus foncée,” and engages him in conversation (Contes du nouveau Palais de Cristal, 288–89). Whereas the “bonne petite blanche,” as Adonis calls the Creole, uses standard French, the black man, identified by the narrator as “le nègre,” speaks patois: “Moi regarder une canne à sucre, toute pareille à celles que moi avoi planté là-bas. Adonis il ête content, il a ici une petite Améique: les belles productions du pays à li” (289). The rendering of this creolized speech, although seen by some as racist, can be read instead as a nod toward cultural authenticity. This linguistic difference also raises the question of race in a post-abolition context. In Ségalas’s story, a mix of narrative voices represents both Europeans and Creoles outside the colonial space, reproducing multiple viewpoints without resolving the tensions among them.

Andrèse steps away from Adonis to narrate the last conte: “L’ oncle d’Amérique et le neveu de France.” This story, which involves Adonis, treats abolition’s immediate effects on the colonists and their former slaves together with the relationship between France and its colonies via an encounter between a Guadeloupean Creole, M. Fargès, and his Parisian nephew Rodolph Dartinville. Embedded within this tale is also the issue of racial identity, which is set forth by Andrèse in describing the Creole’s daughter as being not “d’un blanc douteux,” but as white as French Europeans: “Les créoles de nos Antilles sont par le fait des Françaises d’Amérique, parfaitement distinctes des noirs, qui sont d’une race africaine” (Contes du nouveau Palais de Cristal, 297). The sugar industry declines following slavery’s abolition. Fargès faces bankruptcy and schemes with an unsuspecting Adonis to marry off his daughter, Lilia, to Rodolph, who is pretending to be a rich noble.

On the deck of a ship bound for Europe, a space laden with the memory of the Middle Passage, Fargès meets Adonis. The Creole offers to employ the black man as his “domestique,” intending to pass him off to Rodolph as one of his many slaves. Adonis initially refuses. As the character invokes his rights, the narrator recalls the main figure of Haitian independence: “Moi ête un homme libe, répondit le nègre indigné, avec la pose d’un Toussaint Louverture” (Contes du nouveau Palais de Cristal, 303). With this allusion to the nickname “the black Napoleon” and the collective memory of Saint-Domingue, history slides into myth.

A few pages later, upon seeing Adonis, who has agreed to accompany Fargès for a short period, Rodolph reacts in an irrational and vulgar way to his skin color. The black character rises to his own defense. Ségalas exploits the narrative style that enables an author to observe a character in situ, albeit from a distance, while voicing his thoughts: “Un singe! s’écria Adonis, suffoqué d’entendre comparer un homme libre à un singe” (Contes du nouveau Palais de Cristal, 309). Adonis rejects as vehemently the label “mulâtre,” thus exposing deep racial tensions (310). Intrigued by how freely Adonis expresses his opinion, Rodolph questions Fargès about his other black charges. The Creole discloses the reality for former slaves in the colonies: “C’est vrai, ils sont très-émancipés. . . [M]ais l’émancipation n’a fait que changer les termes: nous avions des esclaves, nous avons des domestiques et
des ouvriers, voilà toute la différence” (310). There is no resolution; the story ends in Paris. Though Fargès’s scheme unravels, as does Rodolph’s, all ends happily for Adonis, who “quitta son maître pour vivre en homme libre et en fashionable” (328).

A shift in cultural context illuminates how the core problem of race changes in Ségalas’s late colonial narrative, *Récits des Antilles: Le bois de la Soufrière*.

**Authorizing the Colonial Project**

The post-abolition era witnessed the triumph of polygenism. Emblematic of this development, Arthur Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races* (1853–55) concluded from physiology that racial differences were absolute and permanent (123–32, 151–61). The Société d’anthropologie de Paris, founded in 1859, professed that blacks constituted a separate race that would not evolve either over time or through contact with whites. In the Larousse dictionary of 1866, the article “Nègre” upheld brain size and shape as evidence of black people’s mental weakness: “Un fait incon- testable et qui domine tous les autres, c’est qu’ils ont le cerveau plus rétréci, plus léger et moins volumineux que celui de l’espèce blanche, et comme dans toute la série animale, l’intelligence est en raison directe des dimensions du cerveau, du nombre et de la profondeur des circonvolutions, ce fait suffit pour prouver la supériorité de l’espèce blanche sur l’espèce noire” (11:904). This alleged intellectual inequality between the white and black races anticipated the rationale of the “mission civilisatrice” declared under the Third Republic: “Leur infériorité intellectuelle, loin de nous conférer le droit d’abuser de leur faiblesse, nous impose le devoir de les aider et de les protéger” (11:904).

Ségalas took on this mission in *Récits des Antilles: Le bois de la Soufrière*. She first published this narrative in 1877 as a serial story in the *Musée des Familles: Lectures du Soir*, an illustrated French literary magazine, as Barbara Cooper has documented in considering “Ségalas’s changed attitude toward blacks” from the perspective of other women’s pedagogical writings during the second half of the century (“Race, Gender, and Colonialism,” esp. 118–20 and 127n4). Republished in a book along with some other pieces in 1884, then as a separate volume, Ségalas’s novel saw eight editions between 1885 and the mid-1890s. This commercial success, in line with that of *Ourika*, reflects the historical context. Ségalas’s novel intersected with the 1884 declaration of France’s “mission civilisatrice” by Jules Ferry, then the president of the council and the minister of public instruction and fine arts: “Il y a pour les races supérieures un droit, parce qu’il y a un devoir pour elles. Elles ont le devoir de civiliser les races inférieures” (*Discours et opinions*, 210–11). *Récits des Antilles*, like the 1884 volume, which includes a reprint of “L’oncle d’Amérique et le neveu de France,” overlapped with the division of Africa among European colonial powers at the Berlin Conference (1884–85). Framed as a study of abolition’s effects, Ségalas’s narrative recirculates previous elements of her colonial writings, but contradicts the ideological work of her poetry.
The allusion to Offenbach’s operetta *La Créole* (first performed at the Bouffes Parisiens theater on 3 November 1875) “would suggest that the action in the early part of Ségalas’s novel takes place in the 1860s since ten years elapse between chapter 4 and chapter 5,” Cooper has argued (“Race, Gender, and Colonialism,” 127n4). The novel opens thus: “Holà! Neptune, Adonis, Apollon!” (*Récits des Antilles*, 3). A reader familiar with Ségalas’s “La Créole (L’esclavage)” would recognize the slave names used here in connection with the speaker: “c’était un créole de la Guadeloupe, qui appelait ses nègres” (3). One also notices the rhetoric from her 1855 tale. In explaining blacks’ role in the later post-emancipation context, however, Ségalas’s omniscient narrator sets an edgy tone: “Tous les nègres sont maintenant des hommes libres: les esclaves ne sont plus que des travailleurs, qui malheureusement ne travaillent guère, et gâtent par leur inertie la pensée juste et généreuse de l’abolition de l’esclavage” (3–4). Negative perceptions of black people were expressed and yet countered in the discourse of race examined in Ségalas’s verse from the 1830s and ‘40s, as well as in “L’oncle d’Amérique et le neveu de France.” These views become more radical in *Récits des Antilles*, which draws out the hostility among whites, blacks, and other people of color after the abolition of slavery.

Recall the agency given to the black speaker ascribing beauty to his color in Ségalas’s 1836 “Un nègre à une blanche.” The physiognomy of Jupiter, the principal black character in *Récits des Antilles*, suggests the antithesis: “Jupiter pouvait avoir une trentaine d’années; c’était un nègre de race africaine et du noir le plus beau, ou pour mieux dire le plus laid. . . . Il n’y avait absolument de blanc dans ce sombre visage que la blancheur éclatante des dents et le blanc des yeux, au milieu duquel roulaient deux prunelles ardentes et quelque peu sauvages” (7). The civilizing role “la belle Créole” was to have played, giving black people faith and education on the eve of abolition, had apparently failed to produce the desired effects. There is no trace of this edifying discourse or the related ethos of sympathy in the narrator’s view of Jupiter: “Au résumé, Jupiter était laid comme un singe, noir comme un merle, lent comme une tortue et voleur comme un pie” (7). This racial profiling extends to Jupiter’s son Coco, whom the narrator depicts as an “affreux négrillon,” the spitting image of his father, inside and out: “Coco n’était pas noir au dehors et blanc au dedans, son cœur était nègre aussi, noirci par tous les mauvais instincts” (7). Couched in physiological terms, this binary opposition overdetermines the theme of blind vengeance tied to fear of the oppressed, as seen in Ségalas’s 1847 “La Créole (L’esclavage).”

The subtitle, *Le bois de la Soufrière*, refers to the tropical forest in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe. This site, which Ségalas brings to life with exacting detail, signifies the natural resources of the island that were exploited for colonialists’ gain: a ground ripe for revolt. The volcanic terrain galvanizes the negative associations with Jupiter, the narrator barely masking irrational beliefs about black people: “Ce n’était plus le nègre apprivoisé, c’était le vrai sauvage, de race africaine, qui ne cherchait plus à cacher sa haine” (*Récits des Antilles*, 33). Charly de Tercel, the white Creole for whom Jupiter worked, mistakenly shoots Jupiter’s son Coco. At two
POETRY/spaceliningAND/spaceliningBEYOND
different, yet related, levels of interpretation, Jupiter’s revenge against Tercel exposes the consequences of slavery and its abolition.

The shift in blacks’ legal status, which has not been accompanied by a change in their roles or in colonial mores, exacerbates racial antipathy. Ségalas develops through the character Onélie Beaumanguier the role of “la belle Créole,” who mediates between the races. Mme Beaumanguier discovers and adopts, though not legally, Charly’s only daughter, Rosélis, after Jupiter kidnaps Rosélis and abandons her to die in the dense forest encircling the Soufrière. A series of chance encounters, which retrace the Atlantic slave trade route between France, Africa, and the Antilles, lead Charly to his daughter ten years later in Martinique. Her “adoptive” mother, however, disputes his paternal rights. The public trial, transposed into a battle between the races, forestalls a happy ending.

With the character Roland, visiting from Paris, Ségalas complicates her stance on race in Récits des Antilles. Self-styled as being “dans le progrès,” Roland triangulates the view presented of the colonial world, adding a European perspective to that of African blacks and Creoles of both colors (43). Charly finds it shocking that Roland “fai[t] des visites à un mulâtre” (43). When Roland describes himself as “ému de cette touchante égalité” that now exists between the people of color and French Creoles, Charly quickly readjusts his friend’s view: “Oh! l’égalité . . . existe dans nos lois, mais pas dans nos mœurs. Nous partageons avec les gens de couleur les emplois publics, mais quelles que soient leur fortune et leur position, nous ne leur ouvrons pas nos salons” (43). Here, the use of an omniscient narrator recalls Ségalas’s rhetorical strategy in 1855. Ségalas borrows Roland’s voice to measure “la marche du progrès dans le nouveau monde et l’effet de l’abolition de l’esclavage,” registering negative attitudes toward blacks, but not closely identifying (her voice) with the harsh opinions expressed (43).

A subsequent exchange between Roland and Charly shows that the legal measure enacted on the continent has failed to dislodge the racial hierarchy in the colonies. Récits des Antilles builds on the cultural legacy and further textures Ségalas’s colonial corpus as Charly explains the meaning of the word “créole” to Roland: “Donnez-vous donc la peine de relire l’histoire; vous verrez que les créoles de nos colonies sont les descendants des Français qui sont venus s’établir à la Guadeloupe, à la Martinique, et même à Saint-Domingue, d’où la révolte et le massacre les ont fait disparaître” (46). The memory of Saint-Domingue, distant yet haunting, is filtered only through the perspective of the French colonizers. The white Creole repeats terms used in “L’oncle d’Amérique et le neveu de France,” but sharpens the use of the word “créole” in relation to whites versus blacks: “Il est vrai que les nègres nés aux colonies s’appellent nègres créoles, mais le mot créole seul ne désigne absolument que les blancs, qui sont, croyez-le bien, dans nos Antilles, tout aussi blancs que vos Parisiens, et sont par le fait des Français d’Amérique” (46). The narrative pivots from the past to the present as “la belle Créole,” associated with racial sensitivity, mediates the negative effects of abolition.
The plot thickens against the backdrop of revenge, which pits a free black man against a white plantation owner. Convinced that Onélie has made off with his daughter, Rosélis, the night before the trial, Charly encounters an elderly black woman while seeking her mistress. Long employed by Mme Beaumanguier, “la vieille nègresse” speaks “le langage des blanches,” reflecting her mistress’s influence, the narrator observes (Récits des Antilles, 71). Still loyal to her mistress, the old woman expresses nostalgia for slavery: “Aujourd’hui que les pauvres nègres ne sont plus esclaves, il faut bien que de bonnes blanches comme Mme de Beaumanguier viennent les secourir, quand ils ne peuvent plus travailler. Ah! Monsieur, où est-il, le bon temps de l’esclavage!” (72). Her reminiscence excludes the cruelty toward slaves who worked as field hands, acknowledged in Ségalas’s 1847 poetic narrative. This difference in attitude on the part of the domestic slave, who likely experienced better treatment while working in or around the plantation manor, accurately represents the division among colonial slaves.

In Récits des Antilles, as in “L’oncle d’Amérique et le neveu de France,” multiple viewpoints express racial tensions. As the narrative shifts back to race and to the trial pitting whites against blacks in and outside the courtroom, Ségalas’s narrator reduces the problem to color envy, which recalls the physiology of (male) genius, which excluded females: “Tout noirs qu’ils sont, les nègres sont les rouges des colonies: le blanc représente pour eux l’antique esclavage, l’autorité, la suprématie, et ils ne sont pas fâchés de se révolter à l’occasion contre ces peaux blanches qu’ils enviennent. Ils ont déjà la liberté, puis la fraternité des emplois publics, (excepté toute-fois celle du salon): ils sont furieux de ne pouvoir joindre à cela l’égalité de la peau” (89). Can one discern behind these remarks laced with scorn what Ségalas’s mother may have witnessed in Saint-Domingue?

The character Jupiter resurfaces at this juncture, inspiring cheers from the black people gathered outside the courtroom. A negative allusion to Toussaint Louverture in the same context emphasizes the slave revolt he led. The narrator glosses from this perspective the blind stance blacks took “pour le noir contre le blanc, sans raisonnement, sans conviction, uniquement parce qu’ils voyaient là une question de couleur” (Récits des Antilles, 89). This line of thought carries through to the novel’s end. Ségalas’s narrative retreats from the more balanced view in other women’s writing that the French, too, especially French Creoles in the colonies, reacted irrationally to blacks. While attempting to flee, Jupiter is bitten by a poisonous snake, confesses his crime, and dies. Charly and Onélie declare their love for one another, and Rosélis is reunited with her father. This weak conclusion assimilates the two Frances in the guise of a happy ending for whites only, which leaves Ségalas open to charges of racism. This issue, however, offers little insight into why Ségalas’s works treating France’s colonial enterprise in the nineteenth century, which nearly bookend her output, have been unevenly preserved by literary critics.

In 1890, three years before Ségalas died, François Desplantes and Paul Pouthier assessed her production and recalled Les algériennes as anchoring her engagement
with French colonization. Yet, to explain why her œuvre had been included in the most honorable places in nineteenth-century French literature, they reiterated Eugène de Mirecourt’s 1856 appraisal of Ségalas as “le poète des mères, des enfants et la famille” (Madame Anaïs Ségalas, 89). This is the same category that Ségalas was placed in by Louise D’Alq who in her 1893 anthology of French women writers ranked Ségalas as the most popular “poète féminin” of the century, calling her poetry “les annales du XIXe siècle mises en vers” (Anthologie féminine, 344). In 1895, René Doumic also ignored the colonial themes probed by Ségalas, but placed her “au deuxième rang,” predicting that she would fall into oblivion: “le sort commun des écrits de toutes les femmes” (La vie et les mœurs, 253). After the turn of the century, Edmond Pilon recalled Ségalas among the “muses plaintives du romantisme” and mentioned “La Créole (L’esclavage)” to capture the exotic flair of the poet “hantée de paysages tropicaux, de tamariniers et de déesses noires” (“Les muses plaintives du romantisme,” 208).

In her anthology, Jeanine Moulin suggests Ségalas’s deeper connection to French colonial history: “[L]es origines maternelles d’Anaïs Ségalas lui ont certainement mieux fait comprendre le drame des gens de couleur” (La poésie féminine, 292). Ségalas’s heritage further textures her political affiliations in Évelyne Sullerot’s history of women’s press, the “douce créole” flanking the “poétesse non sans valeur qui fut de tous les clubs féministes de 1848” (Histoire de la presse féminine, 172). This snapshot of a more complex writer is not preserved by Luce Czyba, who reads Ségalas through the prism of twenty-first-century feminism and isolates “un conformisme conservateur” to cast her enduring legacy as a “muse chrétienne” (“Anais Ségalas,” 185). Yet, as I have shown from the colonial corpus buried by the feminine works commonly listed for Ségalas, she diversified her production well beyond the Romantic “poetess” tradition that conservative critics have used to limit women’s verse and thus maintain the maleness of poetic genius. In the next chapter, I reexamine the writings of the so-called late Romantic Malvina Blanchecotte, who reveals another aspect of poetic women’s intellectual legacy, by positing that the labor of genius transcends class and gender.