Louis-Sébastien Mercier: 
Prophet, Abolitionist, Colonialist

LAURE MARCELLESI

In Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s novel L’An 2440: Rêve s’il en fut jamais, the narrator is stunned to find the statue of a black man in twenty-fifth-century Paris—a black man whose merciless sword of justice put an end to slavery and colonial rule in the New World. This was the genesis of the Black Spartacus, a literary character developed by Mercier, Raynal, and Diderot—and incarnated by Toussaint Louverture, leader of the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue in the 1790s. Yet, in his 1798 Le Nouveau Paris, Mercier denounces the insurrection he had seemed to be calling for through his creation. Decrying it as an indiscriminate and pitiless bloodbath, he bemoans the “torches civiles allumées dans nos colonies.” Far from supporting the insurrection, Mercier blames the abolitionist Société des Amis des Noirs for the violence. How can we reconcile the statue of the “vengeur du nouveau monde” in L’An 2440 and the opprobrium heaped on the Société des Amis des Noirs in Le Nouveau Paris? We seek here to answer this question by exploring Mercier’s contradictory and evolving positions on slavery and colonial rule, in the three authorized editions of L’An 2440 published during the author’s lifetime in 1771, 1786, and 1798.
While we shall follow Marcel Dorigny’s warning and not seek “à tout prix une cohérence que l’auteur n’a probablement pas lui-même voulue,” we believe that a close comparative study of these editions reveals a certain consistency whose logic lies in Mercier’s vision of human progress. Mercier views L’An 2440 as a blueprint for humanity’s progress—and himself as a prophet for his time. It is within this prophecy that Mercier articulates two key aspects of his approach to slavery and colonialism: the humanist imperatives of Enlightenment ideals and his faith in the French génie national. What we witness in L’An 2440 is not so much a contradiction as a shift in priorities; from slavery seen as a moral evil to the vital importance of colonies for France. For Mercier, this shift in view is smooth and natural as both his call for abolition and his plan for a colonial enterprise are rooted in Enlightenment ideals.

The Novel L’An 2440

L’An 2440: Rêve s’il en fut jamais presents a simple plot line. The narrator goes to bed after a heated conversation with an English visitor to Paris. When he awakens, he finds that he has slept for some six hundred and seventy years—it is now “L’an de grâce MMCMCCXL,” the year of Mercier’s 700th birthday. The rest of the novel is a forty-one-chapter-long stroll through Paris in which the narrator discovers the twenty-fifth century, which has been perfected according to Enlightenment ideals, both in France and abroad. In the final chapter, after he sees a disconsolate Louis XIV among the ruins of Versailles, the narrator is bitten by an adder, ending both dream and book.

The first anonymous publication of L’An 2440 in 1771 was an immediate success. It went through at least twenty editions and many reprints during the author’s lifetime. There were also numerous translations in spite of the novel’s condemnation by the Holy See in 1773 and by the Spanish Inquisition in 1778. In 1786, Mercier published a much expanded edition, in three volumes, followed by a short allegorical text entitled L’homme de fer, songe. He also disavowed all other editions since 1771 as faulty and shameless “falsifications” in a preface signed by “L’auteur de l’An 2440.” With the original bans still in place, and the added material even more provocative, the author’s name was once again absent from the title page. Mercier’s name finally appeared on the title page of the novel as “L. S. Mercier, ex-Député à la Convention nationale et au Corps législatif; Membre de l’Institut national de France” in the year VII of the Revolutionary calendar (probably 1798) and then again in the year X (1801 or 1802), along with his portrait as the frontispiece of the first volume. Both editions reprint the 1786 text, with a “Nouveau Discours Prélminaire” exalting the novel’s
prophetic dimension and inviting his readers to judge the accuracy of his novel which provides “une prédiction qui embrasait tous les changemens possibles, depuis la destruction des parlemens, de la noblesse et du clergé, jusqu’à l’adoption du chapeau rond.”

**L’An 2440, a Prophesy of Human Progress**

Mercier’s insistence on the prophetic aspect of *L’An 2440* is key to our understanding of the novel. He conceives of *L’An 2440* not just as a work of fiction, not even simply as an exposition of progressive ideas, but as an exploration of human perfectibility and ultimately a template for action. The trope of the dream as well as the description of an ideal society bring to mind the notion of *utopia*. However, Mercier emphasizes temporal instead of the more traditional spatial displacement of the *utopia*—such as Thomas More’s fictional island in his 1516 *Utopia* or Cyrano de Bergerac’s 1655 *Histoire comique des États et Empires de la Lune*. As such, the label *uchronie* in French or *uchronia* in English is more appropriate to Mercier’s work. The word *uchronie* was coined by Charles Renouvier in his 1876 *Uchronie: l’utopie dans l’histoire* and has been utilized since then in analyzing works as William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888). Gregory Ludlow considers Mercier’s novel to be the first *uchronia*:

> Mercier’s shift in emphasis from spatial to temporal considerations is linked, politically and philosophically, to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment notion of progress and the perfectibility of man. Unlike his predecessors’ works, Mercier’s *L’An 2440* affirms the belief in historical progress and development, rather than in the fixist notion of an ideal society, where time has stopped and perfection been achieved.

The name of *uchronia*, with its focus on progress and possibility, perfectly describes *L’An 2440*, which presents not perfection achieved but a march toward perfection. Faith in human perfectibility is one of the essential ideas of the Enlightenment. Even though the notion varies greatly from one Enlightenment thinker to the next, and although Mercier himself expressed doubts in other works, one can follow Raymond Trousson in placing *L’An 2440* in the continuum from the “*Discours sur les progrès de l’esprit humain* de Turgot (1750) à l’*Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (1795) de Condorcet.”

> Such faith in progress is all the more forceful in a chapter that Mercier
adds to the 1786 edition. When the eighteenth-century narrator admires the accomplishments of the ideal twenty-fifth-century society, judging it impossible to achieve “une plus grande perfection,” he is rebuked by his host who believes in the endless perfectibility of humanity and foresees more improvements in the future: “car où s’arrête la perfectibilité de l’homme armé de la géométrie & des arts méchaniques, instruit de la chymie?”

*L’An 2440* thus not only outlines an ideal society, but plans for its perpetual progress as well.

Mercier’s belief in the applicability of his novel to his own century is discernible on the title page which bears an epigraph borrowed from Leibniz: “le Temps présent est gros de l’Avenir. . .” The open-ended sentence, with its ellipsis, already reaches into the future. The reader is invited to approach *L’An 2440* not as a fantasy in a parallel universe, but as a probable future within reach for humankind, an *avenir* that he or she can start building in the present. Mercier makes this invitation all the more explicit at the end of the 1786 edition as he urges his contemporaries to improve themselves so they can taste the “volupté” of *L’An 2440* “avant que nos arriere-petits-enfans ne la goûtent.” Moreover, Mercier assigns himself a distinct role in this march toward an ideal society. Also in the 1786 edition, the third volume’s epigraph, speaks to the author’s ultimate goal: “le plaisir sans égal seroit de fonder la félicité publique.” Mercier portrays himself here as a leader in the public sphere, whose intellectual work is a beacon for progress and universal happiness.

Often considered a “modèle de tout écrivain engagé,” Mercier emphasizes the importance that thinkers and writers hold in the construction of his ideal civilization. In a footnote to chapter 29, devoted to “les gens de lettres,” Mercier claims that nations do not owe “leur splendeur, leur force et leur gloire” to either their “plus puissants monarques” or their “princes les plus riches,” but rather to those who brought about “des progrès étonnants dans les arts, dans les sciences, dans l’art même de gouverner.” The chapter entitled “La bibliothèque du roi,” in which the narrator visits the twenty-fifth-century king’s library, demonstrates how this tenet was put into practice as the reader can measure what the uchronian society of the year 2440 owes to the writers of centuries past. As he reviews the books contained in the library—and evokes those conspicuously missing from it—Mercier gauges the benefits—or lack thereof—brought to humanity by their authors. For instance, while he does not deny the “génie” of thinkers such as Luther, Erasmus, Bossuet, Pascal, among others, he deems it to have been ill-employed on matters of religion and wishes it had been used to “perfectionner la morale, la législation, la physique” instead. Only then would these intellectuals have fulfilled their duty: the “services” due to “la raison humaine.”
The progress brought about by the men of letters is symbolized by the recurring image of lumière (both light and enlightenment). For instance, the chapter entitled “Les Lanternes” starts with the very concrete streetlamps that have brought light and morals to the cities of the twenty-fifth century and moves on to a metaphorical light—that of reason and the printed word: “les livres excellents écrits par des hommes sublimes ont été comme autant de flambeaux qui ont servi à en allumer mille autres.” This theme is highlighted in the 1786 edition, starting with notes added to the “Épître dédicatoire à l’année deux mille quatre cent quarante”: arts and printed works are bound to “éclairer l’univers” while the “flambeau de la philosophie,” taken up in the matter of two lines by the synonyms “le fanal” and “la flamme,” shines now too strongly to ever be extinguished. The novel’s last chapter, added in the 1786 edition, strikes an exalted tone that returns to the “lumières universelles” seen as the “phare conducteur d’une nation.” It ends on the figure of the philosophe, who can see through a monarch’s luxury and glory to assess the value of his heart in respect to “le bonheur public.” As the prince vanishes into a mere shadow—“un fantôme”—he is replaced by the philosopher and his concern, in the very last sentence, for the “genre humain.”

By 1786, the prophetic aspect of L’An 2440 is foremost in Mercier’s mind. In the “Avis de l’Auteur” that opens this edition, Mercier expresses his pleasure at having seen “plusieurs de [s]es idées se réaliser pour l’avantage du bien public” since the novel’s first publication in 1771. The edition concludes with a single Latin word: “Dixi.” The author has spoken, he has pronounced his prediction. From committed writer, Mercier becomes an oracle for the future of France and humanity. By the end of 1789, he emphasizes his role as prophet as he bids adieu to the Revolutionary year, addressing and praising 1789 just as he addresses and praises 2440 in the “Epître dédicatoire à l’année 2440” that opens his novel. In a short piece published in the Annales patriotiques et littéraires on December 31, 1789, Mercier does not simply enthuse over the many changes brought about by 1789, but he also draws attention to his own premonitions. In a clear reference to his novel, he admits that he almost confused 1789 with 2440, his “chère fille,” before he realized that 2440 shall have “encore plus de charmes, d’esprit & de beauté.” True to his vision of human progress, Mercier insists that he and his contemporaries need to work on the advances made in 1789 and put the new Revolutionary principles in practice to bring 2440 to pass. By 1798, when he returns to L’An 2440, he opens the “Nouveau Discours Préliminaire” with the statement that his “Rêve a annoncé et préparé la révolution française” and repeats the words “prévision” and “prophétie.” He even makes a claim that has since attracted much derision:
“je suis donc le véritable prophète de la révolution, et je le dis sans orgueil.”

Of interest here is not the truth in Mercier’s statement but rather his self-view as prophet—and the value of *L’An 2440* as prophecy.

**Mercier’s Abolitionism and its Limits**

Starting with the 1771 edition, Mercier offers a uchronian project for the whole world. As the narrator’s guide explains, humankind lives in the twenty-fifth-century in universal harmony: “nous nous regardons comme tous frères. L’Indien et le Chinois seront nos compatriotes dès qu’ils mettront le pied sur notre sol. Nous accoutumons nos enfants à regarder l’univers comme une seule et même famille rassemblée sous l’œil du père commun.”

There is no room in such a world for slavery and old colonial rules: Latin America no longer is “la Nouvelle Espagne,” Montezuma’s descendants now reign over Mexico. The city of Asuncion, Paraguay, celebrates the end of “l’esclavage honteux où était réduite la nation sous l’empire despotique des Jésuites.”

The end of slavery is commemorated by the famous statue to the “vengeur du nouveau monde,” whose title as vengeur is to be taken seriously. Commanded for his “fermeté” and “vertueuse vengeance,” he is hailed as “l’ange exterminateur à qui le Dieu de justice avait remis son glaive” in a passage with apocalyptic overtones. In the words of a twenty-fifth-century Parisian who recounts how slavery and colonial rule were brought to an end:

Le torrent qui brise les digues, la foudre qui tombe, ont un effet moins prompt, moins violent. Dans le même instant ils ont versé le sang de leurs tyrans: Français, Espagnols, Anglais, Hollandais, Portugais, tout a été la proie du fer, du poison et de la flamme. La terre de l’Amérique a bu avec avidité ce sang qu’elle attendait depuis longtemps, et les ossements de leurs ancêtres lâchement égorgés ont paru s’élever alors et tressaillir de joie.

The whole episode is awash in violence, and ends on the macabre image of European slave-holders’ blood quenching and regenerating the American soil, as though only such bloodshed could offer redress for the moral evil of slavery.

Based on these excerpts, one can only agree with Cave and Marcandier-Colard’s assessment of Mercier’s stance: “son anti-esclavagisme est celui des philosophes; mais virulent, il harangue l’Occident coupable, comme le feront Raynal et Bernardin de Saint Pierre, et, visionnaire, il prédit l’abolition.” This portrait of Mercier as committed abolitionist is prevalent among scholars of eighteenth-century France. For instance, Edward
Seeber devotes a section of his *Anti-Slavery Opinion in France during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* to Mercier while Roger Mercier considers his eighteenth-century namesake as “[l]’un de ceux qui prirent le plus constamment la défense des Nègres.”

For Christopher Miller, in his comprehensive examination of the literature and culture surrounding the slave trade in France, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, Mercier is the “abolitionist Louis-Sébastien Mercier.”

Admittedly, such judgement is not based solely on *L’An 2440* but also takes into account other works by Mercier. However, it fails to examine the nuances of Mercier’s position and his later criticism of the abolitionist movement.

The first cracks in the portrayal of Mercier as a staunch abolitionist appear when one pays close attention to his faith in Enlightenment ideals. They are the basis of both his view of human progress and his abolitionist stance, and it naturally follows that Mercier cannot conceive of the uchronian world of 2440 without them. However, for all their generosity and humanism, these ideals remain European and Europe-centered. As a consequence, even when Mercier writes about a South America rid of colonial rule, he cannot imagine that the former colonized people would not have embraced European technology, arts, and morals. The impassioned call for freedom embodied in the statue of the New World Avenger in chapter 22 is thus later softened in chapter 42, when reporters for the *gazettes* write from the city of Asunción during the celebration of the abolition of the Jesuits’ colonial rule: “mais en même temps la nation, qui n’est point ingrate, avoue qu’elle a été arrachée à la misère, formée à l’agriculture et aux arts par ces mêmes Jésuites. Heureux s’ils se fussent bornés à nous instruire et à nous donner les lois saintes de la morale!”

The Jesuits did, after all, have a positive influence, bringing grateful natives abundance through arts and agriculture, which Mercier assumes the Aztecs and Guarani did not possess. Even though by 2440, “les naturels ont repris leurs droits imprescriptibles,” and live freely in their homelands, they have embraced European progress.

Not only do Mercier’s imagined Europeans spread their values, both technical and moral, to the world, but they also enlighten non-European peoples about themselves. For example, in the twenty-fifth century, Voltaire’s tragedies are performed everywhere—from *Mahomet* in Constantinople to *L’Orphelin de la Chine* in China. *Mahomet* is played in a theater “bâti sur les débris de l’ancienne mosquée dite Sainte-Sophie” while wine is served liberally at parties, implications that Islam has come to an end. As for the Chinese, they have given up their “langue hiéroglyphique” and adopted a more rational one, based on European linguistic models. Here, however, Mercier does not simply Europeanize the Chinese or the Turks, who have lost under his pen some of their idiosyncrasies. He holds a mirror to them...
through the works of a French playwright: he has the French Enlightenment reveal their true characters to themselves.

We do not mean here to fault Mercier for living in his era, or imply that he could—let alone should—have escaped his place and time to imagine a relationship with the Other closer to our own early twenty-first-century position on the matter. Rather, we want to draw attention to the limitations of Mercier’s European-centered values and to how they lead him, slowly but surely, to put into question the Black Spartacus figure.

Mercier’s treatment of the Black Spartacus figure should not be construed as an appeal for insurrection as much as a repelling scenario prompting white slave-owners to free their slaves. This idea starts in the 1771 edition, with a footnote to the description of the vengeance exacted by the New World Avenger hoping that “ce héros” spares the lives of “ces généreux Quakers qui viennent de rendre la liberté à leurs nègres.” The author praises the “généreux Quakers, les plus vertueux des hommes” again, this time in a gazette report on Philadelphia. In a footnote, he also calls on the “princes du Nord” to follow their example and put an end to slavery. His arguments for abolition, however, do not dwell on the inhumanity of slavery. They drawn instead on rhetorical appeals and present the potential advantages to the monarchs: “une gloire immortelle,” “cet acte glorieux,” “leurs vrais intérêts,” predicting that, being free, “leurs sujets seront plus fidèles.” One could argue that references to glory and promises of faithfulness would be more effective with a prince than appeals to humanity. Yet, one is struck by the shift from a humanitarian concern for enslaved populations to the consideration of the slave-holding powers’ prosperity.

This shift of focus from the moral issue of slavery to concern for the welfare of Europeans becomes all the more pronounced in the 1786 edition. What was a passing reference becomes a four-page long footnote praising American Quakers for their fight for abolition. This diatribe against slavery ends with a reference to “un Spartacus sur les bords de la Gambie” although it should not be interpreted as a renewed appeal for a New World Avenger. Here, possible slave uprisings are not to be wished for. Rather, the lengthy and gruesome description of the tortures, poisons, and wars about to be waged by “une race nombreuse de vengeurs” are meant as a deterrent against slavery, as an argument for abolition by—and for—white slave HOLDERS. To avert a cruel war in which “les blancs, vainqueurs dans les trois parties du monde, verroient ici le terme de leur supériorité,” Mercier offers a plan in which “le maître comme l’esclave, les colonies comme la métropole, trouvent leur avantage.” Giving the example of “l’heureuse Pensylvanie,” he lists the benefits of abolition for the former slave-owner: “là, le negre traité en homme, accoutumé peu-à-peu à un travail qui n’excede pas ses
forces, devient un domestique utile, fidele, & reste attaché à son maître.”

66 There is no mention of the viewpoint of the former slaves but assurance of financial gain “si le planteur affranchissoit lui-même ses esclaves,” and were to treat them as a father.67

Mercier gives a fictional example of this European-centered viewpoint on slavery in his 1776 novel Jezennemours (also known in later editions as Histoire d’une jeune luthérienne). Toward the end of the novel, the hero, Jezennemours, boards a ship to Guadeloupe and is shipwrecked on an unnamed French island of the West Indies. He is appalled by the sight of Black slaves, “[c]ette foule d’infortunés asservis par un petit nombre, enlevés à l’Afrique pour travailler le sucre qui doit flatter le goû des Européens.”68 After an impassioned condemnation of slavery, Jezennemours decides to buy some of the weakest and oldest slaves to free them. However, after three pages, once Jezennemours and his newfound father close the deal, the slaves all but disappear from the narrative: “le marché fut bientôt conclu pour ces esclaves choisis; on ne s’amusa plus à les marchander davantage, & ils suivirent leur nouveau Maître.”69 Here, the bargain is mentioned quite casually (bientôt, s’amusa); the slaves are never given a voice and are as quickly dismissed as they are bought; they are not shown being freed, simply being acquired by a new master. This short episode reads like a passage obligé in a late eighteenth-century novel dealing, even briefly, with the slave-holding West Indies—a way to assuage the reader’s conscience before moving on with the main story line.

In this respect, Mercier’s texts on slavery are very different from the abolitionist works of a Condorcet or a Bernardin de Saint Pierre. Bernardin de Saint Pierre’s Esclaves des îles françaises: Lettre sur les noirs, excerpted from the longer Voyage à l’isle de France, à l’isle Bourbon, au cap de Bonne-Espérance, par un officier du roi (1773), is a first-hand report on the evils of slavery on the Ile de France, marked by experience and emotion.70 Condorcet’s 1781 pamphlet on slavery Réflexions sur l’esclavage des Nègres is grounded on a philosophical analysis of natural law.71 In spite of their different approaches, both Condorcet and Bernardin de Saint Pierre lay plans to abolish the slave trade and slavery. In his 1789 Voeux d’un solitaire, Bernardin de Saint Pierre even supports the presence of Black representatives from the colonies in the new French National Assembly.72

Mercier’s evolution on the issue of slavery follows a different trajectory. Far from wishing to bring former slaves to metropolitan France as equals and citizens, he focuses his attention to the interests of French colonies. If we return to Mercier’s mention of Spartacus in 1786, we see that it is less a dream for the future than a nightmare. After his plea for a paternalistic treatment of black workers on plantations, Mercier asks, “si le ciel forme
un Spartacus sur les bords de la Gambie, un Oénomaüs sur les rives du Sénégal, que deviendront nos colonies?” The viewpoint expressed here is very different from the “cri de surprise et de joie” of L’An 2440’s first narrator when he is told about the New World Avenger. The tone in the 1786 edition has become one of concern for the properties of the Old World. With the possessive adjective nos, Mercier is no longer in the universal realm of natural rights but rather aligns himself, and his readers, in one of two groups. And his group, that of enlightened and humanist Europeans, no longer wishes for a Black Spartacus in their plantations. Rather, it is looking forward, past slavery toward a new management of their colonies—toward a new form of colonialism.

The 1798 edition of L’An 2440 emphasizes this shift. Not only does it further the replacement of an abolitionist rhetoric with a vision of a new colonial involvement, it also bears witness to a geographical displacement from the Americas to Africa. When Mercier lists all that L’An 2440 accurately predicted, “depuis la destruction des parlemens, de la noblesse et du clergé, jusqu’à l’adoption du chapeau rond,” he does not include the Haitian Revolution, although he could easily have added Toussaint Louverture and his statue of the Avenger of the New World to the inventory of successful prophecies in L’An 2440. Mercier does, however, include Bonaparte’s Egyptian campaign, claiming that “l’expédition en Egypte s’y trouve mot pour mot.”

Could Mercier’s repression of the Haitian Revolution be an early symptom of the French collective “amnesia” on the subject, diagnosed by Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall and Christopher Miller, among others? Mercier’s silence certainly has to be understood in the wider context of the shock—the trauma, even—caused by the news of the slave uprising of Saint-Domingue in metropolitan France. Judging from his entry on the “société des amis des noirs” in Le Nouveau Paris, Mercier belongs to the large group of French writers whose “narratives of the ‘crimes, tortures, and devastations,’ of the Revolution perpetuated a one-sided view of France as purely a victim in the Haitian Revolution,” in Miller’s words. Blaming the “société des amis des noirs” for the uprising and its nefarious consequences for France, Mercier depicts the slaughter of white plantation-owners: “et tandis que l’on plaidoit ici la cause des noirs, la porte était ouverte en Amérique aux incendies, aux meurtres ; et les hommes de couleur se jetèrent entre les noirs et les blancs pour être tout-à-la-fois leurs plus dangereux amis et leurs plus implacables ennemis.” Mercier’s gruesome evocation of indiscriminate murders and arsons as well as of a violent reversal of hierarchy and loyalty is representative of the depiction of “massacres de Saint-Domingue” in French literature. It helps explain why the birth of the Haitian Revolution
is perceived as a taint for the French abolitionist movement for years to come. It also confirms the status of the Avenger of the New World and the Black Spartacus in *L’An 2440*: far from models for enslaved Africans, they serve as warnings to white planters, as arguments to move them to a more humane attitude. If slavery is going to be abolished—as Mercier imagines it will be in *L’An 2440*—it has to be on the white colonist’s terms.

Mercier and his compatriots are shocked not only by the violence of the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue but also by the major blow it brings to the French colonial empire. Sepinwall shows that, “for the French, Haitian independence meant the loss of the empire’s most important colony, the pearl of the West Indies” and signalled the end of a French empire in the Americas. With the image of Bonaparte in Egypt, Mercier leaves behind the smarting loss of Saint-Domingue to focus his attention on a new continent with a call for an ambitious enlightened colonial enterprise.

**Mercier, an Enlightened Colonialist**

This new enlightened, civilizing colonial enterprise forms a preeminent part of the 1786 edition. When Mercier fast forwards to the twenty-fifth century, he finds France now ruling over Greece, Egypt, as well as most of Africa. It is true that the world is no longer guilty of the “crime affreux” of slavery and the slave trade, and that Africans are no longer enslaved to be transported “dans des boîtes infectes à quinze cents lieues de leur pays, pour cultiver sous le fouet déchirant d’un lâche propriétaire des cannes à sucre, beaucoup moins belles que celles que l’on cultive auprès de leurs cabanes paternelles.” The focus of the passage, however, lays less on slavery than on how to provide sugar to Europe. Mercier imagines that, having turned away from the Americas, the Old World now receives sugar from Africa: “nous sommes retournés à la côte d’Afrique où la canne à sucre croît sans culture: nous y avons formé quelques établissements pacifiques” where free African laborers cultivate sugar cane for a twelfth of what the cost used to be on American plantations. Mercier is certainly not the only eighteenth-century thinker to have argued for plantations in Africa (Senegal in particular) with the goal of securing both the abolition of slavery and resources such as tobacco, sugar, or rum. Lafayette, Raynal, Condorcet, and Madame de Staël, among others, dreamt up similar plans. Miller has examined this movement in depth in the tenth chapter of his *French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* with the case study of Baron Roger’s *Kélédor, histoire africaine*. We shall therefore not dwell on this aspect of Mercier’s uchronia, except to agree with Miller that such plans reveal “the connection between abolitionism and a new colonialism aimed at Africa.”
Mercier’s treatment of Africa in the 1786 edition of *L’An 2440* supports this transition toward colonialism, with a twenty-fifth-century Frenchman extolling the “avantages sans nombre” that France derives from its suzerainty over the continent. For example, the French go “au grand Caire, à Alexandrie, puiser les trésors des deux mondes” while the Nile, the Senegal river, and the Red Sea, also under French control, greatly facilitate French commerce. Commerce is the focus of a chapter devoted to “les Indes orientales.” Just like the chapter on Africa revolved on securing sugar supplies for Europeans, this chapter examines the best way to engage in trade with India. Rejecting both a military conquest of the country and the long caravan route through Turkey and Persia, Mercier’s plan relies on his faith in “l’avantage respectif du commerce,” beneficial to both Europeans and Indians. As a result, the twenty-fifth-century Frenchman explains: “nous avons préféré à ces conquêtes prodigieuses & presque romanesques, les insinuations ascendantes d’un commerce victorieux et paisible.” Victory for Europe in the future will therefore not lay in the aggressive conquest of yore but in the progressive force of commerce.

Does Mercier’s shift of interest away from the Americas and slavery toward a commercial and enlightened colonialism really betray the impassioned values and rhetoric of the New World Avenger statue? This is a question that Jean-Louis Vissière takes up in passing in his article “L’actualité de Mercier,” in which he points out how France’s colonial empire in the 1786 edition of *L’An 2440* could be interpreted as inconsistencies on the part of Mercier, as an anomalie:

*Curieusement, la France... s’est constitué un empire méditerranéen. Louis XXXIV règne sur la Grèce et l’Egypte. Pour Mercier, il n’y a sans doute aucune contradiction entre cette politique et les principes... libéraux: l’annexion de ces deux pays relève moins de l’impérialisme que de la philanthropie.*

Indeed, Mercier is careful to portray French sovereignty over the world in a much different light than that of the Spanish and Jesuits of South America: France is no rapacious invader and brings freedom from barbarian tyranny as well as progress—be it technical, cultural, artistic, or political—to the world. In the “Indes orientales,” fear and hatred of the Europeans have been replaced by gratefulness, as the narrator’s host proudly states that: “nos vues droites & pacifiques ont accoutumé les Indiens à voir les Européens comme des hommes éclairés & de véritables bienfaiteurs.” The radical transformation of Africa under the French is most striking as the host tells the narrator that Africa has been regenerated by “nos découvertes... sans doute aucune contradiction entre cette politique et les principes... libéraux: l’annexion de ces deux pays relève moins de l’impérialisme que de la philanthropie”
lumieres,” with the possessive nos insisting on the origin of such progress and enlightenment. The verb régénérer appears four times in the 1786 chapter that Mercier devotes to Africa, emphasized by such synonyms as renaître, rallumer, relever, renaissance, even résurrection and ressusciter, to put into relief the many facets of the continent’s renewal. Rational and fair government has replaced the “peuples gémissants sous un bacha insolent, inepte & barbare.” The plague has been eradicated. The African people, formerly thought to be inherently “stupide,” now know sciences and arts. The climate itself has been fixed, as it were, by growing “les arbres de nos climats septentrionaux” to offer a natural environment hospitable to cattle. And these trees from Northern regions literally regenerating the African natural environment offer a perfect symbol for European Enlightenment values regenerating its people. To take up Vissière’s words, this sounds less like impérialisme, and the Black legend of Spanish rule with its greed for gold, than philanthropie, based on ideals and progress that provide an answer to non-European people’s needs.

However, even such a utopian dominion sometimes requires military power and violence. Although peace and the recognition of mutual interests are the tools of choice in this enlightened form of conquest, Mercier recognizes that such regeneration of faraway lands and peoples cannot always be achieved peacefully, as was the case for the “Indes orientales,” and he mentions the necessary wars that will bring it to pass. He thus explains in his chapter on Africa:

La légitime destruction des puissances barbares fut au dix-neuvième siècle l’ouvrage concerté des puissances maritimes. Ces guerres ne furent point longues. Les pays subjugués par la plus heureuse & la plus nécessaire des conquêtes, devinrent le domaine des conquérants, qui punirent justement les barbares qui ne s’étaient fait connaître que par les vexations & la tyrannie.

Mercier tries to legitimize this colonial war by expressing it not so much in terms of strength and conquest but rather in terms of moral values and freedom (légitime, heureuse, nécessaire as opposed to barbares, subjugués, vexations, tyrannie). By emphasizing the civilizing enterprise over the war of invasion, Mercier seeks to have his conscience—and that of his readers—condone it. The idea of a civilizing mission, even at the cost of violence, is furthered in a lengthy footnote to the news that the Ottoman empire has been conquered and that it, too, “s’est régénéré sous le fer de la conquête.” This passage lays out the criteria for a good, legitimate conquest of another country: in spite of the primary violence of the invasion, an occupying force
can be deemed legitimate if it meets “l’obéissance volontaire des peuples qui trouvent quelquefois un avantage à être conquis,” when domination gives way to a contract of sorts between the occupied people and the occupying force.¹⁰²

This occupying force is clearly identified: it is France. Starting with the 1786 edition and continuing even more strongly during the Revolution, Mercier’s uchronia takes a pronounced patriotic turn. We have seen the benefits that France reaps from its colonies, in particular its thriving commerce. Yet Mercier is very careful to present France not just as any colonial power, but as a powerful, yet benevolent, world-leader. Happy that “aucune puissance n’a songé à croiser [France’s] opérations,” Mercier revels in the dream of a powerful French navy in the twenty-fifth century, unrivaled even by England.¹⁰³ Her fleets do not spoil other regions, but rather deliver French cereal, wine, fruit, manufactured goods, and clothes to the rest of the world, understandably grateful.¹⁰⁴ Mercier’s uchronia ultimately becomes a patriotic one, against the backdrop of France’s political, colonial, and commercial rivalry with her British neighbor. As Mercier’s patriotism grows, so does his sense of antagonism with England. Mercier’s Anglomania in 1771—after all, it is a British man that sets L’An 2440 in motion—gives way by 1786 to a sense of rivalry, culminating to an extreme Anglophobia with the Revolution.¹⁰⁵

In this competition with England, however, France has a clear advantage: she was chosen by destiny for a benevolent dominion of the world. Already in the 1771 edition, L’An 2440 ended with a footnote exalting France’s geographical position and its domination of the seas: “quel royaume que la France! Et quel peuple semblerait avoir plus de droits au bonheur!”¹⁰⁶ In 1786, Mercier expands the footnote to two pages and a half and appeals to a Gallic oracle promising that the French monarchy would last five thousand years, strengthening with the support of the past his own view of France’s bright future.¹⁰⁷

In the last editions published during Mercier’s life, the glorification of France and its world destiny is literally foregrounded by a new frontispiece for the second volume of L’An 2440. The illustration of chapter 37, entitled “Salle du Trône,” that opened the volume starting in 1786 is replaced by an engraving signed by Tardieu l’aîné and representing “La France et le Temps” (Fig. 1).¹⁰⁸ In it, France is personified as a woman wearing the laurel wreath of victory and flanked by a cock—a symbol of the French nation that had become prominent in Revolutionary iconography. Sitting in the bottom right corner of the engraving, under palm fronds, a traditional illustration of the tropics and of far-reaching conquests, France points to unrolled scrolls on her lap as three allegorical figures pay her homage. First
are the allegory of Abundance with a Cornucopia overflowing at France’s feet and that of Peace—or Harmony—bearing what could be an olive or a rose branch. Behind them, Time, under the traits of an old man carrying a scythe, leans toward France, to take a look at her open scrolls. It would not be too far-fetched to assume that these scrolls represent the very novel the reader is about to enter, that is *L’An 2440*. Time could therefore be checking the accuracy of Mercier’s predictions. Foremost in these predictions is that of France’s dominion of the world, represented both by the palm fronds at the top of the picture, and a terrestrial globe near the allegory of France. But the engraving goes further and, in keeping with the novel it illustrates, emphasizes France’s civilizing colonialism. An empty Roman armor hanging from the palms marks the rejection of Rome’s violent conquests since, in the novel, Mercier strongly condemns Rome as having “étendu les chaînes de l’oppression sur l’univers connu.” Instead, it is Athena / Minerva, recognizable by the owl on her helmet and the Gorgon’s head on her chest plate, who presides over France’s colonial enterprise. As the goddess combines a warrior’s strength, necessary to defeat foreign puissances barbares, with the power of reason and philosophy that will enlighten and civilize, she appears as the perfect symbol for the new form of colonialism championed by Mercier.

The accent put on France’s national and international interests in the 1798 edition of *L’An 2440* is to be placed within the context of the Revolutionary wars, which can have only exarcebated Mercier’s patriotism. At a time when a new national identity was being defined, and France’s international standing threatened, reaffirming France’s power both in Europe and outside was of the utmost importance to Mercier. That is why he cannot, in *Le Nouveau Paris*, cheer for Toussaint Louverture and support slave uprisings in French colonies. When, as we have seen, he deplores them as “torches civiles allumées dans nos colonies,” it is to blame them on an alleged conspiracy led by the British to destroy France, a conspiracy in which the Société des Amis des Noirs is but a blind tool. However, while Mercier’s patriotic concern for “nos colonies” is certainly intensified under the Directory, it was born long before, in the 1786 Spartacus passage that already feared for the future of “nos colonies.”

*L’An 2440* is a turning point in the Enlightenment reflection on slavery and colonialism. Mercier’s forceful rejection of slavery and an old form of colonialism, epitomized by the black legend of Spanish colonial rule in the Americas—both perceived as remnants of the past—gives way to his advocacy of a new colonialism, born out of the combination of Enlightenment ideals with patriotism. As Mercier’s novel looks forward to the future, it sees
the progress of humanity in a strong yet benevolent dominion of the world by European nations—and France in particular. If literary critics have often looked at Mercier as a “pre-romantic” writer whose work foreshadowed that of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Hugo, and even influenced Baudelaire, a close study of his *L’An 2440* reveals another way in which Mercier prefigured the nineteenth century: his call for colonial enterprises condoned by the *mission civilisatrice* ideal.111

**NOTES**

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1. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *L’An 2440: Rêve s’il en fut jamais*, ed. Christophe Cave and Christine Marcandier-Colard (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), 131 (hereafter cited as *L’An 2440* [1771]). “I observed, . . . on a magnificent pedestal, the figure of a negro; his head was bare, his arm extended, his eye fierce, his attitude noble and commanding; round him were spread the broken relics of twenty scepters; and at his feet I read these words: To the Avenger of the New World” (Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred*, trans. W. Hooper [Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1795], 127).

2. Raynal borrows heavily from Mercier’s New World Avenger in the 1774 edition of his *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*. Raynal calls for a slave uprising, led by “ce grand homme que la nature doit peut-être à l’honneur de l’espèce humaine . . . ce Spartacus nouveau, qui ne trouvera point de Crassus” (Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 7 vols. [La Haye: Gosse fils, 1776]), 4:265. “That great man whom Nature may owe to the honor of the human race . . . this new Spartacus, who will meet no Crassus” (this and all translations are my own unless otherwise noted). In 1780, a further revision of the *Histoire des deux Indes*, probably penned by Diderot, removes the name *Spartacus* but adds a passage almost literally lifted

3. The slave insurrection on Saint-Domingue began in August, 1791. Toussaint Louverture became the movement’s *de facto* leader two years later. Haitian independence was declared in 1804. Some believe that Toussaint Louverture was inspired by the Black Spartacus literary figure. He was, in any case, immediately seen as its incarnation. In his 1963 *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, C. L. R. James imagines Toussaint Louverture reading the *Histoire philosophique* and particularly “the most famous passage” under study here “over and over again” (C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* [New York: Vintage Books, 1963], 25). For a discussion of this aspect of Toussaint Louverture’s legend, see Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 300–8.


5. In his description of the *Société des Amis des Noirs*’ responsibility in the slave insurrections, Mercier insists on the parallel between abolitionist discourse in France and violence in the West Indies: “et tandis que l’on plaidoit ici la cause des noirs, la porte était ouverte en Amérique aux incendies, aux meurtres” (*Le Nouveau Paris*, 2:85. “And whilst they were pleading for the cause of the Blacks, the door was opened in the colonies to burning and murders” (*New Picture of Paris*, 1:197). Furthermore, Mercier claims to have always regarded the “société des amis des noirs” (the “society of the Friends of the Negroes”) as a “piège” (a “snare”) refusing to join his name to those of the “hommes sensibles, mais à vue courte” (“humane, but short-sighted men”) that made up its ranks. (**Le Nouveau Paris**, 2:83–4; *New Picture of Paris*, 1:196). Mercier is not being entirely truthful here. Records show he did briefly adhere to the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, attending one of their meetings in 1788. See Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot, *La Société des Amis des Noirs 1788–1799. Contribution à l’histoire de l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Paris: Unesco/Edicef, 1998), 137, 143, and 172. However, Mercier never officialized his membership and his name does not appear on the “list of members of the *Société des Amis des Noirs*,” compiled by Eloise Ellery from documents found at

6. Scholars working on *L’An 2440* usually limit themselves to the 1771 edition of the novel. For instance, the most recent editions, by Raymond Trousson in 1971 and Christophe Cave and Christine Marcandier-Colard in 1999, both present the first 1771 edition. In the words of Simon Collier, who follows Trousson’s argument here, this choice is justified by the conclusion that the 1786 amplification of the book “ended up by killing it” and that “the additional matter, which includes a gratuitously anti-Semitic chapter (ch. 79), does not greatly enhance the utopia” (Simon Collier, “Mercier’s Enlightenment Utopia: Progress and Social Ideals,” in *The Enlightenment and its Shadows*, eds. Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova [London and New York: Routledge, 1990], 89). On the other end of the spectrum, Edward Derbyshire Seeber refers to the novel’s “considerably enlarged edition, appearing in 1786” in his discussion of Mercier (Edward Derbyshire Seeber, *Anti-Slavery Opinion in France during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* [Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937], 147). Léon Béclard bases his analysis of *L’An 2440* on the enlarged 1786 edition, “contenant la pensée définitive de Mercier,” according to him (“which contains Mercier’s definitive thoughts”) (Léon Béclard, *Sébastien Mercier; sa vie, son oeuvre, son temps* [Paris: Champion, 1903], 91). It is probably for the same reason that Jean-Louis Vissière quotes from the 1786 edition, although he does not explain his choice. (Jean-Louis Vissière, “L’Actualité de Mercier,” in *Louis-Sébastien Mercier, précurseur et sa fortune*, ed. Hermann Hofer [Munich: Fink, 1997], 311–37). All these scholars work on what they deem to be the “best” edition of the novel but fall short of comparing its different versions, and its evolution over time. This paper thus seeks to offer the first in-depth comparative study of *L’An 2440*’s editions, as they relate to the issue of slavery and colonialism in Mercier’s philosophy.


10. *L’Homme de fer* can be read alongside Mercier’s “songes philosophiques.” Not unlike his twentieth-century namesake, the narrator in *L’homme de fer*, clad in iron, becomes a figure of justice and change. This ironman fantasy emphasizes Mercier’s compulsion for change, his desire for social evolution – and even revolution. The story is reprinted in subsequent editions of the novel. It is also included in Mercier’s *Songes et Visions Philosophiques* (Paris: Lavillette, 1790) as well as in Bonnet’s recent edition of Mercier’s *Songes et Visions Philosophiques*, ed. Jean-Claude Bonnet (Paris: Manucius, 2005), 99–137.
11. In spite of Mercier’s professed outrage, it seems he did have a hand in earlier modifications, such as the rewriting of the chapter “La bibliothèque du roi” in a 1774 edition. (Wilkie, “Mercier’s L’An 2440,” 11).

12. Wilkie indicates that “publication of this work would have represented a substantial risk for a Parisian printer” (Everett C. Wilkie, Jr. “Mercier’s L’An 2440: its Publishing History During the Author’s Lifetime. Part II: Bibliography,” Harvard Library Bulletin 32, no. 4 [Fall 1984], 377).

13. Mercier, who did not modify the 1786 text, explains this decision in terms of the readers’ assessment of his pre-revolutionary prophesies: “comme la malice et la malveillance pourroient insinuer que j’ai glissé dans cet ouvrage plusieurs phrases nouvelles, et que j’aurais fait ainsi la prédiction après l’événement, j’atteste que j’ai réimprimé ces trois volumes sans en retrancher un seul mot, sans y ajouter un seul mot, sans déranger une virgule, tels enfin qu’ils ont paru en mars 1786” (Louis-Sébastien Mercier, L’An deux mille quatre cent quarante: Rêve s’il en fut jamais; suivi de L’homme de fer, songe, 3 vols. [Paris: Lepetit jeune et Gerard, An X (1800)]; 1:xxvij; hereafter cited as L’An 2440 [1800]). “Since malice and malevolence could insinuate that I introduced in the work several new sentences, and that I would thus have made my prediction after the event, I certify that I have reprinted these three volumes without subtracting a single word, without adding a single word, without disturbing a comma—I have reprinted them, in short, exactly as they appeared in March 1786.”

14. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1800) 1:ij. “A prediction that spanned all the possible changes, from the destruction of parliaments, of the nobility and the clergy, to the fashion of the round hat.”

15. Charles Renouvier, Uchronie (l’utopie dans l’histoire): Esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européeene tel qu’il n’a pas été, tel qu’il aurait pu être (Paris: Bureau de la critique philosophique, 1876).


17. Raymond Trousson, Voyages aux pays de nulle part: Histoire littéraire de la pensée utopique (Bruxelles: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1975), 177. “From Turgot’s Discourse on the Advances of the Human mind (1750) to Condorcet’s Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1795).”


19. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 2:233. “For where will stop the perfectibility of a Man armed with geometry and mechanical arts, educated in chemistry?”


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24. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 179. “The Men of Letters.” “It is not to the most powerful monarchs, not to the most opulent princes, . . . that most states owe their splendor, force and glory. It is private persons, who have made the most astonishing improvements in the arts, in sciences, and even in the art of government” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 193).


26. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 169. “What benefit might not human reason have received from such men as Luther, . . . Erasmus, Bousset [sic], Paschal [sic] . . . if they had employed their genius in attacking the errors of the human mind, in improving morality, legislation and physics, instead of opposing or establishing ridiculous dogmas!” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 177).

27. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 153. “The Lamps.” “Excellent works, wrote by men of sublime genius, have served as so many torches to illuminate a thousand others” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 156).

28. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 1:vj. “The Dedicatory Epistle to the Year Two Thousand Four Hundred and Forty.” Arts and printed works both “light up” and “enlighten the entire universe.” The “torch of philosophy” is taken up by the “light” and the “flame.”

29. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 3:136. The “universal lights” are seen as the “beacon of a nation.”


31. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 1:ij. “Several of [his] ideas come true for the benefit of the common good.”

32. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 3:140. Mercier’s emphasis. In Latin, “I have spoken.”


36. Mercier underlines such efforts with concrete terms, such as “se fortifie par l’exercice” (“is fortified by exercise”), “bâtir” (“to build”), and “mettre à exécution” (“to carry out”). (Mercier, “Adieux à l’année 1789,” 5).


39. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1800), 1:i. “I am therefore the true prophet of the revolution, and I say so without any pride.”

40. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 153. “We regard all men as our friends and brethren. The Indian and the Chinese are our countrymen, when they once set foot
on our land. We teach our children to regard all mankind as composing one and the same family, assembled under the eye of one common father” (Mercier, *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred*, 155–6).


42. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1771), 275. “The abolition of that disgraceful slavery to which this nation had been reduced, under the despotic empire of the Jesuits” (Mercier, *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred*, 334).

43. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1771), 132. “The Avenger of the New World”, “his fortitude, and virtuous vengeance,” “he was the exterminating angel, to whom god resigned his sword of justice” (Mercier, *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred*, 128).

44. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1771), 131. “Not the torrent that breaks the dykes, nor the bursting thunder, have a more sudden, or more violent effect. At the same instant, they poured forth the blood of all their tyrants; French, Spanish, English, Dutch, and Portuguese, all became a prey to the sword, to fire, and poison. The soil of America drank with avidity that blood for which it had so long thirsted; and the bones of their ancestors, cowardly butchered, seem to rise up and leap for joy” (Mercier, *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred*, 128).

45. As we have already mentioned, Raynal and Diderot plagiarized this passage for the revised *Histoire des Deux Indes*: “plus impétueux que les torrens, ils laisseront par-tout les traces ineffaçables de leur juste ressentiment. Espagnols, Portugais, Anglois, Français, Hollandois, tous leurs tyrans deviendront la proie du fer et de la flamme. Les champs Américains s’enivreront avec transport d’un sang qu’ils attendoient depuis si long-tems, et les ossemens de tant d’infortunés, entassés depuis trois siecles, tressailleront de joie” (Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 10 vols. [Genève: Pellet, 1780], 6:221). “More impetuous than torrents, they will leave everywhere indelible traces of their just resentment. Spaniards, Portuguese, English, French, Dutch, all their tyrants will become the prey of sword and fire. The fields of America will blissfully soak up the blood for which they had so long been waiting, and the bones of so many wretched people, heaped one upon the other for three centuries, will quiver with joy.”

46. *L’An 2440*, 1771. 12. “His anti-slavery stance is that of the Philosophers; but, with virulence, he harangues the guilty West, as Raynal and Bernardin de Saint Pierre will do after him, and, a visionary, he predicts the abolition.”

47. To my knowledge, Yves Benot and Jean-Claude Bonnet are the only scholars to mention, albeit in passing, Mercier’s changing opinions regarding slavery. For example, Benot states that Mercier [and Lescallier] “ne sont pas restés fidèles à leur premier engagement abolitioniste” [“did not stay true to their first abolitionist stance”] Yves Benot, *La démence coloniale sous Napoléon* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006 [1992]), 259. Bonnet alludes to “l’attitude fluctuante de l’écrivain [Mercier]” [“Mercier’s fluctuating attitude”]. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Néologie*, ed. Jean-Claude Bonnet (Paris: Belin, 2009), 534.

48. Edward Derbyshire Seeber, *Anti-Slavery Opinion in France during the Second*


51. It also fails to address Mercier’s refusal to be involved with the Société des Amis des Noirs (see note 5 above) and his lack of political action toward the abolition of slavery when he was a political figure. Our focus here, however, is the literary expression of such issues in L’An 2440.

52. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 275. “This nation, however, is not ingrate, for it acknowledges the advantage of being raised from wretchedness and instructed in agriculture and the arts by those Jesuits. Happy, if they had contented themselves with instructing [us], and giving [us] [the] sacred laws of morality” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 334; translation slightly modified).

53. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 131. “The natives have reassumed their unalienable rights.” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 128).

54. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 281. Voltaire’s Le fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophète [Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet] was written in 1736 and first performed in 1741.

55. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 271. Voltaire’s L’Orphelin de la Chine [The Orphan of China] was first performed in 1755 at the Comédie-française.


57. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 272. “Hieroglyphic language” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 329).

58. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 132. “This hero doubtless would have spared those generous Quakers, who have lately given their slaves their liberty” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 128).

59. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 275. “Those generous quakers, the most virtuous of mankind” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 335).

60. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 275. “The princes of the North” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 335).

61. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 275–6. “Immortal glory,” “that act of glorious beneficence,” “their real interest,” “their subjects will be more faithful” (Mercier,
Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 335).


64. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 3:33. “The Whites, victorious in the three parts of the world, would see here the end of their superiority.”

65. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 3:34. “The master as well as the slave, the colonies as well as the Metropole, find benefits.”

66. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 3:34. “Happy Pennsylvania”; “there, the slave, treated as a human being, accustomed little by little to a workload that does not exceed his strength, becomes a useful servant, faithful, and remains attached to his master.”

67. L’An 2440, 1787, III, 35, “if the plantation owner were to free his slaves himself.”

68. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Jezennemours, roman dramatique, 2 vols. (Paris and Neuchâtel: magasin de la Société Typographique, 1776), 2:226. “This crowd of hapless victims, enslaved by a few, taken from Africa to grow the sugar that shall please European taste.” Mercier also uses the conceit of sugar tainted with blood, common in eighteenth-century abolitionist rhetorics: “c’est le sang de l’Afrique mêlé aux larmes de l’Amérique qui vont composer le dessert [d’un] lâche Sybarite” (Jezennemours, roman dramatique, 2:226). “It is the blood of Africa, mixed with the tears of America that will make up the dessert of a cowardly Sybarite.”

Mercier returns briefly to the link between the moral evil of slavery and Europe’s consumption of sugar in the supplement to his 1801 Néologie. He defines a “négrier” in these terms: “NÉGRIER. Vaisseau qui sert au commerce de nègres; c’est l’enfer porté sur l’onde. Mangez du sucre, Européens! mais point de thèse justificative” (Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Néologie, ed. Jean-Claude Bonnet [Paris: Belin, 2009], 471). “SLAVE SHIP. Ship that is used for the commerce of negroes; it is hell on the waters. Eat sugar, Europeans! but do not offer any justifying thesis.” Mercier falls short of calling for the abolition of the slave trade here, merely asking his readers to recognize and put an end to their moral hypocrisy.

69. Jezennemours, roman dramatique, 2:229. “The deal was soon closed for the chosen slaves; no more time was wasted in barter, and they followed their new Master.”


73. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 3:25. “Should the Heavens create a Spartacus on the banks of the Gambia, an Oenomaus on the banks of the Senegal, what will become of our colonies?”

74. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1771), 131. “I cried out with surprise and joy;” (Mercier, Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred, 127).

75. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1800), 1:ij. “From the destruction of parliaments, of the
nobility and the clergy, to the fashion of the round hat.”

76. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1800), 1:xxvii. “The expedition in Egypt can be found there word for word.”

77. Although they focus on later repressions of the event in France’s collective memory, Miller shows “how France attempted to come to terms with the Haitian Revolution, long after it was over, through a calculated plan for forgetting” (Miller, The French Atlantic Triangle, 246) and Sepinwall points out that “Haiti has been the subject of a special amnesia in French national memory” (Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, “The Specter of Saint Domingue: American and French reactions to the Haitian Revolution,” in The World of the Haitian Revolution, ed. David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009], 325).


79. Mercier, Le Nouveau Paris, 2:85. “And whilst they were pleading for the cause of the Blacks, the door was opened in the colonies to burning and murders; and the Mulattoes threw themselves between the Blacks and the whites, and became at the same time their most dangerous friends, and their most implacable enemies” (Mercier, New Picture of Paris, 1:197).


81. See Chateaubriand’s famous exclamation in Le génie du christianisme: “qui oserait encore plaider la cause des noirs, après les crimes qu’ils ont commis?” (quoted by Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, “The Specter of Saint Domingue: American and French reactions to the Haitian Revolution,” 317). “Who would dare now to plead the cause of the blacks, after the crimes that they have committed?” (Sepinwall’s translation).

82. After Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot, Jean-Daniel Piquet develops this idea in L’émancipation des Noirs dans la Révolution française (1789–1795): “le public de lecteurs est le même ; non les esclaves dépourvus de toute aptitude à lire mais les métropolitains qui sont ainsi avertis des conséquences très graves pour les colonies d’un refus de s’engager dans la voie d’une abolition graduelle de l’esclavage” (L’émancipation des Noirs dans la Révolution française (1789–1795) [Paris: Karthala, 2002], 27). “The readership is the same: not the slaves, without any ability to read, but the metropolitan French who are therefore warned of the very serious consequences for the colonies of a refusal to begin a gradual abolition of slavery.”


85. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 2:225. “In foul boxes, fifteen hundred leagues from their country, to cultivate, under the lashing whip of a cowardly owner, sugar canes, far less beautiful than those cultivated beside their father’s cabins.”

86. Mercier, L’An 2440 (1787), 2:225. “We went back to the African coast where the sugar cane grows without cultivation: we established a few peaceful settlements there.”
93. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1787), 2:236. “We have preferred to these tremendous and almost fantastical conquests, the infiltrating ascendancies of a peaceful and victorious commerce.”
94. Jean-Louis Vissière, “L’Actualité de Mercier,” in *Louis-Sébastien Mercier, précurseur et sa fortune*, ed. Hermann Hofer (Munich: Fink, 1977), 320; emphasis mine. “Curiously, France has acquired a Mediterranean empire. Louis xxxiv rules over Greece and Egypt. For Mercier, there is probably no contradiction between this policy and liberal principles: the annexation of both countries owes less to imperialism than to philanthropy!”
95. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1787), 2:237. The East Indies. “Our rightful and peaceful views have accustomed the Indians to see Europeans as enlightened men and true benefactors.”
97. “Regenerate, come back to life, rekindle, raise, rebirth, resurrection, resurrect people groaning under an insolent, inpet, and barbaric pacha.”
100. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1787), 2:224. “The legitimate destruction of the barbaric powers was, in the nineteenth century, the concerted work of all naval powers. These wars did not last long. The countries subjugated by the happiest and the most necessary of conquests became the dominion of the conquerors, who justly punished the barbarians who had been known only through vexations and tyranny.”
103. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1787), 2:227. “No other power has tried to stand in the way of France’s operations.”
106. Mercier, *L’An 2440* (1771), 294. “What a kingdom is France! and what people seem to have more right to be happy!” (Mercier, *Memoirs of the Year Two*
Thousand Five Hundred, 360).


