

“ALL BUT THE FORM IS SERIOUS”.  
SLAVERY, RACISM AND DEMOCRACY  
IN GUSTAVE DE BEAUMONT’S *MARIE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Gustave de Beaumont’s often neglected political thought as expressed in his 1835 novel *Marie, ou de l’esclavage aux États-Unis*. Despite being most commonly seen as a sort of “addendum” to Alexis de Tocqueville’s thought, *Marie* entails original and stimulating social and political views. I argue that these views can be read as fragments of a consistent theoretical pattern, a dizygotic twin of Tocqueville’s better-known “liberalisme d’espece nouvelle”. In order to test this hypothesis I focus my analysis on three of *Marie*’s main themes: slavery, race, and political democracy. I argue that, through the novel’s narrative form, Beaumont both displays a keen analysis of slavery (rejecting its understanding as a negative condition – that is, as something flourishing within legal voids – and highlighting instead the deliberate political efforts which allow its perpetration) and a constructivist conception of race belonging. Nonetheless, by intertwining Pascal’s dualism between *cœur* and *raison* and Montesquieu’s dialectic between *mœurs* and *lois*, Beaumont proposes a distinctly conservative declination of the “tyranny of the majority” theory, suggesting that only a monarchic political power is strong enough to protect minorities from popular hate. As a whole, *Marie*’s liberalism seems at the same time more socially progressive and more politically conservative than Tocqueville’s, showing an originality which suggests an opportunity for further study.

**Keywords:** Beaumont, Slavery, Marie, Tocqueville, Liberalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

References to Gustave de Beaumont's *Marie, ou de l'esclavage aux États-Unis* (1835) can hardly ever be found today outside works devoted to his best-known friend, Alexis de Tocqueville. Nevertheless, before "disappearing" (Clignet 2001: 207), this almost-forgotten romantic novel had long stood on its own feet, influencing Karl Marx's analysis of both slavery and American society and affecting the abolition debate in the U.S. (where it was translated and published as a feuilleton in 1845-1846).

Bonds between *Marie* and Tocqueville's 1835 *La démocratie en Amérique* are indeed very tight. Both works were conceived during the two authors' well-known trip to North America in 1831/'32. They were later published in the same year and by the same publisher (Gosselin). And they explicitly mention each other as their natural complement.<sup>1</sup>

Over the last decades, as Tocqueville's celebrity rose unstoppably, these bonds have worked as a mixed blessing for Beaumont's novel. They have prevented it from falling into oblivion; but they have also led scholars to number it – at best – as one of the sources that allow for a better understanding of Tocqueville's thought, along with Alexis' 1831-32 travel notes and the unpublished drafts of the manuscript of the *Démocratie*.<sup>2</sup>

And yet nineteenth-century readers, even recognizing the *Démocratie* as a more groundbreaking work than *Marie*, did not perceive them as qualitatively *incomparable*. In 1836, both books were awarded with the Prix Montyon: 8000 francs were conferred to Tocqueville's book, 3000 to Beaumont's. And this proportion seems consistent with the two works' respective critical reception.

As a matter of fact, an attentive reading of *Marie, ou de l'esclavage aux États-Unis* allows one to discover surprisingly original insights on both so-

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<sup>1</sup> See BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 6-7; TOCQUEVILLE 1990 [1835]: 15.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance KOHN 2002: 170: "My alternative approach will draw upon three sources: the text of *Democracy in America*, unpublished drafts of that notes, and Beaumont's novel *Marie*". Even NOLL 2014, notwithstanding its declared intent to pay attention to "the neglected" *Marie* (NOLL 2014: 273), disappointingly ends his work by suggesting to "incorporate Beaumont's insights" into Tocqueville's argument in order to better understand the latter (NOLL 2014: 299). As a matter of fact, *Marie* seems to have been only partly affected by the (modest) twenty-first-century awakening of 'beaumontian' studies, which has mostly focused on his more mature *L'Irlande sociale, politique, religieuse* [1839]. The 2008 international Turin conference "Gustave de Beaumont. L'Irlanda, la schiavitù, la questione sociale nel XIX secolo" nevertheless included three talks (out of seventeen) specifically concerning *Marie* (NACCI 2011, GUELLEC 2011 and CHIGNOLA 2011). None of them was chosen for *The Tocqueville Review's* 2010 issue "L'Irlande et l'Amérique de Gustave de Beaumont", which published a selection of the conference papers. Since then two new French editions of *Marie* have been published: see BEAUMONT 2009 and BEAUMONT 2014.

cial and political theory. In analyzing the condition of the Afro-American population in the U.S., *Marie* develops a constructivist conception of race belonging, while its "addendums" propose an acute refutation of traditional interpretation of slavery as a "negative" status (i.e. a status marked by a lack, rather than an overabundance, of law). On the other hand, by intertwining Pascal's dualism between *cœur* and *raison* and Montesquieu's dialectic between *mœurs* and *lois*, Beaumont proposes a distinctly conservative declination of the "tyranny of the majority" theory, suggesting that only an unelected (and therefore monarchic) political power can be strong enough to protect endangered minorities from popular hate.

On the whole, these items suggest that *Marie* expresses a cohesive and original, although underrated, liberal position. In order to test this hypothesis, I will begin by analyzing some revealing items which recur throughout the book: slavery, racism, gender differences, and the dialectic bond between *mœurs* and *lois*. At the same time, I will overturn the traditional Tocqueville-Beaumont analysis scheme in using Tocqueville's best-known thought to shed light on that of Beaumont. In doing this, I will acknowledge – as did Beaumont<sup>3</sup> – Tocqueville's intellectual superiority and his strong influence over his friend. But for this very reason, I will suggest that the points on which Beaumont's thought diverges from that of Tocqueville are particularly telling of his own political views.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Aussi, *mon cher maître* [...], je m'incline aujourd'hui comme jadis devant votre supériorité intellectuelle et rationnelle, et je ne me permettrai pas d'écrire une idée qui n'ait reçu votre approbation" (Beaumont to Tocqueville, 6 octobre 1833, TOCQUEVILLE 1967 [A]: 132, Beaumont's italic). Beaumont would have repeated the same idea until the very last days of Tocqueville (when he wrote to Alexis affirming that he owed him most of the ideas he had once believed to have developed on his own: see TOCQUEVILLE 1967 [B]: 532) and even in his devoted biographical preface to Alexis' posthumous *Œuvres* (see BEAUMONT 1866).

<sup>4</sup> The existence of (slight) differences between Beaumont's and Tocqueville's political views was acknowledged by Beaumont himself. While commenting a passage of first *Démocratie's* manuscript concerning administrative centralization, for instance, he noted: «Pensée fausse. [...] Comme j'ignore si l'auteur est de mon avis et que je ne sais quelle pensée il adoptera, je m'occupe point de la rédaction» (TOCQUEVILLE 1990: 71). Beaumont's autonomous rôle in his and Tocqueville's intellectual biography has recently been addressed by HESS 2018. Despite being highly interesting, Hess' work still explicitly chooses to focus on the similarities between Tocqueville and Beaumont rather than on their discords, which to this day have remained virtually unexplored. Hess opens nevertheless a very promising research path as he recommends to take Gustave's as well as Alexis' intellectual contribution into account and to understand the two of them as a «two-man research machine» (HESS 2018: 1). COLDAGELLI 2005: 30 justly noticed that it was «precisely *because* he was so different from him» that Tocqueville chose Beaumont as a research companion (my italic).

## THE NOVEL

Letters from North America by both Tocqueville and Beaumont show that, at least until late summer 1831, they planned to co-author a book about America. This joint project was apparently consistent with their ongoing collaboration. Tocqueville's earliest surviving texts testify how deeply Beaumont was involved in his intellectual life.<sup>5</sup> In October 1828 he addressed to Beaumont a long letter in which he investigated British political history. Between 1829 and 1830 they both attended and discussed together François Guizot's lessons on the *Histoire de la civilisation française*. They then conceived and conducted the prison research mission to the U.S., the results of which were later published in their co-authored prix-winning book *Le système pénitentiaire aux États-Unis et son application en France*. During their travel across the Atlantic they took English lessons and read together Jean-Baptiste Say's *Traité d'économie politique*.

Beaumont's earlier reference to his own project ("*quand je publierai mon ouvrage*", Beaumont 1973: 167, Beaumont's italic) is dated 26/10.<sup>6</sup> This letter to his sister-in-law Félicie also contains – perhaps not by chance – his very first reference to Afro-Americans. Until then, his curiosity had been attracted by another oppressed minority in the United States: the Indigenous peoples. But during his stay in Pennsylvania in autumn 1831, his attention shifted to the condition of the *hommes de couleur*. As he announced this shift to his sister-in-law, he also suggested a point that would later become a cornerstone of *Marie*:

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<sup>5</sup> After graduating in law Tocqueville spent a few months in Italy with his eldest brother Eduard (and although his travel notes have mostly gone lost, the remaining texts offer several interesting hints about young Tocqueville's though). He then started working as *juge auditeur* at Versailles, where he and Beaumont finally met. On the most prominent influences on young Tocqueville see DIEZ DEL CORRAL 1989, COLDAGELLI 2005, and JAUME 2008. On the contrary, almost anything is known of Beaumont's youth. HESS 2009: 77 suggested the list of the books he owned might help understanding which were his favorite readings: see TINNIN 1961. On Tocqueville and Beaumont's friendship see BÉGIN 2015: 35-54.

<sup>6</sup> The decision of writing two different works instead than a co-authored one did not imply by any chance the end of their intellectual collaboration. In both the first *Démocratie* and *Marie* Tocqueville and Beaumont rather suggested to have established a "division of labour" within the frame of a joint research project. However, this division is ambiguous. Tocqueville and Beaumont suggested it was both theoretical (*lois / mœurs*: see TOCQUEVILLE 1990: 15 and BEAUMONT 1840: 7) and content related (democracy / slavery: see TOCQUEVILLE 1990: 262). Nevertheless, neither of these hypotheses seems cohesive with the variety of items all their works dealt with. Scholars have long debated this problem. Seymour Drescher famously claimed the effectiveness of this division of labour (see DRESCHER 1968: 216). His interpretation was challenged in SWEDBERG 2009: 295, while HESS 2018: 4 stressed again the importance of "tak[ing] seriously the division of labour on which Tocqueville and Beaumont agreed from an early stage".

Il est curieux de voir quel orgueil aristocratique se trouve chez *ces hommes libres* dont le gouvernement repose sur le principe de l'égalité absolue. La couleur blanche ici est une noblesse [Beaumont 1973: 176, Beaumont's italic].

A few days later, in Baltimore, Beaumont had the opportunity to observe U.S. slavery at his peak. Back in Philadelphia, he immodestly wrote to his brother Achille:

J'ai fait [sur l'esclavage] bien des observations [...]. Mais tout cela sera probablement publié dans le grand ouvrage qui doit m'immortaliser et c'est à cette publication que je te renvoie pour savoir le reste (Beaumont 1973: 175-176).

As early as November 1831, then, Beaumont had already chosen to devote a book to slavery and racism in the U.S. (while indigenous tribes would have played a secondary, though still relevant, role). It is harder to establish the moment when he decided to adopt the narrative form. Our only indication is an undated note by Tocqueville – probably dating back to spring/summer 1833 – in which the latter helps Beaumont to outline the personality of his novel's main male character.<sup>7</sup> At any rate, in early autumn 1833 Beaumont wrote to Alexis from the Hautes-Pyrénées to tell him how he was splitting his time between wonderful hiking in the mountains between France and Spain and the drafting of his "ouvrage américain": the writing of *Marie* had begun.

As far as the plot is concerned, Beaumont's novel focuses on two main characters. Ludovic, a young Frenchman looking for a new start in the U.S., and Marie, an 18-year-old American girl. Their misadventures are recounted by Ludovic himself to another French voyageur, who is supposedly visiting the U.S. in 1851: the main events of the plot might therefore be set around 1830-35, coinciding with Beaumont and Tocqueville's American trip.

While dwelling in Baltimore at the house of Mr. Nelson, a rich American merchant, Ludovic falls in love with Nelson's shy daughter Marie, "d'une éclatante beauté", only to discover that – despite her skin tone, which "surpassait en blancheur les cygnes des grands lacs" (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 65) – she and her older brother George are secretly "black" because of an Afro-American ancestor of their late mother. Due to this "tache" (which scholars have rightly compared to Philip Roth's *Human Stain*) Nelson tries to dissuade Ludovic from proposing. As he persists, he compels him to

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<sup>7</sup> TOCQUEVILLE 1967 [A]: 131. On Beaumont's literary sources of inspiration, and in particular on his "obsession" (ZIMRA 1976: 1007) for the works of Tocqueville's uncle-in-law François-René de Chateaubriand, see ZIMRA 1976. Pierson has reasonably identified in Beaumont's lack of talent as a novelist the main weak point of *Marie*: see PIERSON 1996 [1938]: 517-523.

undertake a six-month tour of the U.S. so he can experience the strength of racial discrimination.

Upon Ludovic's return, in spite of his growing concerns, he and Marie decide to get married in New York. Regrettably, Marie's secret is revealed shortly before the ceremony, and the news of an ongoing mixed-race marriage fuels a pogrom against the Afro-American population. After barely escaping lynching, the couple leaves New York and seeks shelter in the western wilderness, but Marie does not survive the hardships of travel and dies in Ludovic's arms. Meanwhile George has been killed while taking part in an Indian uprising against whites. Desperate and alone, Ludovic moves to the wilderness, where a couple of years later – we are now back to the “present”, which is eighteen years after the real publication of *Marie* – he meets the Traveller and tells him his story. His tale convinces him to sail back to his motherland, France, and “leave it no more”.<sup>8</sup>

Beaumont himself does not seem to have been fully satisfied of the narrative frame he chose for his work. As he points out in his Introduction: “[T]out en est grave, excepté la forme. Mon but principal n’a point été de faire un roman” (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 9). Nevertheless, if we look at *Marie*'s plot from a historical perspective, his decision seems to have been consistent – and maybe even pioneering. As a genre, the novel is particularly suitable to the observation of the intimate facets of social structure on a “non-normative” person (as Marie, a cultivated and independent mixed-race young woman, ought to be considered in the white and masculine western society of 1830).<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Beaumont's choice seems to anticipate the methodological insights of microhistory, which – as suggested by Lara Putnam – are particularly appropriate to investigate slavery, slave trade and the relevance of “actors or practices of African origin” in the “Atlantic World”.<sup>10</sup> In Putnam's definition:

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<sup>8</sup> “Rendu à sa chère patrie, il ne la quitta jamais” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 224).

<sup>9</sup> “[Marie] donne à lire l’histoire des États-Unis comme des histoires entrecroisées où les destins individuels se débattent avec la marche en avant de la nation” (COSSU-BEAUMONT 2014: 552). By contrast, Chignola has suggested that Beaumont chose a narrative form in order to counter-balance the emerging Afro-American “slave narratives”, therefore silencing the autonomous voices of subalterns (see CHIGNOLA 2011: 100). Chignola's essay – whose perspectives I do not entirely share – is nevertheless highly original and stimulating, as it seeks to place Beaumont's reflections on slavery at the very core of liberalism. In his view, in order to keep running, democracy and liberalism need to feed themselves by constantly struggling to assimilate external non-democratic surpluses. Abolitionism (and therefore the transformation of former slaves into salaried workers) falls into this scheme, as do colonialism and prison organization, which – as Chignola points out – are among the other fundamental research topics of Tocqueville and Beaumont.

<sup>10</sup> See PUTNAM 2006: 615.



Microhistory reduces the scale of observation, often to the level of personal encounters or individual life histories. It does so not in search of sympathetic "human faces" [...] but rather in order to challenge our understanding of the processes themselves, in the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved (Putnam 2006: 615).

However, Ludovic and Marie's sad tale does not comprise the whole body of *Marie ou de l'esclavage aux États-Unis*. Almost half of the work is composed of three "addendums": an analysis of slavery as a dispositive of power; a report concerning the "religious movement in the U.S."; and a diachronical study on the "état social" of Indigenous Americans. Scholars have been puzzled by this unusual structure (Coss-Beaumont 2014: 522), and have described Beaumont's work as "dual" (Cossu-Beaumont 2014: 522), "mosaic" (Schapira 2009: IX), "uneven" (Jardin 1973: 18), "strange" (Zimra 1976: 1009) and even "bastard" (Drescher 1968: 214). It has also been suggested that the addendums might represent an embryo of Tocqueville and Beaumont's planned "American" co-authored work (Cossu-Beaumont 2014: 553).

Marie's subheading (*De l'esclavage aux États-Unis*) has also puzzled scholars. As many have pointed out, slavery does not seem to be the core of Beaumont's work: Marie deals rather with racism in former slave states. Beaumont's choice would therefore be "misleading" (Schapira 2009: viii) or "catchy rather than descriptive" (Cossu-Beaumont 2014: 547).

Nevertheless, two reasons stand for the accuracy of Marie's full title. Firstly, in Beaumont's view, racism in the U.S. remains unintelligible without taking into account former slavery. Secondly, although it is placed among the addendums, Beaumont's refined analysis of slavery is one of the theoretical peaks of both his and Tocqueville's intellectual production.

I will therefore embrace the suggestion of Beaumont's title, and start my analysis from the issue of *esclavage*.

#### "A THINKING THING": SLAVERY, LAW, AND RESISTANCE

Tocqueville's view of slavery is mainly deducible from two texts: his "*Rapport [...] relative aux esclaves des colonies*", delivered to the *Chambre des députés* on 23 July 1839,<sup>11</sup> and chapter X of the second part of the first *De-*

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<sup>11</sup> On the political circumstances of his intervention (which concerned the bill on the abolition of slavery proposed by Antoin Destutt de Tracy) see COLDAGELLI 2005: 29-30. JARDIN (1984: 292) stresses that the role of *rapporteur* would have more naturally belonged to "l'auteur de Marie"; however, Beaumont was not available, as he did not succeed to get himself elected to the *Chambre* until December 1839.

*mocracie*, devoted to *Les trois races des États-Unis*.<sup>12</sup> Both show an economic and “tactical” (that is, non-axiological)<sup>13</sup> abolitionism, affirming the noxiousness of slavery on multiple levels.<sup>14</sup> Far from being either “natural”<sup>15</sup> (as in Aristotle’s view) or necessary (due to the “negroes” unique resistance to Southern hot climate),<sup>16</sup> slavery hurts the economy by devaluing work: the “*caractère entreprenante et énergique*” that people show in free States cannot be found in slave countries, as white people lazily spend their time hunting, chatting and resting. Moreover, slaves do everything they can to avoid efforts.

In the French Caribbean, things are even more urgent. In fact, slave emancipation in nearby English colonies has provided slaves with both an example and a nearby shelter.<sup>17</sup> Just like democracy in *Démocratie*’s “Introduction”, emancipation is therefore a “*révolution inévitable*”<sup>18</sup> which should be governed rather than debated, because its effects challenge the very foundation of social order.

Regarding these challenges, the *Démocratie* and the *Rapport* slightly diverge. Chapter X focuses on racial tensions which might follow emancipa-

<sup>12</sup> Full title: *Quelques considérations sur l'état actuel et l'avenir probable des trois races qui habitent le territoire des États-Unis*, TOCQUEVILLE 1990 [1835]: 246-310 (slavery is mainly discussed on pp. 262-278). As it was “added at the last moment” (Nolla in TOCQUEVILLE 1990: 246) this chapter could not be the object of the critical readings by neither Beaumont nor Tocqueville’s other usual counselors (his father, his brother Edouard, and Louis de Kergerolay). We therefore unluckily do not dispose of Beaumont’s remarks on these crucial pages. In a footnote Tocqueville referred to *Marie*’s addendums for further readings on slavery in the U.S (TOCQUEVILLE 2010: 262). Edward Nolla (in TOCQUEVILLE 1990: 246) cautiously suggests Beaumont might have both inspired and reviewed this chapter. However, this interesting hypothesis remains impossible to prove. On the other side, Tocqueville’s hand notes on *Marie*’s manuscript seem to mainly focus on stylistic items: see Nolla in TOCQUEVILLE 1990: xxxix.

<sup>13</sup> TOCQUEVILLE 1990 [1835]: 268.

<sup>14</sup> Tocqueville’s hostility to slavery was nonetheless unyielding. Tocqueville was an active members of the French “*Société française pour l’abolition de l’esclavage*”, as was Beaumont (who had been invited to discuss his *Marie* on 12 January 1835): see DRESCHER 1991, JENNINGS 2000: 48-75 and SCHMIDT 2005: 135-185. Schmidt’s work on the abolition of slavery has the virtue of ‘provincializing’ the “European abolitionism” by showing its contradictions as well as its strong delay compared to slaves’ own abolitionism, which was active on both a practical and an intellectual level almost two centuries before Europeans’ first anti-slavery movements took root. For an exhaustive bibliography on historiographical studies on slavery see DELPIANO 2009: 135-150.

<sup>15</sup> “On a quelquefois prétendu que l’esclavage des nègres avait ses fondements et sa justification dans la nature elle-même. [...] La commission n’a pas, Dieu merci, à réfuter ces fausses et odieuses doctrines. L’Europe les a depuis longtemps flétries” (TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 42).

<sup>16</sup> “Si l’esclavage a été aboli en Italie et en Espagne sans que les maîtres périssent, pour quoi n’en arriverait-il pas de même dans l’Union?” (TOCQUEVILLE 1990 [1835]: 271).

<sup>17</sup> TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 46.

<sup>18</sup> TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 47.



tion, and which – in Tocqueville’s view – seem even suitable to end in a devastating civil war between blacks and whites. Less dramatically (perhaps thanks to the positive precedent of Antigua),<sup>19</sup> the *Rapport* does not expect former slaves to revolt against landlords; instead, it identifies a more subtle risk: work refusal.<sup>20</sup>

An aristocrat in his instincts, Tocqueville sometimes seems to consider wage labor as something unnatural.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Caribbean plantation economy would collapse if it failed to turn slaves into “*ouvriers libres*”. In order to “*amener [le nègre] à des mœurs laborieuses*”,<sup>22</sup> French Government must therefore undertake a two-step anthropological project. First, it has to promptly take the place of the *maîtres* as depository of slaves’ “habit of obedience”<sup>23</sup> – a goal which could be achieved by stimulating their gratitude for emancipation.<sup>24</sup> It should then impose on former slaves a temporary but unlimited “*tutelle*” and use this period to transform their *mœurs*,<sup>25</sup> finally leading them to “*sentir les avantages du travail*”.<sup>26</sup>

Beaumont’s analysis of slavery has some points in common with Tocqueville’s. He shares the latter’s judgment concerning the economic disadvantage of slavery in the rising market society, and he is as concerned about the future coexistence of whites and free blacks in the Southern U.S. But unlike Tocqueville, Beaumont also takes account of slavery as something that is personally *experienced* by slaves. This shift in perspective leads him to display a richer and perhaps more insightful conception of slavery.

With regard to how slavery concretely works, Tocqueville mainly pinpointed two schemes. He considered slavery as an extra-legal condition:

<sup>19</sup> TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 62 and 67.

<sup>20</sup> “L’expérience [...] a prouvé que la difficulté n’était pas d’empêcher les affranchis de se révolter, ni de punir ou de prévenir leur crimes, mais de les plier à des habitudes laborieuses” (TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 63). On the social construction of salaried workers in Tocqueville’s colonial writings see LETTERIO 2007: 431-437.

<sup>21</sup> See for instance as regards to Native Americans: “Les hommes qui se sont une fois livrés à la vie oisive et aventureuse des chasseurs sentent un dégoût presque insurmontable pour les travaux constants et réguliers qu’exige la culture” (TOCQUEVILLE 1990 [1835]: 253).

<sup>22</sup> TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 56.

<sup>23</sup> “Habitudes de respect et d’obéissance” (TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 48). On “habit of obedience” as a political concept see RUDAN 2016: 39-54.

<sup>24</sup> “Durant le temps où la liberté déjà promise n’est pas encore entièrement donnée [...] l’action du pouvoir est facile et efficace. [L’esclave] ne voit pas encore dans le magistrat un maître, mais un guide et un libérateur” (TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 73).

<sup>25</sup> “L’Etat [...] peut leur imposer les conditions qu’il juge indispensables et leur faire subir les épreuves nécessaires avant d’achever de les livrer à eux-mêmes. Il est libre de prendre, suivant les cas, toutes les mesures qui doivent répandre l’instruction parmi eux, y régler les mœurs, y favoriser efficacement le mariage” (TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 76).

<sup>26</sup> TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 76.

states simply had to keep to the side and let slave owners impose their complete arbitrary will.<sup>27</sup> And, on a psychological level, he affirmed that slave relation completely colonized and annihilated the slave's soul, modeling his deepest instincts and – even more importantly – leading him to internalize his master's worldview, which of course implied slaves' natural minority.<sup>28</sup>

On both respects, Beaumont distances himself from Tocqueville. Firstly, he rejects the idea of slavery as a negative condition (that is, as something that flourishes within legal voids) and rather stresses its pronounced *positive* nature:

Il semble que rien ne soit plus facile que de définir la condition de l'esclave. Au lieu d'énumérer les droits dont il jouit, ne suffit-il pas de dire qu'il n'en possède aucun? [...] Le sujet n'est cependant pas aussi simple [...]: le législateur a beaucoup de dispositions à prendre pour créer des esclaves, c'est-à-dire pour [...] substituer à leur nature perfectible un état qui les dégrade et tienne incessamment enchaînés un corps et une âme destinés à la liberté (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 226).<sup>29</sup>

By drawing attention to the painstaking efforts that the “*législateur*” has to undertake in order to turn people into slaves, Beaumont anticipates Michel Foucault's conception of domination as a productive, rather than oppressive, “dispositive”.<sup>30</sup> Allowing masters to dispose of slaves at their own will is not sufficient, Beaumont observes: in order to maintain slavery the State also must work hard on many levels. For instance, it has to prevent masters from teaching their slaves how to read and write.<sup>31</sup> Catching fugitives also requires all of its attention (and none of its mercy: death penalty awaits both the slave who flees and the people who facilitate his flight).<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, whenever an unruly slave is sentenced to death, the State must use public funds to refund his/her master.

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<sup>27</sup> “[L]e droit commun d'une société à esclaves n'est pas en tout semblable au nôtre [...]. [L]e pouvoir social s'y mêlait de beaucoup moins d'affaires et se préoccupait d'infiniment moins de soins que dans les contrées où l'esclavage est inconnu” (TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 49).

<sup>28</sup> “On lui a dit dès sa naissance que sa race est naturellement inférieure à celle des blancs, et il n'est pas éloigné de le croire, il a donc honte de lui-même” (TOCQUEVILLE 1990 [1835]: 248). The phenomenon of members of subaltern groups developing an “outgroup favoritism” for their own oppressors has been recently highlighted by sociologists advocating “System Justification Theory”: see JOST, BANAJI and NOSEK 2004.

<sup>29</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 226.

<sup>30</sup> See FOUCAULT 2004: 66-70.

<sup>31</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 228.

<sup>32</sup> “La Caroline du Sud porte un châtiment terrible tout à la fois contre l'esclave qui a fui et contre toute personne qui l'a aidé dans son évasion: en pareil cas, c'est toujours la peine de mort qu'elle prononce” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 230). While reading this page, one cannot help thinking of the harsh punishment faced today by those charged with helping migrants to cross the border between France and Italy.

As Beaumont points out, the "peculiar institution" could not be maintained without all these efforts: slavery is, in fact, a completely unnatural condition for human beings. Implicitly reversing La Boétie's statement on recalcitrant animals and human "voluntary serfs",<sup>33</sup> Beaumont puts on the lips of George (Marie's brother) a cry of dignity and hope:

Le plus fin parmi les animaux chérit la main cruelle qui le frappe, et se réjouit de sa servitude... Le plus stupide parmi les hommes, ce nègre abruti, quand il est enchaîné comme une bête fauve, est libre par la pensée [...]: son corps seul obéit; son âme se révolte (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 69).

Humans' untameableness grounds Beaumont's second original idea: unlike the *Démocratie*, Marie shows slaves as partly resistant to their masters' attempts to annihilate their spirit. As is the case for Cyrill L. James's Antillean slaves (who spend their nights singing about their desire to slaughter their owners) and Ranajit Guha's revolting peasants (see Guha 1983), Beaumont's "subalterns" succeed in preserving a modicum of mental autonomy.<sup>34</sup>

This endurance is due in part to their love of freedom.<sup>35</sup> But more importantly, it depends on an interesting ontological contradiction affecting slavery itself. From one perspective, slavery is founded on the annihilation of slaves' humanity: slaves not only have no legal right (which remains in the "domain des fictions"<sup>36</sup> and is therefore easily achieved by the State) but are also deprived of basic anthropological instincts such as loving their partners, taking care of their children, gradually improving their knowledge and capacities and – of course – running for their freedom.<sup>37</sup> But on

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<sup>33</sup> "Mesmes les bœufs soubz le pois du joug geignent. Et les oiseaux dans la cage se pleignent; [...] puis que les bestes qui ancore sont faites pour le service de l'homme, ne se peuvent accoustumer a servir, qu'avec protestation d'un desir contraire: quel mal encontre a esté cela, qui a peu tant denaturer l'homme, seul né de vrai pour vivre franchement; et lui faire perdre la souvenance de son premier estre, et le desir de le reprendre" (LA BOÉTIE 1976 [1548]: 121-122).

<sup>34</sup> "[O]ne does not need education or encouragement to cherish a dream of freedom. At their midnight celebrations of Voodoo, their African cult, they danced and sang, usually this favourite song: 'Eh! Eh! Bomba! Heu! Heu! Canga, bafio té! Canga, mouné de lé! Canga, do ki la! Canga, li!' 'We swear to destroy the whites and all that they possess; let us die rather than fail to keep this vow'" (JAMES 1989 [1963]: 18). A real taboo for French nineteenth-century political authors, the 1791 *Révolution haïtienne* is hardly mentioned by Tocqueville and Beaumont. In one of these sporadic hints, Tocqueville vaguely but significantly alludes to "beaucoup de personnes, préoccupées par des Souvenirs de Saint-Domingue": see TOCQUEVILLE 1962 [1839]: 58.

<sup>35</sup> "Le sentiment le plus naturel à l'homme et le plus inviolable, l'amour de la liberté" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 230).

<sup>36</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 228.

<sup>37</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 228.

the other hand, this process finds an intrinsic limit in the very goal of slavery itself, which is to employ slaves in *human* activities. As Beaumont cleverly puts it:

Or, le maître, après avoir lié les membres de son esclave, est obligé de les délier, pour que celui-ci travaille; tout en l'abrutissant, il a besoin de conserver un peu de l'intelligence du nègre, car c'est cette intelligence qui fait son prix; [...] quoiqu'il ait déclaré le nègre une chose matérielle, il entretient avec lui des rapports personnels qui sont l'objet même de la servitude (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 231).

In the novel, slavery's paradoxical nature is anticipated by a threatening statement pronounced by George: "Il est vrai que, d'après vos lois, un nègre [...] c'est une chose... oui, mais vous verrez que c'est *une chose pensante*".<sup>38</sup> At a first read, in this definition of the slave as "a thinking thing" one might see nothing but an implicit reference to Pascal's aphorism of man as "a thinking reed": a keen confrontation with slave theory as exposed in the "addendums" rather suggests to see it as a motto synthesizing the ontological contradiction of slavery as a legal dispositive.

#### "WHITER THAN A LILY": RACE AND RACISM IN THE U.S.

Just as that of slavery, the analysis of racism finds a common ground in the *Démocratie* and in *Marie*. Both texts detect a connection between democracy and hate for non-white people in the U.S. In fact, egalitarianism and racism are described by both Tocqueville and Beaumont not as contradictory principles but as twin outputs of a single phenomenon: radical modernity as specifically experienced in North America.

Speaking in Tocqueville's terms, democracy as an "*état social*" sociologically replaces traditional societies of the "Old Regime", which were based on a rigid hierarchic separation between different social groups. Oppressive as it was, this separation used to guarantee everybody a sort of ontological serenity: everybody knew what their place in the world was, and they were not expected to struggle for it. Such self-confidence helped people from different classes to interact: in talking with a peasant, a nobleman did not fear to see his status compromised, while a peasant had no reason to envy the nobleman for his position – just as he did not envy eagles for their wings.

Modernity crushes old structures, and imposes what Tocqueville names "imaginary equality".<sup>39</sup> From then on, everybody will be suppos-

<sup>38</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 68 (my italic).

<sup>39</sup> See COLANGELO 2008.

edly "equal" with everybody else: nothing but their will, talent and/or luck will prevent them from reaching any position on the social and economic ladder. The collapse of the old structures liberates individuals from their traditional boundaries; but at the same time it burdens them with continuous anxiety: they might now lose their social status or fail in achieving the one they pursue. As a result, envy and mistrust spread in parallel with intimacy and peer-to-peer cooperation. As Marcel Gauchet puts it:

That which separates men, and radically so, is also what assures them their common setting, their co-belonging within a coherent general framework. Hence those forms of collective cohesion, so paradoxical from our standpoint, in which the establishment of essential divisions between men and the fact that they consider one another as strangers are nonetheless paired with strong and intense social bonds between these "strangers". [...] In such a case, it is clear that familiarity is quite opposed to the felling of intimate closeness or sameness. It is born, rather, as the inverse reaction to the radicality of difference. And as a result, it is precisely at the moment the peaceful certitude of the possibility of interacting with a wholly other – or rather within an intrinsically other – begins to subside that familiarity is undone. The spectacle of difference becomes wholly intolerable and demands to be eradicated.<sup>40</sup>

This is exactly what happened in the U.S. Modernity and equality struck particularly hard in North America due to the class affinity of most settlers and the lack of traditional aristocracies. In this frame of sudden universal resemblance, black slaves soon acquired for white people the reassuring role of total-otherness.<sup>41</sup> Racial difference – just as Beaumont had suggested in his 1831 letter from Baltimore – became a "nobless", fulfilling "a desire for structured order that offsets (fear of) democracy's flux".<sup>42</sup>

This is why, as explained by both Beaumont and Tocqueville, racism worsens as emancipation moves forward;<sup>43</sup> preserving blackness as radical otherness is perceived (by white North Americans) as a critical need. Any progress in racial equalization is therefore expected to *necessarily* engender

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<sup>40</sup> GAUCHET 2006 [1980]: 203-204 (revised transl).

<sup>41</sup> See JANARA 2004.

<sup>42</sup> JANARA 2004: 779.

<sup>43</sup> See Beaumont: "Il n'est pas rare, dans le Sud, de voir les blancs bienveillants envers les nègres. Comme la distance qui les sépare est immense et non contestée, les Américains libres ne craignent pas, en s'approchant de l'esclave, de l'élever à leur niveau ou de descendre au sien. Dans le Nord, au contraire, où l'égalité est proclamée, les blancs se tiennent éloignés des nègres" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 84). And Tocqueville: "L'abolition de l'esclavage au Sud fera croître la répugnance que la population blanche y éprouve pour les noirs. [...] Les hommes blancs du Nord s'éloignent des nègres avec d'autant plus de soin que le législateur marque moins la séparation légale qui doit exister entre eux" (TOCQUEVILLE 1990 [1835]: 274).

a reaction equal in magnitude and opposite in direction. This sort of “law of racism” is well synthetized, in *Marie*, by a citizen praising the New York pogrom:

Oh!, dit celui-ci, les amalgamistes [= whites fighting for Afroamericans’ rights] font tout le mal; ils veulent que les nègres soient les égaux des blancs; les blancs sont bien forcés de se révolter (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 145).

Hence, for both Beaumont and Tocqueville, racism is the result of a democratic need for distinction. However, Beaumont also develops a different (and perhaps deeper) analytical level. In order to understand it, we must first consider Tocqueville’s famous statements about racism and skin pigmentation:

Si l’inégalité créée seulement par la loi [in France] est si difficile à déraciner, comment détruire celle qui [in the U.S.] semble, en outre, avoir ses fondements immuables dans la nature elle-même? [...] Je désespère de voir disparaître une aristocratie fondée sur des signes visibles et impérissables (Tocqueville 1990 [1835]: 264).

In Tocqueville’s view, Afro-Americans’ skin color condemns them to be *seen* as inferiors long after their legal emancipation: their blackness adds to their merging an obstacle that, for instance, Roman *liberti* didn’t have to face. Now, regarding Beaumont and Tocqueville supposed harmony, this argument allows us to see the elephant in the room: Beaumont’s character Marie, on whose “blackness” all the plot rotates around, is nonetheless described as “whiter than a lily”.<sup>44</sup> Why?

Beyond narrative gimmicks, Beaumont’s choice hints at his most interesting insight about racism: performativity of social prejudice. Far from being a natural given, “whiteness” and “blackness” are floating social constructs. And yet, “imperceptible” (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 63) as it is (at least for a European), Marie’s blackness is not a mere “idea”: it tangibly shapes her appearance. Fear of disclosure and the internalization of race prejudice affect her self-confidence, modeling her behavior and attitudes.<sup>45</sup> Her invisible “stain” can therefore be “guessed” by her compatriots, as her blackness leaves the sphere of opinion and turns into visible flesh and blood.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Comment? *de couleur!* Elle est plus blanche qu’un lis” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 4, Beaumont’s italics).

<sup>45</sup> For example: “[P]endant que parlait Nelson, Marie, faible femme, roseau dévoué aux orages du cœur, était agitée de mille secousses: [...] et, avec l’innocence dans le cœur, elle portait sur son front la rougeur d’une coupable” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 75).

<sup>46</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 92. See also the scene at the Almshouse: here the “furieuse”



This is why Americans blame Ludovic – who understandably points out Marie’s obvious whiteness – for his European misleading prejudices:<sup>47</sup> in a certain sense, *his* perception of Marie, not theirs, is mistaken. Unlike Tocqueville, Beaumont puts blackness and racism in the correct order: social prejudice produces (rather than depending on) race difference, which nonetheless than becomes something tangible, real.<sup>48</sup>

In a more general sense, Marie’s duality (her being at the same time “white” and “black” depending on the watcher’s perspective) reflects the novel’s fundamental binary theoretical structure. *Marie*’s backbone is, in fact, its epistemic dialectic between two levels of knowledge: an instinctive one, mostly rooted in people’s traditions; and a more intellectual and logical one. Beaumont’s analysis of racism intersects this binary structure. And, by doing so, it unfolds – as I am going to claim – *Marie*’s long-neglected specific political stance.

#### A MONARCHIC PASCALIAN: BEAUMONT’S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Despite critics’ silence on this matter, Beaumont’s work is dominated by three couples of concepts: heart [*cœur*] / intellect [*raison*]; customs [*mœurs*] / laws [*lois*]; female / male.<sup>49</sup> Contrastive use of the term *cœur* occurs fourteen times in the narrative part alone: eight times vs “*raison*”, twice vs “*tête*”, twice vs “*esprit*”, once vs “*intelligence*” and once vs “*genie*”. *Mœurs* appears in a binomial eleven times (eight times vs “*lois*” and three vs “*institutions*”). Gender analyses are countless.

Notwithstanding its opposition to “reason”, the term “*cœur*” does not refer to some irrational principle. In line with Pascal’s philosophy, it rather stands for a non-logic form of knowledge.<sup>50</sup> “Heart” and “reason” apprehend the word in different ways, both epistemically valid. Balance between them is desirable, though not always possible: sometimes people can only

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Afro-American sectioned patient, who violently refuses any contact with white staff, instinctively shows affection for Marie (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 49).

<sup>47</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 78 and 211. Ludovic himself, as Marie’s tragic death is approaching, is said to become “blind”: see BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 185.

<sup>48</sup> See PAINTER 2008. The reference to Beaumont’s character in Painter’s article (“Was Marie White?”) works as a symbol of the fluctuations and ambiguities in the social determination of the “white race” throughout U.S. history.

<sup>49</sup> Among the few references to this topics see NACCI 2011 and CLIGNET 2001: 209 (whose brilliant insight I discuss *infra*, footnote 59).

<sup>50</sup> For a hint of the influence of Pascal’s most famous couple of concepts on Tocqueville’s philosophy see DIEZ DEL CORRAL 1989: 231-234 (paragraph “*Raison y coeur en Pascal*”).

choose which principle to follow.<sup>51</sup> Religion in the U.S. serves as an example: Protestantism fulfills believers' intellectual needs, while Catholicism takes better care of their "heart".<sup>52</sup>

In order to move from the individual to the political level, Beaumont crosses Pascal's pair *cœur/raison* with one traditionally provided by Montesquieu: *mœurs/lois*.<sup>53</sup> In the frame of the *Ésprit de loi*, as summarized by Melvin Richter, *mœurs* are conceived as "usages evolved by the nation as a whole over time" and "nonlegal internalized restraints established by costume", in opposition to "the institutions established by the specific provisions of a lawgiver [the "lois"]" (Richter 1977: 107-108). *Mœurs* therefore include instincts, social norms and common sense, and they impact on institutions by defining a Govern's room for maneuver.

Beaumont and Tocqueville employ Montesquieu's dyad in significantly different ways. As Giulia Oskian has convincingly pointed out, Tocqueville praises U.S. institutional structure for fostering a virtuous cycle.<sup>54</sup> According to Tocqueville, American *mœurs* are incarnated in the Constitution, which limits and directs politicians' actions, while at the same time being amendable as common sense evolves. On the other hand, political institutions employ public education, jury and political participation to gradually encourage a change in the *mœurs*, leading people to become more and more adept at collectively taking charge of their political freedom. *Mœurs* and *lois* thus enhance each other, slowly strengthening and expanding U.S. democracy.

<sup>51</sup> See Nelson's advice to Ludovic: "Mon ami [...], votre cœur généreux vous égare. Ma raison viendra au secours de la vôtre" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 78-78). Even *Marie's* supposed Anti-Americanism (see for instance L. GUELLEC 2011: 79) should be interpreted in a milder way in light of the *cœur / raison* scheme. As a matter of fact, Ludovic blames the U.S. for a lack of balance between the two principles rather than a lack of qualities tout court: "Ah!, pourquoi les Américains n'ont-ils pas autant de cœur que de tête?" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 119); "le langage du protestant et celui du catholique diffèrent, comme la raison diffère du cœur" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 210).

<sup>52</sup> "Votre religion me semble digne d'un être intelligent et libre: cependant l'homme est aussi un être sensible, qui a besoin d'aimer, et ce culte n'a point touché mon cœur" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 53).

<sup>53</sup> It should be remarked that Pascal and Montesquieu also represent two of the three "tutelary deities" Tocqueville lists in his famous letter to Luis de Kergorlay: "I pass a short portion of every day with three men, Pascal, Montesquieu and Rousseau: I miss the presence of a fourth, and that is you" (TOCQUEVILLE 1977: 481).

<sup>54</sup> See OSKIAN 2014: 70-71 and 85-105. Despite being sometimes disconcerting, Tocqueville's "dialectique" (ANTOINE 2003: 257-282) or "interréaction" (BENOÎT 2004) represent the key of his political and social view. As Antoine pointed out, "idées et faits s'engendrent mutuellement suivant une dialectique perpétuellement en travail dans l'histoire, où les idées sont logiquement antérieures, mais ne trouvent leur réalité [...] qu'au terme d'un long parcours d'incarnation" (ANTOINE 2003: 249; her interpretation seems to implicitly recall Walter Benjamin's concept of "constellation" as expressed in BENJAMIN: 1963). On Tocqueville's democracy as a 'virtuous circle' also see MASTROPAOLO 2002.

Beaumont shares neither his friend's dialectical approach nor his optimism. *Marie* traces a more rigid scheme: *mœurs* and *lois* (just like "heart" and "reason") run on different tracks, and separately affect the pace of a society – the latter acting as in an object pushed by two different forces. Optimum institutional structure would therefore provide mutual independence for *mœurs* and *lois*. Contamination would break social balance, leading either merciless reason (*raison d'État*) or unfettered popular passions to rule.

Unfortunately, North America offers two emblematic examples of corruption in the *mœurs/lois* balance. A patent one is represented by indigenous tribes. In Beaumont's view (which echoes one of the most heated debates in modern political philosophy),<sup>55</sup> North American indigenous groups mostly lack any kind of political governance. Social order is therefore guaranteed by *mœurs* alone:

On ne connaissait point parmi [les peuplades de l'Amérique du Nord] ce que nous appelons la loi. Non seulement elles n'avaient point de législation écrite, mais les rapports des hommes entre eux n'y étaient soumis à aucune règle uniforme et stable, émanée de la volonté législative de la société. Ces sauvages n'étaient pourtant point aussi barbares qu'on le pourrait croire. Lorsque la souveraineté nationale ne s'exprime pas par les lois, elle s'exerce indirectement par les mœurs. Quand les mœurs sont bien établies, on voit se former une sorte de civilisation au milieu de la barbarie[.] (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 301).

The lack of political constraints implies neither anarchy nor social collapse: well established *mœurs* can make up for them. Nevertheless, not having the *lois*, society is deprived of a very important shelter. For North American indigenous people this weakness emerged dramatically as soon as they made contact with Europeans. "White" people's mix of slyness, military power, richness and seductive lifestyle quickly overturned the Natives' *mœurs*.<sup>56</sup> Since they did not have at their disposal a strong and independent political power which might be able to counterbalance these social upheavals, Indigenous people found themselves adrift. Finally they turned from fierce and fearsome hunters into atomized individuals experiencing a state of dependence, misery, starvation and cultural eradication.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Hobbes and Gottfried W. Leibniz were the most prominent voices, respectively denying and asserting the existence of a civil organization among native tribes: see LANDUCCI 2014 [1972].

<sup>56</sup> "Les blancs [...] ont eu le pouvoir de changer leurs coutumes, d'altérer leurs mœurs et de bouleverser leur état politique tout entier" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 292); "C'est en changeant les opinions en altérant les coutumes et en modifiant les mœurs, que les Européens ont produit la révolution dont je parle [= Indigenous people's indirect subjugation]" (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 324).

<sup>57</sup> "A partir de l'arrivée des blancs, l'Indien contracte des goûts nouveaux. [...] Il tombe

Albeit in a less tragic way, the U.S. also feature a similar imbalance between *mœurs* and *lois*. Legislative and executive power is conferred to elected officials whose position depends on popular approval. The independence of the political sphere is therefore highly weakened, as representatives tend to flatter – instead of balancing – people’s passions. Politics becomes the lackey of popular instincts,<sup>58</sup> which in turn release the officials from any formal restrictions:

Dans une république, les fonctionnaires ont moins de pouvoir défini que dans les gouvernements monarchiques et plus d’autorité discrétionnaire. Le peuple [...] concède peu à ses agents, mais il leur laisse faire beaucoup quand il les voit agir dans le sens de ses passions. [...] Chez nous, on suit la loi; en Amérique, l’opinion (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 104).

This institutional balance is reflected in American racism. Since prejudice against African-Americans lies at the core of American usage, no elected authority dares to oppose it.<sup>59</sup> Race segregation in places of worship is particularly telling. Since they have been chosen by the community of devotees (which can always remove them), Protestant ministers indulge its *mœurs* by fostering separation between “blacks” and “whites”. By contrast, Catholic priests – who are directly appointed by Rome – enjoy a more consistent degree of independence and can therefore stand for equality: “chef d’une assemblée dont il ne dépend pas, [le prêtre] s’inquiète peu de lui déplaire en blamant ses erreurs et ses vices” (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 89.).

This comparison between (elected) ministers and (picked) priests leads Beaumont to develop a more general reflection, which entails his own view of the “Tyranny of the majority”:

Je fus à cette occasion frappé d’une triste vérité: c’est que l’opinion publique, si bienfaisante quand elle protège, est lorsqu’elle persécute, le plus cruel de tous

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dans la dépendance des Européens et devient leur tributaire. [...] Peu à peu les ressources du sauvage diminuent; ses besoins augmentent. Des misères inconnues à ses pères l’assiègent alors de toutes parts: pour s’y soustraire, il fuit ou meurt” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 321).

<sup>58</sup> See for instance: “Ce peuple, faiseur de lois, placé en face de sauvages ignorants, leur livre une guerre de procureur: et, comme pour couvrir son iniquité d’un simulacre de justice, les expulse des lieux par acte en bonne forme” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 96).

<sup>59</sup> Notwithstanding its sharpness, we should therefore reverse Clignet’s Pascalian insight: “Beaumont définit son travail comme consistant à identifier la partie du tissu social américain où le conflit entre la rationalité et les raisons du coeur que la raison ne connaît pas se manifestent avec le maximum d’intensité. Il s’agit, on le sait, des relations raciales” (CLIGNET 2001: 209). As a matter of fact, far from being in “conflict”, *raison* and *cœur* perfectly converge in supporting U.S. racism, which is therefore virtually impossible to eradicate. As Ludovic soon understands, U.S. racism pertains to both opinion and passion: “Quelle est donc, chez un peuple exempt de préjugés et de passions, l’origine de cette fausse opinion [...] et de cette haine impitoyable [?]” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 66).

les tyrans. Cette opinion publique, toute puissante aux États-Unis, veut l’oppression d’une race détestée, et rien n’entrave sa haine. En générale, il appartient à la sagesse des législateurs de corriger les mœurs par les lois, qui sont elles-mêmes corrigées par les mœurs. Cette puissance modératrice n’existe point dans le gouvernement américain. Le peuple qui hait les nègres est celui qui fait les lois; c’est lui qui nomme ses magistrats, et, pour lui être agréable, tout fonctionnaire doit s’associer à ses passions. La souveraineté populaire est irrésistible dans ses impulsions; [...]. C’est donc le peuple avec ses passions qui gouverne; la race noire subit en Amérique la souveraineté de la haine et du mépris (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 90).

By blaming popular sovereignty *tout court* for Afro-American oppression, *Marie* seems to look at the “Tyranny of the majority” from a more conservative point of view than the *Démocratie*. Balance between *mœurs* and *lois* can only be pledged by the “moderation” produced by a non-elected “legislator” taking part to political power, while – as noticed by Welch – “in America citizens actually were the legislators and could not be expected to impose corrective legislation on themselves” (Welch 2010: 208) – an assumption which seems to imply an endorsement for constitutional monarchy as the ideal form of government. Only a monarch, being (reasonably) sheltered from people’s emotionality, can counterbalance popular opinion and take charge of the defense of despised, oppressed minorities. As Welch puts it: “Beaumont expected no transformation in American *mœurs*”.

While considerably forward-thinking on a social level, Beaumont’s liberalism then proves to be less progressive than Tocqueville’s on a strictly political ground. *Marie* shows no trace of Alexis’s trust in the empowering and pedagogic effect of political participation: the only ‘popular deliberation’ mentioned (unless one counts the New York’s riot against the Afro-American population, too) is the one establishing *Marie*’s belonging to the “black” race.<sup>60</sup> And while describing, in the addendums, the “democratic” people of Iroquois, Beaumont suggests popular sovereignty to be only bearable by small and very simple societies.<sup>61</sup> Unlike

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<sup>60</sup> “L’opinion publique fut tout en émoi; on fit une sorte d’enquête; les anciens du pays furent consultés, et il fut reconnu qu’un siècle auparavant, la famille de Thérèse Spencer avait été souillée par une goutte de sang noir” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 63). Another indirect clue to Beaumont’s skepticism on social and political principles marked by ‘chaos’ might be spotted in the complete absence of a positive judgment of *metisage*, which on the contrary plays a central role in Tocqueville’s reflection on the coexistence of races. On ‘chaos’ as a founding principle for a lively social and political life see SENNETT 2018.

<sup>61</sup> “La condition de ce peuple le met à l’abri des factions qui ne sont que trop ordinaires dans les gouvernements populaires. Comment un homme formerait-il un parti, puisqu’il n’a ni honneurs, ni richesses, ni autorité à accorder?” (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 311). Even more significantly, after comparing their democratic confederation with Natchez’s “despotic and theocratic” organization in the South, Beaumont shows how the latter proved to be the most

the *Démocratie*'s,<sup>62</sup> *Marie*'s political theory is basically monarchic: no room seems to be left for the establishment of a moderate, instructive and virtuous political democracy.<sup>63</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST ANTE LITTERAM?

*Marie*'s individual (*cœur/raison*) and political (*mœurs/lois*) pairs intersect the novel's third fundamental bipartition: the "female" / "male" dyad. In this regard, a table can be easily sketched. The left column lists *cœur*, *mœurs* and femininity; the right one *raison*, *lois* and masculinity.

In her *L'impensé de la démocratie*, Agnes Antoine has tracked down a feminine principle hunting Tocqueville's *Démocratie en Amérique* (Antoine 2003: 302-303 and 350). Antoine optimistically describes it a possible source of positive, generative and non-dominating social and political bonds. Something similar can be easily located in Beaumont's *Marie*, in which femininity is linked to a non-hierarchical form of coexistence:

[L]es femmes nous sont supérieures dans l'exercice de la charité. Leur bienfait n'est jamais à charge, parce que, avec elles, comme c'est le cœur qui donne, c'est aussi le cœur qui reçoit. Au contraire, l'humanité des hommes leur vient presque toujours de la tête. Ce principe de la bienfaisance la rend pesante aux malheureux; en effet, si la raison veut que le riche soit secourable au pauvre, elle enseigne aussi que l'obligé est au-dessous du bienfaiteur, comme le pauvre est au-dessous du riche (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 47-48).

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resilient model to whites' oppression due to enlightened chiefs' civilizing influence on their subjects (BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 307 and 323).

<sup>62</sup> See for instance Matteucci: "According to Tocqueville, Rousseau's utopian idea of direct democracy and the "small state" must also be partly realized in a mass society; otherwise, not only can there be no democracy, but also no liberty. How? [...] Through ample local liberties or autonomies, which may give men both a taste for and experience of taking part in the management of shared matters" (MATTEUCCI 1990: 50-51, my transl.). On the *Démocratie*'s medley of liberalism, republicanism and "civic humanism" see COUTANT 2007. On Tocqueville's view of despotism see MÉLONIO 1997. On Tocqueville's political views see TESINI 1997.

<sup>63</sup> *Marie*'s pessimism was to be echoed in Beaumont's more mature *L'Irlande*: "Concernant l'anomalie irlandaise, où se mêlaient esclavage, misère et démocratie, donnant ainsi naissance à la plus invraisemblable des configurations, l'auteur de *Marie* [...] ne manquera pas de constater que les institutions politiques irlandaises avaient fini par ressembler à celles des noirs d'Amérique" (CERETTA 2010: 150). Ceretta nevertheless attributes to *L'Irlande* a sincere democratic inspiration which seems to clash with *Marie*'s stances: "la démocratie ne se résolvait pas dans un problème de légitimité du pouvoir [...] mais à travers la création et la sauvegarde d'institutions capables d'assurer la liberté" (CERETTA 2010: 153). A comparison between the political thought of *Marie* and that of *L'Irlande* cannot be undertaken here, but would undoubtedly be valuable.



Of course, Beaumont's cautious political view does not endorse the prevailing one of a non-hierarchical principle, as Antoine suggests for Tocqueville: Beaumont rather wishes, at best, for a good balance between the two. At any rate, if we move from political theory to gender analysis, *Marie's* insights get more stimulating. In fact, while naming the two principles after a traditional binary scheme (female = passions, intuition, generosity; male = intellect, power, severity), Beaumont seems to acknowledge the fluidity of their gender distribution in concrete social groups. As focusing on the huge differences between French and American women due to their different education, Beaumont recognizes – albeit unwillingly – the relativity of traditional female/male distinctions:

Cette froideur des sens, cet empire de la tête, *ces habitudes mâles chez les femmes*, peuvent trouver grâce devant la raison; mais elles ne contentent point le cœur (Beaumont 1840 [1835]: 18 (my italics).

The link between education and gender difference is not examined in depth; it is, nevertheless, consistent with *Marie's* theoretical system, which on many points seems to anticipate the insights of social constructivism. Apart from race belonging (which I have discussed above), this tendency emerges in *Marie's* remarks on insanity.

In one of the first scenes of the novel, Ludovic secretly follows Marie in her benevolent visit to the "Almshouse", a charity refuge hosting people with mental illnesses. Three of the inmates are described. One is a convicted murderer who has been driven mad by solitary confinement in prison. Another is a young woman whose religious fervor has led her to mental illness. The third is an Afro-American former slave who has paranoid fears engendered by a slave trader, who tortured him before the sale.<sup>64</sup> It can be seen that in all three cases insanity is attributed to social causes, and more precisely to the influence of three oppressive "total institutions": prison, slavery, and religious communities.

Beaumont's acuity in these respects had probably been nourished by his research experience in American prisons. From his and Tocqueville's *Système pénitentiaire*, *Marie* inherits a tendency to attribute a key role to learned habits<sup>65</sup> as embedded in a social context ("le joug de l'habitude, chose si méprisable et si puissante")<sup>66</sup> in affecting both individuals' and peoples' development.

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<sup>64</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 48-49.

<sup>65</sup> See PERROT 1984: 36.

<sup>66</sup> BEAUMONT 1840 [1835]: 221.

And yet, the prison investigation's most vivid legacy can be probably traced on an emotive level.<sup>67</sup> Days spent among desperate inmates in Sing Sing, Auburn, Philadelphia and a dozen smaller institutes are reflected in the mixture of empathy, pessimism, rage (and perhaps guilty conscience) that Beaumont shows when faced with the condition of subalterns in U.S. society.

The unique perspectival shift that Beaumont experienced in the U.S. might have helped him – a French aristocrat reluctantly thrown into a democratic age – to develop “a very contemporary tension around the witnessing of evil” (Welch 2010: 216) and consequently an original political thought, marked by a medley of monarchism and social progressivism. In light of this evidence, the “sibling relationship” between Tocqueville's 1835 “*liberalisme d'espèce nouvelle*” and Beaumont's early social and political thought should probably be reconsidered. Rather than being at the same time “frères jumeaux” and “frères ennemis” (Clignet 2001), *Marie* and the first *Démocratie* seem to be best described as dizygotic twins, whose connections and discords alike seem worthy of wider and deeper analysis.

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<sup>67</sup> See Beaumont's retrospective account of his and Alexis's encounters with American prisoners: BEAUMONT 1866: 20-21.

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