

NELE SAWALLISCH

Trudel's Legacies: For a Critical Understanding of Slavery in Quebec

Zusammenfassung

Knapp 50 Jahre nach dem Erscheinen von Marcel Trudels einflussreicher Studie L'Esclavage au Canada français (1960) ist seit 2013 eine englische Übersetzung unter dem Titel Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage (Übers. George Tombs) verfügbar. Dieses Ereignis bringt wider Erwarten nicht das lange Zeit vernachlässigte Thema der Sklaverei auf kanadischem Boden wieder in den Vordergrund, sondern vor allem ein über Jahrzehnte gefestigtes Bild von Trudel als Nationalhistoriker. Als Pionier und Fokalpersönlichkeit auf dem Gebiet der Geschichte Neufrankreichs und der Sklaverei gilt Trudel auch heute, sowohl in akademischen als auch populären Diskursen, als unumstößliche Autorität. Dies hat zu einer nahezu unreflektierten Übernahme seiner Thesen und Interpretationen geführt, die auch jetzt einer kritischen Rezeption im Wege steht. Darüber hinaus birgt eine solche Übernahme die Gefahr der Verharmlosung der Sklaverei im frühen Neufrankreich und stellt somit ein beständiges Hindernis im Rahmen der Revision eines zentralen Kapitels kanadischer Geschichte dar.

Abstract

Roughly 50 years after Marcel Trudel's seminal study L'Esclavage au Canada français from 1960, an English translation is now available, entitled Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage (2013, transl. George Tombs). Its recent release has not, however, sparked a profound discussion about slavery on Canadian soil, but has emphasized, on the contrary, Trudel's towering image as national historian in Quebec. Trudel, whose book came as pioneering scholarship at the time, is still viewed as the dominant authority regarding the histories of New France and slavery. A multi-faceted image of Trudel has solidified over the past decades and affects the reception of his work still today. In fact, his theses and interpretations on slavery have been accepted almost uncritically in both academic as well as popular discourses. However, avoiding a critical discussion of Trudel holds the danger of romanticizing slavery in New France and thus, represents a serious obstacle in the process of revising a crucial chapter of Canadian history.

Résumé

À peu près une cinquantaine d'années après la publication de l'œuvre de Marcel Trudel *L'Esclavage au Canada français (1960)*, sa traduction en anglais est dorénavant disponible sous le titre *Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage (2013, trad. George Tombs)*. Au lieu d'inspirer une discussion sur le fait de l'esclavage sur le sol canadien, cette traduction a plutôt fait resurgir l'image importante de Trudel en tant qu'historien national. Avec son livre en 1960, Trudel s'était établi comme autorité pionnière sur le terrain de l'histoire de la Nouvelle France ainsi que de l'esclavage, et c'est cette réputation qui domine toujours la réception de son œuvre aujourd'hui. En effet, ses thèses et ses interprétations portant sur l'esclavage ont été adoptées de façon peu critique par les discours académique et non-académique. En évitant une discussion critique de Trudel, une tendance à idéaliser l'esclavage en Nouvelle France s'est manifestée qui, en même temps, représente un obstacle important au processus de réviser un chapitre crucial de l'histoire canadienne.

Introduction

In 2013, Montreal's Véhicule Press released *Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage*. George Tombs's translation of the seminal text by Québécois historian Marcel Trudel thus appeared fifty-three years after it was first published as *L'Esclavage au Canada français* in 1960 by Presses universitaires Laval. This gap reveals the long ignorance and even denial of slavery on the part of some of Quebec's leading nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians. To this day, Québécois as well as Canadians, more broadly speaking, both in academic or in public discourse, struggle with the reworking of this particular chapter of their past.¹ Trudel's 1960 publication therefore came as pioneering scholarship and just before Quebec's Quiet Revolution, which would eventually overturn the Church's domination in the province through processes of political and economic secularization, paving the way also for a revision of the national historiographical discourse. Upon its release, however, *L'Esclavage au Canada français* was met with resistance not only from the Church but also from Trudel's fellow historians as it shook the foundations of an

1 The debate on what kind and how much information on slavery in Canada is available to Canadians is ongoing. Christopher Moore, on his blog *Christopher Moore's History News*, claims that "Information about slaves and slavery in early Canada is all over the school texts and the kid's (sic) books and yes, even the adult histories of Canada. But somehow none of that counts" (March 1, 2014). It is safe to say that when Trudel first wrote his book, this was not the case. It is also true that there have been efforts to update school text books and increase the offer, say, of workshops for teachers (notably by Natasha Henry, who has recently launched her website *Teaching African Canadian History*). However, even though scholarship on Black Canadian History has increased significantly since Trudel and, later, Robin Winks, much work still needs to be done to counter the dominance of the well-established Underground Railroad story.

influential Québécois nationalist self-image that had banned slavery from collective memory.

Indeed, Trudel's monograph changed Quebec's historiography in so far as it established slavery as a fact in New France for about 200 years. It revealed that it was an accepted social reality, which continued after the British conquest of 1760, placing slave owners not only at every level of society but also among the famous secular and religious elites (James McGill and Saint Marguerite d'Youville, for example, were thus revealed to be slave owners). Many see the book as at least partly responsible for Trudel's professional ostracism and his move to Ottawa in 1966 (Everett-Green; Hill). As Trudel later explained in an interview, however, the book did not sell well at all, and Laval had kept only a small number of hard copies before disposing of the remainder (Pigeon 15). It took forty-four years to release a first revised edition as *Deux siècles d'esclavage au Québec* (2004), only after the interest in the history of slavery in Quebec and Canada had begun to grow.²

A translation into English, however, which would make the knowledge contained therein available to wider Anglophone Québécois and Canadian readerships, took roughly another decade. George Tombs describes the challenges he had to face after first proposing a translation in a conversation with a Parti Québécois minister: "He got quite annoyed, and said 'You shouldn't be translating that book!' [...] His problem basically was that it would give a bad image of Quebec." (qtd. in Everett-Green n.p.). The minister's reaction explains why to this day, the history of slavery is still dominated by the positively-connoted narrative of the Underground Railroad, making Canada a safe haven for fugitives from the United States in the nineteenth century. It still seems difficult to accept today that "des personnages élevés jusqu'à au rang de héros sans tâche aient profité de l'esclavage" (Nadeau n.p.). Although scholars and teachers today provide more and more material on Canadian slavery, the African Canadian and First Nations' struggles against the dominant hegemonic discourse of white European settler nations and for recognition within Canadian historiography still continue well into the 21st century.

While the refusal to acknowledge the lasting relevance of slavery has long been the strongest obstacle to this recognition, it is now further mitigated by another kind of attitude which, while admitting the presence of slavery in colonial Canada, portrays it as a "humane" form of servitude clearly distinct from its US-American or French West Indian counterparts. This type of romanticizing, this paper argues, has its roots in publications like Trudel's *Deux siècles d'esclavage/Canada's Forgotten Slaves* and their reception today. The reactions to the recent translation, which was

2 Trudel's *Dictionnaire des esclaves et de leurs propriétaires au Canada français* appeared in 1990 with Hurtubise HMM. The publication had been delayed for decades because a fire had destroyed Trudel's data and the manuscript in 1965 (Pigeon 18).

instantly nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award in translation,³ have only clarified that Trudel's major study has been cast mostly as a pioneer work directed to both academic and non-academic publics, and hailed as an overturn of a flawed Québécois/Canadian self-image. Its reception continues to hinge on a powerful, multi-faceted image of Marcel Trudel as an eminent historian and a widely-accepted authority, and has brought forth only few critical voices in recent decades. Major weaknesses in Trudel's study have thus been hinted at, but always rationalized in favor of a contextualization of his scholarly innovativeness in the 1960s. This perception holds the danger of distorting the image of slavery in New France and thus, misinterpreting an important chapter of African Canadian and First Nations histories. The opportunity opened up by the translation of bringing colonial slavery in Canada into the limelight should serve to operate yet another contextualization of Marcel Trudel and his study: in order to provide the new "interpretative framework" that Brett Rushforth has called for, Trudel must be seen today as an anachronous "beginning," instead of the pinnacle, of a field of inquiry so that a critical revision of Quebec's past becomes possible (375).

Trudel as National Historian: Consecration I

Marcel Trudel (1917–2011) is recognized today as one of Quebec's leading historians. His long career and numerous publications have turned him not only into an acknowledged authority on the history of New France (or into "Mr. New France," Hustak n.p.), but also into the 'historicus laureate' and "maître" of Québécois history in general (Nadeau n.p.). This prestigious standing, however, was not foreseeable when Trudel started his career in the 1940s. His dissertation on Voltaire (1945) only marked the beginning of a list of provocative publications that shaped Trudel, the *enfant terrible*. Particularly at the beginning of his career in the pre-Quiet Revolution context, his research oscillated between 'going against the grain' of traditional research (cf. Pigeon 15) and the unpopularity and indifference amongst his peers, or even professional ostracism, that it entailed (cf. Everett-Green; Hill n.p.). Trudel's reputation has come a long way from the frosty to indifferent reception by his colleagues that he experienced in 1960 – "Ils ne m'ont pas rejeté, mais ils ne m'ont pas appuyé non plus" (Pigeon 15) – to becoming "une des figures universitaires les plus connues au pays" (Nadeau n.p.).

Over the last decades, Trudel's public image has evolved into a composite of at least three distinguishable elements. First, he is at once the 'pioneer' and the 'rebel' resisting conventional historiography. He is also portrayed as passionate historian, teacher, and meticulous researcher for whom history is both vocation and profession. Lastly, Trudel is as much a sophisticated academic as he is a popular historian,

3 Tombs's translation eventually lost out to Donald Winkler's *The Major Verbs (Les verbes majeurs)* by Pierre Nepveu). The list of nominees and winners can be found on the Canada Council for the Arts' website: <http://ggbooks.canadacouncil.ca/>.

or rather, a historian for the people, intent on making knowledge about New France and Quebec available to a large audience of interested (non-)Québécois.⁴ These facets have reappeared over the years and now make up the foundation of a quasi-religious veneration of Trudel as the “dean of Canadian historians” (Hustak n.p.). A number of both academic and non-academic reviews discussing *Deux siècles d’esclavage* (2004) and its recently published translation *Canada’s Forgotten Slaves* (2013) exemplify how these elements are played out. They demonstrate that the force of Trudel’s authority shapes the reception of his works and hence, of slavery as a historical fact in Canada. In this process, the texts of the reviews under discussion here do not become a place of critical inquiry, but of consecration, to the point of contradicting the intuitive understanding of individual reviewers.

Cases in point are, on the one hand, the reviews by Jean Coléno (*The Montreal Review of Books*), Robert Everett-Green (*Globe & Mail*), Lawrence Hill (*Literary Review of Canada*), Peter McCambridge (*ambos*), and Nelle Oosterom (*Canada’s History*), all of them discussing George Tombs’s 2013 translation tellingly entitled *Canada’s Forgotten Slaves*; and on the other hand, Daniel Gay’s (*Recherches sociographiques*) and Gilles Havard’s (*Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*) scholarly discussions of the 2004 edition *Deux siècles d’esclavage au Québec*. All of the reviewers agree that the book is a major and “indispensable” work of French Canadian historiography (Havard 180). They are aware of the provocative potential of the topic of slavery and of its long neglect by historiography, which is why it still “come[s] as news to many” Canadians in 2013 (McCambridge n.p.). In fact, several reviewers point to Trudel’s “iconoclastic” research (Gay 565, my translation) and the impact of its “shocking” details, to which George Tombs’s translation, long overdue, finally gives access (Coléno n.p.). Reviewers are equally aware of the consequences of Trudel’s study, namely the putting into question of Quebec’s national understanding and the larger Canadian stereotype, or false self-image, as the free nation and terminus of the Underground Railroad (cf. Oosterom n.p.).

With this, they portray Trudel as the rebel-pioneer, who, even in 1960, questioned mainstream historiography.⁵ Moreover, they praise Trudel as a model historian valuing fact-oriented, meticulous and profound research (cf. Hill n.p.), distilled into a book which is yet easily approachable by the general public. Reviewers make repeated references to Trudel’s anecdotal writing style, which makes for his ‘good read’ and appeal, although it sometimes appears somewhat old-fashioned in the light of the new millennium (cf. Hill, McCambridge). Gay and Havard see Trudel’s scholarly merit in addressing a number of topics within the field of slavery in New France that

4 This effort is probably most evident in his five-volume *Mythes et réalités dans l’histoire du Québec* (Hurtubise HMM, 2001-2010).

5 Trudel, too, promoted this picture of himself. In an interview with Danielle Pigeon, he underlines that “[...] j’avais une tête à part des autres et [...] il ne faut pas s’étonner si je me suis consacré à un tel sujet. [...] comme j’avais une tendance à revenir contre ce qu’on affirmait traditionnellement, je me suis intéressé à l’esclavage au Canada” (15).

were literally unheard of before him and, most importantly, that have effects on contemporary Quebec's society. This holds true for the lengthy discussion of "métissage" which, for Gay, is telling about the contribution of First Nations and Blacks to the population's "ethnic diversification" (563, my translation), but also, as a consequence, about institutional racism and the beginning of segregation in Quebec (ibid.).

As reviewers approach the discussion of the content itself, they reveal themselves to be newcomers to Black Canadian history, and as such, largely repeat Trudel's basic findings and interpretations. Thus, most are impressed by the early beginning of slavery in colonial New France around 1629 and its subsequent deep entrenchment in society as an accepted fact among both secular and religious elites (cf. Coléno, Everett-Green n.p.). Most authors explain that slaves were expensive luxury goods and accordingly emphasize the difference in scale between 'Canadian' and US-American and/or French West Indian forms of slavery (cf. Oosterom n.p.), relying on the dual concept of society with slaves versus slave societies. Reviewers give the impression of gladly embracing the reassuring character of Trudel's interpretations, which turn away from the "shocking" and uncomfortable details of slavery, and instead promote a "less harsh" (Coléno n.p.) and also "less widespread" form of slavery "than elsewhere on the continent" (McCambridge n.p.). Interestingly, only Lawrence Hill briefly addresses the episode of Marie-Josèphe Angélique, a slave woman who was gruesomely tortured and executed for allegedly having set fire to her master's home, which then spread through Montreal in 1734.⁶ Instead of seeing Angélique's fate as an instance of the atrocious excesses of the system of slavery, reviewers such as Oosterom persist in repeating Trudel's most notorious assertion that in New France, "slavery had less of a commercial and more of a humane nature" (Oosterom n.p.). Hence, all reviewers give the book a positive overall evaluation, based on the established position of Trudel, and gladly recommend it to readers.

Revisiting Trudel on Slavery: Criticism

This paper contends that a review style as displayed above is influenced by Trudel's authoritative standing in the field of slavery in New France and prevents a necessary critical discussion of Trudel's major theses. As the first monograph on the topic, Trudel has remained the mandatory reference for all subsequent scholars, some of which have then also begun to question Trudel's work in the realm of academia. Among the few critical voices regarding *Deux siècles d'esclavage au Québec* is Brett Rushforth's review of the second edition, together with the *Dictionnaire*, from 2005 (*The Canadian Historical Review*). Rushforth's review succeeds in both giving Trudel credit where it is due while at the same time critically assessing the value of

6 Trudel describes the incident in his subchapter "L'incendie de Montréal" (*Deux siècles* 217-220). Afua Cooper has since devoted her well-known monograph *The Hanging of Angélique* (2007) to what certainly is one of the most spectacular and controversial events in Montreal's history.

Trudel's monograph in the 21st century. Thus, Rushforth only partly subscribes to the veneration of the historian. On the one hand, Rushforth is ready to accept that in scholarship on slavery in Canada, *Deux siècles d'esclavage* is still "the only available outline of the contours of this slave system" (373). Indeed, Trudel's monograph was a "bold proposition" in the 1960s amongst nationalist historians in denial of New France slavery (373). Trudel as a rebel and pioneer shines through as Rushforth goes on to assert that "[b]efore Trudel's meticulous research, we knew almost nothing" about the topic (373).

However, Rushforth's critical analysis of the monograph is notable. It reveals Trudel as a thorough researcher, but also as a selective one in many respects. Trudel might be a pioneer of the 1960s, but today his book is only an anachronous interpretation of facts (cf. Rushforth 373). Journalist and historian Frank Mackey, for example, has since pointed out that Trudel's enumeration of slaves, given today's available research tools, is in fact unreliable and can no longer stand (Mackey 13). Rushforth's own points of criticism are worth discussing and commenting on at length. They fall into two larger categories, touching on the levels of style and content. First of all, Rushforth points out the problem of the re-"edition." In fact, the 2004 version of *Deux siècles d'esclavage*, which Trudel in his preface calls the "édition revue et mise à jour" (Trudel 2009, 7), is really only a "reprint" (Rushforth 373). This is not entirely correct, for Trudel did use the 2004 version to adapt his style, replacing expressions that were common in the 1960s for the designation of black and indigenous people by their less offensive counterparts (Pigeon 19). However, Rushforth rightly observes that "the book's text [and content] remain [...] virtually unchanged" (373).

This explains why some passages are still highly problematic today and might have been omitted if the text had been thoroughly revised. Instead, nobody involved in either the process of re-editing or translating seems to have taken issue with some of the following examples: Quoting the slave owner Charles-Eusèbe Casgrain praising the culinary abilities of his slave Rose, Trudel (and with him, his translator) enthusiastically comments: "In reading Casgrain, one is tempted to cry out 'Long live slavery!'" (Trudel 2013, 127). On another note, outlining his findings on interracial marriage, Trudel does not hesitate to conclude that "après avoir goûté à l'exotisme, les Canadiens reviennent le plus souvent, pour leurs secondes noces, au menu normal en passant dans les bras d'un Blanc" (Trudel 2009, 286; emphasis mine).⁷ Whereas Rushforth might qualify the choice of metaphor as "curious, but characteristic" of Trudel (374), translator Tombs takes out the passage's questionable tone by phrasing neutrally: "[...] once Canadians survived a first marriage with an Amerindian, they were more likely to marry a white person the second time around" (Trudel 2013, 226). While the thorough comparison of the original and the transla-

7 Other problematic examples include comparing the slaves' living conditions to that of their masters; writing about slave "immorality," etc.

tion does not lie within the scope of this paper, one wonders why Tombs never specifies whether he found some passages too contentious to translate them literally or whether they make up the “archaic flavor [of ...] the book” which he tried to remain faithful to (Trudel 2013, 10). Rushforth, on his part, merely hints at what he thinks about Trudel’s “jarring assertions” (374), without pointing to the actual paternalizing, generalizing, and sometimes offensive, expressions in Trudel’s text. Excusing them as “jerky [...] narrative” (McCambridge n.p.) or part of Trudel’s ironic, if somewhat insensitive, writing style seems inappropriate when considering that a prospective audience of the book includes both contemporary Black and First Nations readers.

Rushforth expresses his gravest concerns regarding the actual subjects addressed in *Deux siècles d’esclavage* and their presentation. This also marks the point where most reviews discussed so far fall short of criticism. At the heart of these concerns lies Trudel’s qualification of slavery in New France (and, due to his incoherent use of terminology, he seems to apply this to Canada as a whole) as “humane,” thereby clearly drawing the distinction to the United States and the French West Indies.⁸ Trudel establishes this image throughout the book and at various occasions. For example, describing the funeral proceedings of a young slave girl, Trudel is satisfied to conclude -- “une fois de plus” -- that slavery in New France displayed a “caractère tout humain” (Trudel 2009, 174) or, as the translation echoes, “the relatively humane character of slavery in New France” (Trudel 2013, 142). A number of social practices reinforce this impression in Trudel’s opinion, such as the participation of slaves as godparents in religious rituals, “[a]nother feature [making] slavery in Canada seem more humane compared to other colonies” (Trudel 2013, 153). Addressing the execution of punishment, Trudel declares that in all, crimes committed by slaves being a rarity anyway, their punishment is less severe than in other slaveholding colonies like the Antilles (Trudel 2009, 220; 222). For Trudel, this counts as sign of the successful integration of slaves into society (Trudel 2013, 178).

For Trudel, an apparent “privileged status” (Trudel 2013, 179) of slaves in New France results from the combination of two other characteristic traits of slavery in French Canada, namely its alleged familial atmosphere and the mutual affection reigning between masters and slaves. Trudel stylizes this unequal relationship into one of care and attention on the part of the master. He gives numerous examples of Amerindian and black slaves being presented as “adopted children” which yet again “gives a whole different flavor to slavery in New France” (Trudel 2013, 122-23). This treatment seems in line with the “special care” that was awarded to a slave by her or his master and with regarding slave children as equal to that of the master’s (123-24). Even though Trudel admits that one cannot always draw generalized conclusions about the relationship (Trudel 2009, 176), he feels confident to say that there

8 It should be noted that Louisiana, a part of New France at the time, does not figure in Trudel’s observations (cf. Havard 180).

existed a profound emotional attachment between slaves and their masters or their masters' children (176-7). To support his argument, Trudel lists examples of slaves risking their lives for their masters (176), or female slaves and their love for the master's children (177). In fact, Trudel here adopts a well-known Southern apologetic discourse. The resemblances to the intellectual foundation of this discourse in the concept of the patriarchal household, based on "radical submission [of its members to the paterfamilias] and the protection of the weak [including slaves]" (Wenzel 162), are striking.⁹

A last manifestation of this affection, according to Trudel, is the fact that no small number of slaves carried their owner's family name (Trudel 2013, 191). Disregarding the implications of naming human 'property' and the subsequent loss of identity for slaves, Trudel egregiously underlines the "social promotion of sorts, outwardly putting slaves on the same footing as free people" (191). Trudel also fails to address here the inherent inequality and arbitrariness of a master-slave relationship that played out on personal, profession, or sexual levels, and does not mention incidents of rape. This portrayal remains in stark contrast to and in unresolved conflict with his subchapters "Des Québécois pour pères?" and "Le bâtard est esclave comme sa mère" (Trudel 2009, 258-263). Looking at children born by slave mothers and white fathers, he explains the existence of these children simply by "promiscuité" (258). The application of the Code Noir determined the fate of both mother and child invariably and mercilessly as slaves: "la possession est plus importante que la filiation." It is only then that Trudel admits that "[l]'esclavage au Canada français ne porte pas que des marques d'humanité [...]" (263).

To Rushforth's criticism, one can also add Trudel's insinuations about the differences between Francophone and Anglophone slave owners. According to the historiographical distinction between Régime français and Régime anglais, Trudel explains that before the Conquest in 1760, "[slave owners] were necessarily all or almost all of French origin, whereas after [...] a certain number of British slave owners settled in Quebec" (Trudel 2013, 103). This great majority of Francophone owners is also mainly responsible for the enslavement of the First Nations (103; 257), whereas Anglophones were linked to black enslavement (257). Despite his analysis of an allegedly harmonious, familial master-slave relationship, Trudel consistently intimates that not all slaves were treated in the same manner, a fact that for him seems dependent on the owner's nationality. To explain, he describes the major stages in a slave's life, i.e. baptisms, marriages and burials, as important social events (150-51) – albeit only for a small minority of slaves. This was not so much due to these events

9 I am thankful to the anonymous reviewer for directing me to Peter Wenzel's article (1982), which offers an enlightening intellectual contextualization of George Fitzhugh, "probably the best-known of the nineteenth-century apologists for slavery" (Wenzel 157), in the premodern concept of the patriarchal household and the resulting clash with contemporary theories of liberty and economy. Wenzel thereby exposes Fitzhugh's "anachronism" (cf. 157, 175), a lens through which we might then read also Trudel.

being religious sacraments, but because of their potential to “bring [...] together the most influential members of society” (151). Trudel interprets these events not only as significant socializing and networking occasions, but also as the mirror for a harmonious relationship between owners and owned, openly and proudly presented to the community. Thus, slave owners served as godparents to their slaves; a custom which Trudel underlines was unique to French Catholic society (260). On the contrary, “particularly English-speaking slave owners [...] generally *did not bother* to attend the religious ceremonies of their slaves” (213, emphasis mine). Moreover, Trudel observes that under the English Regime, many slaves ran away “and we do not know whether they ran away after abusive treatment or because they wanted to live their lives as they saw fit” (143–44). The underlying judgment here seems to be that under the French Regime, or under Francophone owners in particular, slavery as a whole was more harmonious than after the increasing influx and takeover of Anglophones. Returning to the baptisms of slaves, Trudel explains that he can only cite a single occasion where an Anglophone served as godfather during a baptism, but supposes that this was only due to the influence of his French Canadian wife (153).

Reviews and Counterintuition: Consecration II

Having alluded to the various problems Trudel's monograph displays, it is now more obvious why and where the reviews under discussion fail as critical responses and guidelines for prospective readers. They merely reproduce the well-established image of Trudel as a historian and, moreover, gloss over the contentious parts in favor of a repetition of Trudel's questionable conclusions, even against their proper intuition. Coléno, for example, subscribes to Trudel's rebel-image of “annoy[ing] some of his peers by refusing to write in the service of nationalist or romantic agendas” (n.p.) – implying that focusing on “le caractère tout humain” (Trudel 2009, 174) of slavery in Quebec is not part of such a romanticizing project. Coléno then concludes that Trudel's book is an important “corrective” to the superficial knowledge about slavery in Quebec (n.p.), instead of yet another form of nationalist agenda that Trudel subconsciously creates despite his revisionist approach. Oosterom's review yet more obviously becomes entangled in a contradictory argumentation. On the one hand, Oosterom critically engages some of Trudel's findings, for example the desire and efforts undertaken by Canadians to obtain slaves (n.p.). On the other hand, however, she goes on to explain that newspapers advertised slaves for auction sales “alongside animals,” which points to the dehumanizing character of the slave system, but promptly quotes Trudel's famous statement in the following sentence that “Slaves usually remained the property of a single master, which may have meant that slavery had less of a commercial and more of a humane nature” (n.p.). This apparent dissonance again echoes the towering construction of an idealized image of master-slave relationships in colonial New France, which writer and scholar George Elliott Clarke in a scathing comment has termed Trudel's “mythology of the

well-treated black and the 'lucky-to-be-in-Canada' slave [and] one more species of European-Canadian, pro-Canada propaganda" (Clarke n.p.).

McCambridge, interestingly, points out that a difference in scale with regard to other countries does not change the fact of slavery's bare existence in Canada (slavery remains slavery). Trudel for him becomes someone who "gives names and faces to this steady trickle of numbers" (n.p.), by which he seems to mean personalizing history and uncovering individual stories that have been suppressed for centuries. Indeed, McCambridge seems taken aback by the "overwhelming [...] flood of information" that Trudel thus provides, but then remembers that as readers, we need to "come to our senses and remember that it's people we're dealing with here, people who were bought and sold at auction like animals" (n.p.). However, McCambridge's allusion to the dehumanizing and de-individualizing processes of slavery remains half-hearted. Instead of showing just how Trudel's book might counter such a loss of individual black and indigenous stories, McCambridge cites an array of 'anecdotes' focusing on white slaveholders and Judge Osgoode instead, who, refusing to convict runaway slaves from the United States, fits neatly into Canada's myth of the safe haven (n.p.).¹⁰ The few examples McCambridge chooses in order to give, possibly, an insight into slave life, seem equally haphazard, and once more echo Coléno's allusion to romantic agendas: "a certain Louis-Antoine voluntarily became a slave out of love ..." (n.p.; the elision points appear in the original).

Everett-Green's main argument centers on the repression of an uncomfortable topic that he now sees brought into the limelight again by Trudel's book. Indeed, the French edition for him functions as a sort of catalyst for more recent and diversified scholarship on slavery in other Canadian provinces (n.p.). Yet, Trudel remains both *origo* and center of Everett-Green's own understanding of scholarship on Canadian slavery. He attaches great hopes to the impact of the translation, calling for an even "broader telling of the Canadian slavery story that we can *all* come to grips with" (n.p; emphasis mine). Everett-Green echoes Tombs's own wish for his translation to "contribut[e] more generally to a debate in Canada about liberty, the universality of human rights [...]" (Trudel 2013, 12). Trudel's role as it is imagined in these statements transcends that of a mere pioneer, dedicated scholar, or popular historian, and becomes larger than life. The bold title of the translation, "Canada's Forgotten Slaves," underlines what Everett-Green and Tombs perceive as an urgent issue in Canadian society, for which Trudel's book is cast both as the authoritative point of reference and as the point of departure. In fact, the Governor General Award nomination of Tombs's translation seems to encourage their hopes for a greater public acknowledgment of the topic in the near future. This, however, ignores the "broader telling" of the facets and dynamics of slavery that has been going on in scholarship during the last decades by such scholars as Cooper, Hill, Mackey, Smardz Frost,

10 Frank Mackey has dismantled this example by explaining that Osgoode had left the country before any such ruling could have been passed by him (10).

Walker, Whitfield, Winks, and others. Moreover, the lofty call for a debate about universal human rights again distracts from the severe issues that *Canada's Forgotten Slaves* evidences. It seems rather ironic to ask for such a discussion when its foundation is flawed.

In contrast to the popular reviews discussed above, the two scholarly Franco-phone pieces appear to be more critical at first glance, as both Gay and Havard take issue with several aspects of Trudel's monograph. Havard underlines a certain lack of consistency in Trudel's approach, argument, and style. For example, Havard hints at the potential insights Trudel left out by not dwelling more on the involvement of First Nations in the slave trade (cf. 182). Havard also exposes the incomplete "toiletage lexical" (181), which should have updated the language of the 1960s in favor of more adequate expressions in the 2004 edition. Lastly, and most importantly, Gay and Havard both mention Trudel's judgments "discutables" (Gay 563) – and what McCambridge might have meant when speaking of a "jerky narrative" (n.p.). These include, most importantly, Trudel's statements about the "humane" air of Canadian slavery and its alleged familiar character (see above). Gay is surprised (564) to find such a topic in Trudel's book at all, but does not comment further and instead turns to another of Trudel's *faux-pas*, the alleged "immorality" of slaves (564). Havard criticizes Trudel's choice of words when claiming that "familial" is "sans doute" not applicable to "toutes les situations" (182). Havard also states that the adjective ("familial") disregards the facts of a daily life of "déracinement ou [...] marginalité de nombreux esclaves" (182).

While both reviewers then detect major points of critique, their intuition is over-run by the standard expectations regarding Trudel's monograph. Thus, in the paragraph immediately following Gay's critical comment on Trudel's view of the "immorality" of the slave, he praises the book as a "trava[il] incontournable [...]" and as a reference work (Gay 564). Gay wants Trudel to be justly contextualized in the beginning of the 1960s, an essential decade in Quebec's recent history, and remembered as having produced one of the "petites révolutions' de l'époque" (564). For Havard, too, the concluding remarks are positive. Despite his just points of critique mentioned above, it seems clear to him (and comforting?) that black and Amerindian slaves did not have to endure "la violence des maîtres inhérente aux sociétés esclavagistes" (Havard 182), recalling Trudel's distinction between slavery in Canada and the southern US or the Caribbean. In the end, Havard affirms the 'more harmless' version of slavery in Quebec.

One more review deserves a more detailed discussion. Lawrence Hill, well-known African Canadian author of such bestsellers as *The Book of Negroes* (2010) and son to Daniel G. Hill, former professor of sociology and author of the well-known *Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (1981), discusses *Canada's Forgotten Slaves* for the *Literary Review of Canada*. Hill takes two essential things from Trudel's book: the establishment and acceptance of slavery in the society of New France, and Canada's denial of it in the following centuries (n.p.). On the content-level, Hill sees the par-

ticular merit in pursuing the history of black and First Nations' enslavement, placing owners at all social levels, and the topic of métissage (n.p.). As for Everett-Green, Trudel's results come as "ground-breaking" for Hill in a dire scholarly landscape that even in the last third of the twentieth century, can still only exhibit "a few substantial books [by Winks and Walker, for example]" (n.p.). Up to this point, Hill repeats the well-known picture of Trudel as pioneering historian, whose work has remained influential on scholars both franco- and anglophone, including his own father, until today (n.p.). He also reproduces the image of Trudel as the rebel who consciously chose an unpopular topic that he pursued unflinchingly and although it entailed his move to Ottawa (n.p.). Trudel's personal and scholarly merit, for Hill, arise from challenging his peers and his readers, "addressing [their] ignorance, and taking pleasure in [presenting new] uncomfortable, provocative facts" (n.p.).

The specificity of Hill's review, however, does not merely lie in his reproduction of Trudel's well-established image, but in his personal appropriation of Trudel as household-friend and bearer of knowledge. Hill can relate to Trudel and his work, because his father Daniel G. Hill "raised eyebrows [himself] with his ground-breaking PhD thesis called 'The Negroes of Toronto: A Sociological Study of a Minority Group'" (n.p.) – published also in 1960 but which, interestingly, did not earn the fame that Trudel could note down for himself. Later, Hill's parents founded the Ontario Black History Society, which has remained an important institution until today. Most importantly, however, Hill realizes that his parents had owned a copy of Trudel's monograph ("an odd, slim, well-worn French volume," n.p.) and used it for their own research, turning Trudel into a tacit presence in the Hill household. This impression is strengthened by the image of Hill's father passing on Trudel's knowledge to his son at the kitchen table: "He let me know that Marcel Trudel's [book] was a detailed, vital, scholarly work about a piece of Canadian – and African Canadian – history that few Canadians knew a thing about" (n.p.). In this way, the young Lawrence learned "a number of fascinating stories" (n.p.). Trudel here becomes somewhat of a familiar presence, carrying knowledge about a past which Lawrence and his parents so well related to into the home. Indeed, Hill concludes with the wish that there be more works as Trudel's "so that we can know ourselves and our history more profoundly" (n.p.). Trudel here is cast also as the de-mystifier, contributing to the self-knowledge and self-understanding of a people. The question though remains: Who is we?

This role attributed to Trudel shapes Hill's assessment of *Canada's Forgotten Slaves*. Undoubtedly, Hill makes valid points about the scholarly value of Trudel's monograph. Trudel is certainly to be credited for pointing out the importance of comparing black and Native American enslavement, ownership, etc. On the other hand, Hill is equally right in focusing on a few essential points of criticism. However, the way in which Hill does bring up criticism comes as ambiguous, at worst, and surprising, at best. Like McCambridge, Hill underlines that the problems with *Canada's Forgotten Slaves* do not only come with its "repetitive [...] archaic [...]" style (n.p.). The core

problems lie with Trudel's "defensive efforts" to cast Canadian slavery as "humane" and his offensive euphemisms (n.p.). Hill admits to have felt "enraged" and hurt at times (n.p.) at reading Trudel's conclusions. The description of his personal reaction to Trudel's book is unique: whether it is because he is African Canadian or not, the effect of Trudel's highly problematic passages should not come as a surprise. What does, instead, are Hill's relativizations of his own feelings: he quickly turns to contextualizing Trudel within a discourse and way of thinking of the 1950s and 1960s, calling to finally "push past his words and ideas, and to appreciate the depth and the courage of his work in meticulously documenting the nature and extent of slavery in New France" (n.p.). Hill, although physically feeling the extent of Trudel's conclusions, brushes his concerns aside for the sake of a form of consecration. Hill is in line with the other reviewers in recommending Trudel's book, subscribing to a seemingly tacit agreement that it is better to have a problem-ridden book on slavery in Canada, than none at all.

Conclusion

Christopher Moore, referring to Lawrence Hill's review "Chains Unearthed," commented on his blog *History News* that it was "[n]ot bad to get a major review of one of your books half a century after it was published, and after you are dead" (n.p.). It is no less astonishing that the translation of a work that was so provocative when it first was published, should today be nominated for a Governor General Literary Award. Marcel Trudel's image is still looming large in Quebec, and his reputation and veneration are still influencing the reception of his work. With regard to the history of slavery in Canada, however, this leads to the quasi-effacement of critical voices about Trudel's book, even against the intuition of his reviewers. The analysis of different reviews has shown a troublesome tendency to accept and excuse Trudel's misled presentations of his source material in favor of the pre-Quiet Revolution context in Quebec, when the Church still dominated the historiographical view of a slavery-free colonial past. A heedless willingness to follow Trudel's powerful numbers, statistics and interpretations of his sources ignore a romanticized image of slavery that is still trying to establish a marked difference to the United States. Trudel himself never truly questions the apparent harmony between masters and slaves, and his way of portraying slavery in Quebec relies, often enough, on paternalistic generalizations of "the slave." Since the 1960s, there has been an upsurge of scholarship on slavery and Black Canadian history in general. Scholars and African Canadian writers have painted a different picture of slavery in Quebec and Canada, but still struggle in a way to no longer having to write 'back' to Trudel and his reputation.

A danger today seems to lie in the fact that there is no available critical edition of Trudel's book, as he still represents the accepted authority in the field. Brett Rushforth's review indicates how a new contextualization of Trudel might work: the question is not to dismiss Trudel completely, but to accept the ambiguity of his

legacy. He should be seen, as Rushforth suggests, as an important starting point for the line of research on slavery, but not as its pinnacle nor as the sole authority. Trudel must be recognized as an important scholar in his time, but as an anachronous reference on slavery today. When talking about first meeting his acquaintance Paul Brown, Trudel exclaims: “Un Noir de Sainte-Thècle! Et c'était un Québécois pur sang ... heu ... disons pure laine! Mais de voir un Québécois pure laine noir, vous vous rendez compte?” (Pigeon 17). Even years after the research and publication of his book, he is still surprised to find black Québécois as part of society.

A critical introduction in addition to the translator's foreword would give the many newcomers to Black Canadian studies and to Quebec's history – inside and outside of academic contexts – a better chance of situating Trudel and to, in Hill's terms “know [them]selves and [their] history more profoundly.” Studies like Afua Cooper's monograph on the trial and torture of Angélique, both disillusioning and empowering, have set out to counter the romanticized narrative of slavery in New France on a larger scale, addressing both academic and non-academic readerships. *Canada's Forgotten Slaves* holds both good and bad tidings in this respect. While it might reach a larger audience, it might also refuel this narrative through its unmediated and uninformed reception.

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