

The Rhetoric of Suffering, Hope, and Redemption in *Masters of the Dew*: A Rhetorical and Politico-Theological Analysis of Manuel as Peasant-Messiah and Redeemer

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Jacques Roumain's 1944 peasant novel, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (*Masters of the Dew*, 1947) is not only a testament of stunning literary skills but also a masterwork of profound theological reflections that articulates a robust humanistic and theo-political response to the problem of evil, human suffering, and poverty in the world. The objective of this essay is twofold. First, it examines the intersections of the rhetoric of suffering, hope, and redemption in the novel. Second, it analyses Roumain's creative construction of an atonement theology in his presentation of the novel's protagonist Manuel Jean-Joseph as the Christ-figure and peasant-redeemer. We will interpret *Masters of the Dew*'s atonement language in the light of René Gerard's theory of scapegoating as articulated in his 1972 book, *La violence et le sacré* (*Violence and the Sacred*, 1977) as well as against the backdrop of the Biblical story of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. I argue that Roumain intends the death of Manuel to be read as a vicarious atonement for the salvation and reconciliation of the peasant people at Fonds Rouge in the same manner New Testament writers project the death of Jesus as a vicarious substitution for the sins and salvation of the world. Through the Geradian framework, I also read Manuel's death as a symbolic exchange for the peace and unity of the "suffering community" and as a preventive act to end the cycle of violence between the peasants.

The first part of the essay explores the rhetoric of suffering and pain in the narrative. Subsequently, we will investigate how suffering and pain establish the context for the future hope and redemption of the community. There is a strong connection between the rhetoric of

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suffering and the rhetoric of redemption in *Masters of the Dew*. Finally, we will bring a close to this piece with our observation of Roumain's imaginative atonement theology, which we propose is sourced in the Biblical story of salvation-history—communicating through the liberative voice and activism of the peasant-savior and hero Manuel. It will become clear to us that Manuel died as an atoning sacrifice in order to foster human solidarity, unity and reconciliation among the rural villagers.

I. **The Drought and The Rhetoric of Suffering**

*Masters of the Dew*² is deeply influenced by the theological language of the Bible and the rhetorical sensibility of what is known today in the academia as political theology. The novel is modeled after the Biblical myth of Christ's passion and sufferings as documented in the New Testament corpus. Roumain evokes biblical allusions, echoes, and parallelisms between Manuel of *Masters of the Dew* and the Christ of the Bible. I shall attempt to point out these biblical resonances in our analysis and comment on their significance for the future of the people at Fonds Rouge. The author particularly equates the passion and sufferings of Manuel with those of the historical Jesus of Christianity. Roumain's Messiah—Manuel Jean-Joseph—is black and a peasant who died for the salvation of his people, and “in order to finally end the cycle of

² The novel has been well received as a major literary intervention and success in world literature and particularly in Black Atlantic literature; for substantial studies on *Masters of the Dew*, see Christiane Conturie, *Comprendre “Gouverneurs de la rosée” de Jacques Roumain* (Bloomington: Classiques africains, 1980); Christiane Chaulet Achour, *Gouverneurs de la rosée: De Jacques Roumain - La pérennité d'un chef d'oeuvre* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010) ; Julie Jean, Thérien, and Murielle De Serres (*Gouverneurs de la Rosée: Texte Integral Du Roman* (Groupe Beauchemin, Editeur Ltee, 1998); Yasmina Tippenhauer, “La réception de l'œuvre de Jacques Roumain par ses compatriotes,” in *Jacques Roumain. Œuvres complètes*. Edited by Léon-François Hoffman (Madrid. ALLCA XX, 2003), 1327-44; Beverly Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1983); Jean Pierre Makouta-Mboukou, *Jacques Roumain: essai sur la signification spirituelle et religieuse de son œuvre*. Ph.D. diss., (Lille: Université de Lille III, 1978).

internecine violence” (Kaussen 122, 124).

The novel is a tapestry of stories woven around central themes of suffering, tragedy, solidarity, sacrifice, hope, and redemption. The land of Fonds Rouge in which most of the unfolding events in the novel took place is desolate and stricken by drought and poverty, which in turn impacted the social existence of the collective peasants and their interactions. Strife and animosity underline the attitude of and dynamics between the people in the community. The drama of redemption begins with violent suffering and ends with emancipating hope and liberative future possibilities.

The problem of evil or pain is expressed through the metaphor of drought. Evil reaches its arrogant height in the everyday experience of the distressed villagers. Manuel Jean-Joseph is presented as the agent of collective peace, restoration, and reconciliation. He articulated and exemplified a life of unity and harmony to the villagers who had been separated for decades because of internal strife and land issue. More importantly, he was decisive in finding a solution to the drought problem by mobilizing the peasants to cooperative communal labor and through collective effort to bring down the water from the mountains to the canals to the entire village. As a community organizer, Manuel worked diligently for the social development, communal rebirth, and ultimately for the common good of every individual at Fonds Rouge.

The plights of the peasants are vividly illustrated in the opening words of the novel from the lips of an old religious woman named Délira Déliverance—the mother of Manuel Jean-Joseph—: “We’re all going to die” (Roumain 23). In her ardent quest for divine intervention in the middle of the crisis, Délira prays to God for deliverance as her name anticipates. She desires the divine to alleviate the pain and ultimately put an end to this endemic anguish in the village. “Plunging her hands into the dust” (23), Délira cries out under the great tension: “We’re all

going to die. Animals, plants, every living soul! Oh, Jesus! Mary, Mother of God!” (23) She wails utterly through the distress as she converses with her carefree husband, Bienaimé:

The drought’s overtaken us, everything’s wasting away, animals, plants, every living human. The wind doesn’t push the clouds along any more. It’s an evil wind that drags its wings on the ground like swallows and stirs up dust-smoke. Look at the swirls of dust on the savanna. From sunup to sunset, not a single bead of rain in the whole sky. (44)

For Délira, the problem of evil and suffering is a theological conundrum. It is overtly cumbersome. Literary critic Valerie Kaussen makes this insightful observation about the opening words of the account:

Emphasizing the village’s exhaustion, and its gradual demise due to persistent drought, the opening passages of the novel depict an environment that is immobile and static. This quality is rendered vividly in the relationship between the characters represented in the opening and the environment that surrounds them. (123)

Hilary Kaplan is probably correct to note that the drought in the novel is symbolic for “the oppressive force of destruction and despair, and a class enemy for a suffering people” (Kaplan 1-2). Literary-historian Joan Dayan remarks that *Masters of the Dew* examines “the causes and effects of a misery unalleviated and brutal” (79). Scholars who have written about the novel often underscore its Marxist and Communist sensibility;³ yet, the rhetorical motifs of hope and redemption, and the theological language of atonement of the novel remain unexplored. I am particularly interested in scrutinizing Jacques Roumain’s artistic creation of the persona of

³ Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions*; Dash, “Introduction,” in *Masters of the Dew*; Léon-François Hoffman, “Présentation de Gouverneurs de la rosée de Jacques Roumain,” in *Jacques Roumain. Œuvres complètes*. Edited by Léon-François Hoffman (Madrid: ALLCA XX, 2003) ; Celia Britton, “Restoring Lost Unity in Jacques Roumain's Gouverneurs de la rosée,” in *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction* (London: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 20-6; J. Michael Dash, *Literature and ideology in Haiti, 1915-1961* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981); Joy Allison Indira Mahabir, *Miraculous Weapons: Revolutionary Ideology in Caribbean Culture* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003).

Manuel as the Christ-figure and hero-peasant in the narrative, and Manuel's active participation in the quandaries of his people.

The life of the people at Fonds Rouge community is menaced, characterized, and aggravated by three great social evils: drought, poverty, and suffering. Social death and alienation⁴ are also specific to their condition, which perhaps explain Délira's incessant mourning. Once again, she responds to her frustrated heaven with deep sadness and incredible hurt; her rhetoric of lament marks the unsettling vision of human tragedy in the narrative:

Don't bother me, man! I know what suffering is. My whole body aches, my whole body's full of suffering. I don't need anybody piling damnation on top of that... Life had dried up at Fonds Rouge. One had only to listen to this silence to hear death. One yielded to this torpor and felt himself already buried. The regular and repeated blows of the mallets in the mortars had become stilled since there wasn't a grain of millet to husk... We're dying with no help and with no hope. (Roumain 24, 112)

Here, grief is clearly manifest through her bodily pain and discomfort. Délira's complaint only alarms us that suffering is relational "to many kinds of events and circumstances of which physical pain is only one and generally not the most dreadful" (Hick 292-3). The omniscient narrator offers a panoramic view of the situation; the severe poverty and the social ills signifying the human relations and social life in the dislocated town are painted below:

The children were crying from hunger, that they were wasting away, their limbs thin and twisted like dry branches, their stomach enormous... They [the peasants] were fed up with poverty. They were worn out. The most reasonable among them were losing their senses. The strongest were wavering. As for the weak, they had given up. "What's the use?" they said. One could see them stretched out, sad and silent, on pallets before their huts, thinking about their hard luck, stripped of all their will power... Alcohol gave them a semblance of vigor, a brief illusion of hope, a momentary forgetfulness. But they would wake up stormy-headed and dry-mouthed. Life would take on the taste of vomit then, and they wouldn't even have a piece of salt meat to settle the stomach. (Roumain 79, 104)

⁴ For an excellent study on the notion of "social death," see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

The enormity of shared suffering and desolation has not only affected the lives of children and adults in the village but also the landscape. The narrator penetratingly summarizes the tremendous impact of misery on the livestock:

The chickens were cackling uneasily. They were waiting for someone to toss them some corn, but the peasants had nothing left to eat themselves, or almost nothing. They held on to the last grains, crushed them under the mallet and made a thick, heavy soup, but it was filling. It gave body to one's stomach. The cocks confronted each other, a ruff of feathers bristling about their necks. They exchanged a few pecks, a few blows of their spurs... The gray-tinted sky was a bare surface blurred by a hard sun-glare. Prostrate chickens looked for shade. The little dog was sleeping, his head between his paws. You could count his bones. If human beings had almost nothing to eat, just image the dogs! (119, 101)

Evil is dark and lacks significance. It has pervaded everything in the community including all existing and animated things. Hannah Arendt who uses the fungus metaphor to assert the intelligibility or comprehensibility of evil in modernity posits that "Evil possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface" (Neiman 301). Manuel is therefore justified when he shuts: "When will all these godamn troubles end?" (Roumain 111). In this sense, modernity has failed to bring the promise of peace and a haven of tranquility to the peasants at Fonds Rouge. The narrator emphasizes that Délira upon whom "All the trials and tribulations of life were etched upon her black face" continues trusting herself in the goodness of God the Liberator of the oppressed (111). She "called on the Lord" for emancipation and wholeness (23). The underprivileged peasants at Fonds Rouge were fighting for life, meaning, justice, and human dignity. They longed to see shalom restored and reigned supreme in their broken and violent world. They also yearned for hope and asked unremittingly when hunger,

desolation, and suffering would be vanished from their existence.

Furthermore, the discouraging drought had caused many peasants to drift away to foreign lands in search for a better life, where they would experience exile, uprootedness, alienation, and nostalgia. The narrator accentuates that globalization, immigration, capitalist greed, and the economic exploitation of those living in the margins of history had also contributed to the local crisis at Fonds Rouge. Manuel Jean-Joseph, who is described as “tall” and “black” (34), was one of the young peasants who left the community to find refuge aboard in the sugar cane industry in Cuba. He spent fifteen years there, “every day cutting sugar cane...from sunrise to dusk-dark” (37). His functional role as hero-savior would allow him to lead the troubled village to peace and harmony; and it is explicitly through Manuel’s martyrdom that his vision of the promise of the future would become a practical reality. Manuel left his indelible mark upon the conscience of the peasants and the land itself (Kaplan 8-11).

On his return to Fonds Rouge from Cuba, Manuel lamented over the terrible drought that had plagued the community for decades resulting in the worst of calamities the villagers had ever experienced in their lifetime. He stated, “When I left, there wasn’t any drought. Water ran in the ravine, not much, to tell the truth, but always enough to do, and sometimes even enough for a little overflow, if it ruined in the hills” (Roumain 37). Manuel looked around in his surroundings and further observed, “Seems like it’s been cursed now” (37). The return of Manuel marked a drastic shift in the narrative towards a life of freedom and redemption. His intervention is liberating and clearly signals the intrusion of the Christ-persona in the human experience at Fonds Rouge.

Manuel quickly discerned that a feud had split two families: his own family and that of his fiancée, Annaise, and in effect alienated the villagers from each other. He would soon

discover that the solution to this crisis will not be easy. Collective salvation would involve the shed blood of a man resulting in peace and reconciliation in the community. In fact, in several instances in the plot, the narrator deploys energetic rhetoric to describe the perpetuating decades of enmity and hostility between the peasants and between different family members in the village. The first account describes the general nature of the clashes in the everyday experience:

Before each hut, in the shade of the few trees that the drought had spared, peasants brooded over their ill fortune. Quarrels exploded without apparent motive. The chattering of the women became irritable, turned easily into arguments. The youngsters kept out of reach of cuffs, but their prudence did them no good. (76)

The stress on communal discord is further explained below as Manuel roams different locals and sites in the neighborhoods:

Manuel returned to the main road and went through the village...Something more than trees, gardens, and hedges separated them. Anger, secret and repressed, that a spark could ignite into violence, aggravated by poverty, gave each peasant as he faced his neighbor that stitched-up mouth, that evasive glance, that had itching for a blow. (78)

The third scene elaborates on the notorious feud between two families in this manner: “One could see that all these years the past had never been buried with Dorisca and Sauveur. They kept it ever fresh like a half-closed wound continually irritated by a fingernail” (78). Finally, the narrator remarks that “the womenfolks were the most enraged. They were truly furious (78-9). Having been persuaded of his messianic mission to nurture concord and encourage congenial relationships between the peasants, Manuel had reasoned that “those Fonds Rouge peasants, those hardheaded, rock-headed peasants needed that water to bring about friendship between brothers again and to make life over as it ought to be—an act of good will between men, by want and fate made equals” (107). For Manuel, the phenomenon is not a saga

of the survival but of the preservation of the whole community.

II. **The Rhetoric of Hope and The Intervention of Manuel as Peasant-Redeemer and Christ-Like Figure**

As the events unfold in the narrative, it would become obvious that common suffering and the condition in common among the peasants would require the emergence of a vanguardist hero-savior and a promethean figure—one who would bring shalom to and make things right at Fonds Rouge. Toward this end, Jacques Roumain could construct a dynamic persona out of Manuel, “the ultimate authority and the author of a prelapsarian truth in the novel” (Dash 79). In other words, the trajectories of excruciating dilemma of death and life, and despair and hope created the space for the rise of Manuel as the Christ.

The thrust of *Masters of the Dew* is undeniably the underlying ideology that “hope returns with the return of Manuel,” (Dayan 83) and the representation of Manuel as the embodiment of hope, life, reconciliation, and redemption. Foremost, Manuel speaks to the peasant Laurélien about finding a common solution for the drought crisis:

“Laurélien,” he said, “I’m going to talk frankly to you. Listen to me, please. Listen carefully: This water problem is life or death for us. I spent part of the night wide awake. I was sleepless and restless because I kept thinking. . .I reasoned, what’s the way out of this misery? The more I thought it over, the more I realized there was only one road and a straight one at that—we’ve got to look for water. (Roumain 59)

Manuel’s next declaration that “there was only one road and a straight one” is probably a linguistic code revealing that he believes himself to be the only way to the water that will adequately satisfy the dire needs of the community. Suppose this presumption is/would be true,

then the assertion may be parallel to a saying attributed to the historical Jesus in the fourth Gospel. In a conversation with the follower Thomas who was skeptical about finding the right way to God, Jesus offers this provocative rejoinder: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Elsewhere, Jesus asserts, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7). Subsequently, Manuel exhibits enthusiastic confidence that he would provide the water to the dying and drying village: “Well, I swear I’ll find water and I’ll bring it to the plain with the rope of a canal around its neck. I’m telling you, I, Manuel Jean-Joseph!” (Roumain 59). Manuel’s statement is almost reminiscent of Jesus’s words to the Samaritan woman that he would supply the “living water” (John 4:7-28). Finally, when Laurélien asked him how he’s going to deliver the water to the people, he simply said to him: “just believe me” (59) as Jesus had often ordered his followers and the people in the surroundings to do likewise—that is, the decisive call to faith in the Christ of faith (John 12:44; 11:25; 14:1).

The narrator supplies substantial information about the condition which tranquil hope was born in the tangle of hopelessness, unrest, and social death. The peasants were once “one big family;” nonetheless, the land problem had caused a big divide between them and introduced disunity and hate. As Bienaimé recounts to Manuel:

We finally got the land divided up, with the help of the justice of peace. But we also divided up all that hate between us. . . Each one nurses his own grudge and whets his own anger. There’s our side---and the others. Between the two, blood! You can wade in blood!... Thus a new enemy had come into being in the village and had divided it as surely as a boundary line. It was hate with its bitter brooding over the bloody past, its fratricidal quarrels.” (Roumain 63)

Accordingly, in the process of developing trust and cultivating tolerance, the peasants would have to acknowledge deliberately that something had gone wrong in the village. In the

same line of thought, they would have to confess to each other that darkness, brokenness and selfishness had reshaped and redefined the social interactions between them. The gist of *Masters of the Dew* is for the peasants to come to collective consciousness and to serve each other, and without each other they would not be able to enter into the life of compassion and communion with weaker peasants (Hauerwas & Vanier 90). Manuel's project of freedom would entail the imperative of "prophetic witness of weakness," to use a phrase from Hauerwas and Vanier. His ultimate goal is to make all things right in Fonds Rouge; this vision of the new life is rooted in the virtues of hope, faith, and forgiveness. Manuel wants to instill optimistic hope and embolden the people to perform small acts of kindness to each other toward the common good and social development. This is particularly evident in his speech to the gathering peasants which is designed to arouse collective consciousness:

We're miserable, that's true. But do you know why, brother? Because of our ignorance. We don't know yet what a force we are, what a single force—all the peasants, all the Negroes of plain and hill, all united. Some day, when we get wise to [do] that, we'll rise up from one end of the country to the other. Then we'll call a General Assembly of the Masters of the Dew, a great big *coumbite* [cooperate communal labor] of framers, and we'll clear out poverty and plant a new life. (Roumain 75)

Manuel's resolution is to salvage the condition of the peasants through his rhetoric of persuasion to the degree that they would be compelled to negotiate their differences and ideologies toward group collaboration and unity. For Manuel, social solidarity would orchestrate new forms of communal bond and engender new forms of social hope. Solidarity planted in hope and trust is palatable for group consciousness and cohesion. It is exactly to this end-goal that Manuel could draw a strategic plan to discovering the water for his people:

If he found water, everyone's help would be needed. It wouldn't be a small matter to bring it down to the plain. They would have to organize a great *coumbite* of all the

peasants. Thus the water would bring them together again. Its cool breath would dispel the evil odor of spite and hatred. With the new plants, with the fruit-and corn-laden fields, the earth overflowing with simple fecund life, a brotherly community would be reborn. (80)

At this juncture in the conversation, I find Richard Rorty's theory of solidarity important. In his seminal work, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty articulates a plausible argument for building and promoting social hope and achieving social solidarity among individual citizens toward an effective democratic order and resourceful civil society, particularly in the North American context. In *Masters of the Dew*, Roumain sustains such a vision in the social context of Haiti's peasantry and the greater Haitian civil society within the communist notion of a global, urban proletariat. In Rorty as it is in Roumain, there is a rhetorical association between solidarity, ethnocentrism, and cosmopolitanism:

We have to start where *we* are—that is part of the force of Sellar's claim that we are under no obligations other than the "we-intentions" of the communities with which we identify. What takes the curse off this ethnocentrism is not that the largest such group is "humanity" or "all rational beings"—no one, I have been claiming, *can* make *that* identification—but, rather, that is the ethnocentrism of a "we" which is dedicated to enlarging itself, to creating an even larger and more variegated *ethnos*. It is the "we" of the people who have been brought us to distrust ethnocentrism. (198)

The emphasis on the subject pronoun "we" in Rorty as the archetypal collective is analogous to Manuel's deployment of the following phrases: "we're miserable," "our ignorance" and "we don't know." I suggest that these statements are intended to communicate the common condition of life that bonds the people in Manuel's village. Rorty's project of human solidarity—as it is for Manuel and Fonds Rouge peasants—is something that individuals would have to create together because it involves collective effort, creative imagination and utopian sensibility. Rorty articulates the concept in this manner:

In my utopia, human solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized by clearing away "prejudice" or burrowing down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal

to be achieved. It is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people different from ourselves... (xvi)

Manuel's pronouncement, "We'll clear out poverty and plant a new life," presupposes the imperative of communal solidarity, friendship, and the ethics of shared cooperation. As a consequence, he goes around from door to door conversing with peasants, making new acquaintances, renewing old relationships, and organizing the peasants together. He affirms the common humanity and the shared suffering that binds them. Manuel calls the inhabitants to outdo their egoistic ways. Clearly, he has introduced himself to the villagers at Fonds Rouge as a "charismatic" whose project entails public peace through his charismatic influence and leadership-authority.

Children were following him, fascinated by his great height. To them, he was the man who had crossed the sea, who had lived in the strange country of Cuba. He was crowned with a halo of mysteries and legends. Manuel caught one of them by the arm... He patted the boy's head that had been shaved with the bottom of a bottle. (Roumain 81)

Sociologist Max Weber explains that

Charisma is an irrational power of attracting other persons. A charismatic is dependent on the expectations, hopes and assent of the persons around him. Charisma always develops in interactions. Charisma is characterized by being able to gain direct influence without mediation and support from authorities, institutions and traditions that have already been recognized. (Theissen and Mertz 186)

Weber elaborates further on the concept:

The term "charisma" will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superman, or at least specifically exceptional power and qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a "leader"... It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. (186)

As it will become evident in subsequent paragraphs, these defined attributes underscore Manuel's charismatic persona and performance and his considerable influence on the villagers. Manuel's charisma was evident in his relation to his family, to his friends, to the peasant community at Fonds Rouge, and even to those who opposed him. Manuel inspires hope first in the heart of his closest friend and fiancée, Annaise, who would eventually become an agent of hope and reconciliation in the community. In a delightful conversation between the two interlocutors, Manuel asks Annaise to trust him and to exercise confidence in his ability to solve the drought problem and alleviate the destructive poverty haunting the people. Manuel's messianic function can be observed in the articulated rhetoric of hope and renovation below:

[Annaise] "But what can we do? Arent' we helpless and with nobody to turn to when misfortune comes? It's just fate, that's all"

[Manuel] "No! As long as your arms are not lopped off and you're determined to fight. What you say, Anna, if the valley got all painted over, if one of the savanna the Guinea grass grew, high as a swollen river?"

"I'd say thanks for such good fortune."

"What would you say if the corn grew in the cool fields?"

"I'd say thanks for the blessing."

"Cant' you just see the clusters of millet, and those thieving blackbirds that we've got to chase away?"

Can't you see the ears of corn?"

She closed her eyes. "Yes, I see."...

Can't you see the vegetables and the ripe fruit?"

"*Oui! Oui!*" [Yes! Yes!]

"You see all that wealth?"

She opened her eyes. "You've made me dream! What I see is poverty."

"Yes, that' what there could be, if there were only---what, Anna?"

"Rain. Not just a little drizzle—but big, thick, lasting rain!"...

"Suppose, Anna, suppose I discovered water? Suppose I brought it to our plain?"

(Roumain 88-9)

The importance of this stimulating dialogue between these two conversational partners (Manuel and Annaise) is sustained by Manuel's rhetoric of hopefulness and his clarion call to Annaise to have hope both in him and in the promising future. Manuel presents himself as the embodiment of hope and the water which the peasants are earnestly seeking. Manuel also portrays himself as "the great enthusiast of hope," as this notion is amplified in the remaining part of the conversation. After his death, the effects of hope and faith would have paramount significance on Annaise to the point that she was actively publicizing Manuel's Gospel of hope and leading the peasants to the water springs. Manuel, having been swayed by the prospect of an emancipative life at Fonds Rouge, seeks to assure Annaise that hope would be vital in the establishment of the "new community of hope" there. It is the functional character of hope and its liberative potential in society that had also incited Manuel to march fearlessly toward a post-despair future.

Vincent Lloyd in his important work, *The Problem of Grace*, makes some noteworthy observations which connect the rhetoric of hope to the rhetoric of faith, which I find sufficiently relevant to our discussion here. According to Lloyd, the rhetoric of hope

convinces listeners to overlook the tragic. It smoothes over rough edges of social norms, disappearing apparent conflicts and filling in apparent gaps... The rhetoric of hope cultivates the virtue of faith. After all, the rhetoric of hope urges its audience to persevere in the face of the tragic. But this would be to misunderstand. The virtue of faith requires acknowledging the tragic. The rhetoric of hope persuades by eliding the tragic. The virtue of faith involves mourning, but the rhetoric of hope conjures an object which can never be lost. (75)

The quality of hope Manuel strives to impart in Annaise and the community at large is boundless and looks ahead to a new creation. Manuel speaks of a hope and "a faith in the future possibilities of moral humans, a faith which is hard to distinguish from love for, and hope for, the

human community” (76). Recognizing his messianic identity, Annaise believed that Manuel was the bearer of hope and instrumental to social betterment in the village:

She looked at him in amazement. “Could you do that, Manuel?” She gazed at each of his features with extraordinary intensity, as if, slowly, he had been revealed to her, as if she were recognizing him for the first time. She said in a voice muffled by emotion, “Yes, you’ll do it. You’re the man who will find water. You’ll be master of the springs, you’ll walk through the dew in the midst of your growing things. I know you are right—and I know you are strong.” (Roumain 89)

Manuel insures Annaise that he wouldn’t be able to get the task done alone; the venture would require the individual collaboration of the entire community; and that “all peasants will have a part in it” (89). Manuel stresses that “if there’s no reconciliation it won’t work out” (89). The messianic consciousness of Manuel is further revealed when Annaise accompanies him to the springs. “She [Annaise] walked in the mysterious shade of the giant fig tree. ‘That’s the keeper of the water,’ she whispered in a sort of sacred terror. ‘He’s the keeper of the water’” (117). Annaise consciously equates Manuel with the fig tree, an important insight that signals that the hero-savior was indeed “The keeper of the water” is both striking and significant for the climax of the story. Manuel is the personification of the very water which the villagers need. Annaise then asked: “Show me the water, Manuel” (118). Manuel moves on to dig in the soil and commands Annaise to “Look!” Immediately, “she knelt down and gestured ‘I greet you, holy water!’ I see it, she said...He was beside her” (118). Openly in this passage is the phenomenon of seeing and believing, which is closely tied as the causal effect of enduring hope and sustaining faith. And the news of great joy about Manuel finding the water was spreading rapidly throughout the village and beyond, “from mouth to mouth, from door to door, and... all over the country” (129).

Manuel's offering the promise of water to Annaise and eventually to the rest of the villagers alludes to Jesus's presentation of himself as the well of living water to his disciples, to the peasant communities in Galilee and its surroundings, and to the Samaritan woman.⁵ As the new community leader and "Chief," as the peasants reverently call him, Manuel directs the people to step-by-step-instructions on how to retrieve and safeguard the water springs:

Now, we've got to do first is plant a row of poles close together to hold the soil, because if we begin digging in the basin, it will be just cracking a pitcher—the water will flood in all directions. Afterward, we'll dig the main canal down through the plain past the acacias, and in every little field each one of us will have his own ditch for his own irrigation. When the main canal and the others are ready, we'll open up the basin. It would be a good idea to appoint a trustee, too, somebody that all the peasants believe in, to distribute the water according to what each peasant needs. You see, it's a big job. (Roumain 123)
He continues:

Let's lend each other a hand. I come to propose peace and reconciliation. What do any of us gain in being enemies? If you want an answer, look at your children! Look at your growing things—death is on them. Misery and desolation ravage Fonds Rouge. So let your better judgment have a voice. Yes, blood has been shed, I know, but water will wash the blood away. (124)

For Manuel, communal cooperation is a critical and necessary element for his vision of social betterment, human flourishing, and collective anticipation. He also accentuates the need for forgiveness as "a central part of deliverance from evil" in the community (Wright 135). Like Jesus in the Gospel stories, Manuel had stated that he had come to bring peace and reconciliation.

⁵ According to John 7:37-38, "Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" And in the same manner as it is recorded in John 4:10 that Jesus offers the "living water" to the adulterous Samaritan woman: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The call to be one is reiterated in Manuel's memorable words: "There's only one way to save ourselves—only one, not two. It's for us to make again one good family of peasants, to call together again in the name of brother to brother our union of tillers of the soil, to share our pain and our labor between comrades and comrades...." (Roumain 124). The character Manuel referenced here and above is nothing less than a revealer of a transcendent message which calls for special understanding and wisdom. This particular understanding is the decisive act which would bring about communal love, acceptance, and equality (Theissen and Mertz 33). He knows that reconciliation is a long and fragile journey, and it would constantly involve the bridging of diverse worlds (Katongole and Rice 11-19). Yet, his program of reconciliation makes a claim on the life of every person and every peasant at Fonds Rouge because the way things are is not the way they have to be. "Reconciliation is not a 'solution' or an end product, but a process and an ongoing search" (18-9).

Manuel articulates the rhetoric of reconciliation and redemption with greater emphasis on communal love and reciprocity:

For a long time Fonds Rouge has had a rotten smell. Hate poisons a person's breath. It's like a stagnant pool of green mud, of cooked bile, of spoiled, rancid, mortifying souls. But now that water's going to irrigate the plain, that it's going to flow in the fields, he who was an enemy will become a friend. He who was apart will unite, and peasants will no longer act like mad dogs to other peasants. Each man will recognize his equal, his likeness, and his neighbor. (Roumain 125-6)

His humanism is an invitation to make an urgent existential decision, which is at the crossroad of death and life, turmoil and peace, suffering and redemption. As a forerunner and ideologist of communism, he presses upon the peasants to transcend themselves and their egregious ideologies and destructive actions (Theissen and Mertz 2). In response, the peasant

Laurelien quickly interprets Manuel's words as "the living truth," (Roumain 126) as Peter once said to Jesus, "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). If Jesus is the Wisdom of God to his followers, then Manuel is the Sophia of Fonds Rouge to his people. He is the ultimate revealer of truth to the community and holds the key to communal gnosis and understanding. Manuel's true identity is disclosed through his words; his truth is even more indestructible as we are informed of his untimely death: "He died in the bloom of his youth" (Roumain 177; Dash 79).

It is good to mention here not every peasant had walked the path of reconciliation nor every individual in the village sought to work out Manuel's proposal of this new way of living and thinking. For example, Manuel's own father, Bienaime, was reluctant at first to embark on the road of harmony and unity. In the same way, other peasants such as the notorious family Sauveur-Dorsica actively opposed Manuel. Some peasants even conspired to put him to death because they perceived him to be "a bad character, a dangerous Negro, who spoke words of rebellion to the peasants" (Roumain 140). Here, the author is probably alluding to a specific event in the life of the historical Jesus. In his judgment before Pilate, Jesus was called a rebel and the people accused him for inciting revolts against the Roman Empire.⁶

Manuel has not only conceived himself as the community's peasant-Messiah and redeemer, he has so disclosed himself in such a way to the people. In fact, he predicted that he would die vicariously "so that life was soon to have a rebirth at Fonds Rouge" (140). We soon

⁶ Recently, some biblical and postcolonial religious scholars have written generously on the idea that Jesus was a radical anti-imperialist and social activist: John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Bibliography* (New York: HarperOne, 1994); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002); William R. Herzog II, *Jesus, Justice and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Joerg Rieger, *Christ & Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2007)

learn in the story of his premature death. Roumain's description of Manuel's death is vivid and full of biblical allusions and parallel to the sufferings and passion of Christ. After a successful meeting with his friend Larivoire in which they discussed how to gather the community to bring the water down in the village, Manuel was violently attacked with a deadly blow by an enemy of peace and reconciliation:

A crackle of crushed grass made him turn around. He had not time to parry the blow. A shadow danced before him, then struck again. The taste of blood rose in his mouth he staggered and fell. His torch went out...A sharp pain nailed him to the ground...He succeeded in raising up on his elbows to drag himself a little way. He was too weak to cry for help...his side and shoulder pierced by dagger thrusts...Two small black wounds pierced his side and his back. (152,155)

With his hands outstretched like a blind man feeling his way through the darkness, he crossed the road, but his foot slipped in the ditch and he fell. Clawing at thistles and weeds with his fingernails, he crawled to the fence, and stood up again in an effort of desperate determination...with his arm he caught hold of a post, but his weight pulled him down and he rolled to the ground. (154)

The passages above which serve as a passion narrative in the novel unmistakably expose that Manuel's sufferings led to his decease in the same manner Jesus had suffered a vicious death at Golgotha. Like Jesus, Manuel was severely wounded and pierced on his sides. The narrator reports Manuel was unable to escape this brutal and slow death even as he managed himself to get home in "terrible pain through his wounds" and to die at the hands of his bemoaned mother (154). Without delay, he charges his mother to "Go see Larivoire. Tell him the will of my blood that's been shed—reconciliation—reconciliation so that life can start all over again, so that day can break on the dew" (158). Manuel forbids his mother not to seek his revenge because the cycle of internal violence will not end and the water, which is a catalyst for hope, peace, and unity, will be lost: "If you send word to Hilarion [the sheriff], then that old Sauveur-Dorisca

story will start all over again—hate and revenge will live on among the peasants. The water will be lost” (158). In an indirect way, Manuel’s words to the mother who wants justice for his dying son are redolent of Jesus’s mandate to Peter to put his sword down and not to seek retaliation when he was attacked and seized by a group of Roman soldiers.⁷ C. S. Lewis is supportive here that human beings are imperfect creatures who must be improved and individuals who must also lay down their arms (88).

Reconciliation as a project of collective effort and human solidarity with greater possibilities for social improvement and liberation at Fonds Rouge describes unequivocally the messianic function of Manuel. On one hand, the peasants could not have imagined nor have they either conceived that restoration and redemption would cost the innocent life and the shed blood of their hero-peasant, Manuel Jean-Joseph. On the other hand, Manuel had predicted his own death as well as insisted that the entire community needed mutual forbearance and reciprocal forgiveness in order to be healed and liberated holistically from their misery. This suffering community that was devastated, alienated, and split by mutual abhorrence and internal strife needed to be fixed, and that reconciliation was the right goal in human conflict resulting in the gift of peace and the promise of harmony (Katongole and Rice 23-5).

Manuel, whose name means “God with us,” had assumed the position of servant leadership and the personification of God’s presence in the midst of the people at the Fonds Rouge. His definitive blueprint was not so much to assist the peasants finding the water—as this was a vital issue in the village—rather to create a new community of freedom and wholeness. Manuel’s messianism and social meaning is summarized in this phrase: He is the Fonds Rouge

⁷ Matthew 26:50-52 reads, “Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’”

peasant who had returned from Cuba to his native land to save his people and to effect social change in their midst through a violent and substitutionary death.

III. **Manuel or Jesus Remembered? The Rhetoric of Redemption and The Theological Meaning of Manuel's Death**

The language of sacrifice is pervasive in *Masters of the Dew*. It bears great theological significance as it sheds light on the character and activism of the novel's protagonist. Manuel is metaphorically presented as the scapegoat of the community and as a symbolic sacrifice in the unfolding story. On a comparative level, Manuel like Jesus was seen as a threat to communal peace and unity to the Fonds Rouge peasants; and like Jesus, he was hated without a cause. From the perspective of the novelist, Manuel was an innocent victim who had chosen to give his life willingly for the restoration of his people. We shall now turn to the theory of scapegoating articulated by French literary critic and philosopher René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* to help us gain some insights about the sacrifice language and to demask the scapegoating mechanism in the novel.

In the excellent text mentioned above, Girard advances the idea that the central role of the four Gospels was to "demask the mechanism of scapegoating" (Volk 292). He posits that the Gospel accounts were written from the perspective of the victim and thus presented Jesus (the prototype victim) as a scapegoat. Girard has not only commented on the theological sense of Jesus's death as a sacrifice for his people but also on the social implications of his death, which he understands is vitally important to our understanding of the relationship between the sacrificial victim and the community, and the social order and violence at that time. He explains that "[T]he violence of the cultural order is revealed in the Gospels...and the cultural order

cannot survive such a revelation” (Vanhoozer, “The Atonement” 387). He declares deliberately that the goal of Jesus’s sacrificial death was “to be rid of violence, the violence of just retribution” (387). He moves on to describe the phenomenon of sacrifice in primitive cultures.

Girard remarks that in primitive societies “sacrifice plays a very real role...and the problem of substitution concerns the entire community. The victim is not a substitution for some particularly endangered individual, nor is it offered up to some individual of particularly bloodthirsty temperament. Rather, it is a substitute for all the members of the community” (8). Girard also contends that the social function of sacrifice is the restoration of peace and harmony in the community: “The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric” (8). He also adds that sacrifice aims at quelling violence within the community and preventing conflict from erupting (14, 42). Sacrifice not only conceals but also reveals (22).

Masters of the Dew has not only reported that violence or enmity was intrinsic to the Fonds Rouge life but it has also shaped social exchanges and dynamics between the peasants. As Manuel reminds the peasants, “For a long time Fonds Rouge has had a rotten smell. Hate poisons a person’s breath. It’s like a stagnant pool of green mud, of cooked bile, of spoiled, rancid, mortifying fouts” (Roumain 125-6). He strongly believes—as a solution to the communal conundrum—that “The only way out of this situation is to make up” (125). Manuel will be the substitutionary atonement of the people in order to effect real social changes.

Furthermore, Girard holds that because social conflict and violence are inherent to the origin of every culture and every religion therefore the economy of sacrifice is at the heart of every “ethical” religion and the symbiotic solution to the problem of evil (Vanhoozer, “The Atonement” 384-5). He advances the controversial claim that “The dark secret of civilization

is that society and religion alike are founded on collective violence” (384). He goes on to expound on the nature of sacrifice and clarify further that sacrifice is “an institution essentially if not entirely symbolic...Because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed” (Girard 1). In the next chapters in the book, Girard expands on the relationship between the surrogate victim and violence. While the function of sacrifice requires a surrogate victim, in ritual sacrifice the victim, when actually put to death, diverts violence from its forbidden objectives within the community (101).

Girard puts forth the idea that—since sacrifice is a communal institution—if the substitution is seen “in terms of individual psychological mechanisms” then it provides an inadequate picture of the process (101). In other words, the victim dies vicariously as a martyr for the welfare of the community. This is exactly the sustaining argument of the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament corpus that Jesus suffered a redemptive death for the salvation of all peoples. (Whether Christological salvation becomes a practical reality in people’s lives is beyond the scope of this study.) In a similar fashion, Jacques Roumain in *Masters of the Dew* enunciates a comparable theological point that Manuel’s death was a ransom for the peace and reconciliation of the people at Fonds Rouge.

Girard further explains that

the ritual victim is never substituted for some particular member of the community or even for the community as a whole: it is always substituted for the surrogate victim. As this victim itself serves as a substitute for all the members of the community, the sacrificial substitution does indeed play the role that we have attributed to it, protecting all the members of the community from their respective violence—but always through the intermediary of the surrogate victim. (102)

He notes elsewhere that the perfect victim as a marginal figure whose death “does not automatically entail an act of vengeance” can be subject to violence without fear of reprisal by some segment of the given community (Vanhoozer, “The Atonement” 384). At Manuel’s funeral and then burial, the peasants sang together this canticle, showing that Manuel was seen as the scapegoat of the community: “The chant rose sadly from the heart of the night: *‘By what excessive kindness Thou hast taken upon Thyself the weight of our crimes. Thou has suffered cruel death to save us from death’*” (Roumain 166). The people at Fonds Rouge had reasoned that Manuel had symbolically borne upon his body “their crimes.” He had given himself up freely for their cause. And this vicarious event is interpreted as an exceptionally loving act.

It is noteworthy to highlight here that the notion of the “sacrificial atonement” had had a profound theological import on early Christian literature in First-century Rome as Jesus’s followers construed his death in an analogous way. The author of 1 Peter pronounces that “Christ also suffered for you...He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross...for by his wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:21, 24). The Gospel of Mark in particular comments on the effects of Jesus’s sacrificial death and links it to the idea of servant leadership. As Jesus reflects critically on the implication of being a committed servant to the people, he speaks prophetically that “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).⁸ Manuel’s death is seen redemptively to take away the crimes or wrongdoings of his people, that is, their sins, and to liberate their conscience of any guilt. The ultimate meaning of Manuel’s death and that of Jesus is the deliverance of their people.

The other theological motif that is painted in the story is that Manuel had suffered a violent death parallel to Jesus’s expiration as witnessed in New Testament’s atonement language.

⁸ The concept of redemption in reference to Christ’s substitutional death is further developed in Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:24; Hebrews 9:12.

After arranging a crucifix and putting flowers on the table and lightening the candles, Delira and the gathering peasants repeated in unison this line, reading Manuel's story in the light of the story of Jesus, "*And now, Lord, Thou lettest Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word*" (Roumain 166). The represented community deduced that the death of Manuel was the causal will of God as it is also said of that of Jesus in New Testament writings. Manuel is identified as "The Servant of the Lord" whose death was foreseen and predicted according to Scriptures. The New Testament writers comparably ascertain Jesus as the suffering "Servant of Yahweh." They explain theologically that Jesus had fulfilled the so-called "Servant Songs of Isaiah" as recorded in the book of Isaiah chapters 40-53,⁹ and his suffering was believed to have great salvific significance for the future of the nation of Israel.

Manuel, having assumed the messianic epithet the "Servant of Yahweh," works resolutely toward the preservation and liberation of the Fonds Rouge community. Manuel as Jesus the suffering servant died so that the people might live and the story of his substitutionary life has saving effects (Rosenberg 385). At Manuel's burial, the people give new and corporate meaning of his death as a giving offering for the hope and destiny of Fonds Rouge:

It's over, yes, it's over. Joachin, Dieuville, Fleurimond, and Laurelien lifted up the coffin. There were wails and groans and voices that cried, "Help me, O God!" for the tall Negroes were carrying the coffin away. They were carrying their brother off toward that earth that he loved so much and for which he had died. (Roumain 177)

⁹ For studies on this topic, see R. T. France, "The Servant of the Lord in the Teaching of Jesus," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968) 26-52; C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948); George A. F. Knight, *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Roy A. Rosenberg, "Jesus, Isaac, and the 'Suffering Servant,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84:4 (December 1965): 381-388.

The last sentence plainly indicates that Manuel—whom the peasants called “their brother,” an intimate term for friendship—gave up his life because of his unconditional love for them, an interesting biblical resonance to Jesus’s self-understanding resulting in his self-predicted death to his friends: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends” (John 15:3; 3:16). Manuel’s sacrifice is motivated by selfless love. Paul, illuminating on his doctrine of the atonement to the Christians in Galatia, declares that Christ’s death was also motivated by noble love and “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Moreover, the narrator of the novel mentions that “They [the peasants] walked slowly toward the edge of the thorn acacias, and the cortege of peasants followed them. The women were weeping and the men walked in silence” (Roumain 177).

Manuel’s leadership role at Fonds Rouge and his untimely passing on behalf of the peasants are characterized as an act of service in the same manner that

Jesus appeals for a revolution in his disciples’ idea of what constitutes greatness, to his own example... To be great was, for Jesus, to serve, to be humiliated. His great act of service was to be in the humiliation of his death for the redemption of others, the very antithesis of the world’s idea of greatness... That his disciples too should give their lives as a ransom for many. This is simply a topical, though unique, example of the humble, self-denying service to which he called them. (France 33)

“Poor devil! Antoine said. ‘He died in the bloom of his youth and he was a good fellow, this Manuel’” (Roumain 177). Antoine speaks sympathetically of Manuel as an innocent victim as the New Testament writers entertain the idea that Jesus was the paschal “lamb of God” who died vicariously as a ransom for the salvation of the world (John 1:29).¹⁰ Next, the storyteller

¹⁰ The author of the Gospel of John writes, “The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” The writer (Paul) of 1 Corinthians states that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (15:3).

informs us that “A Stone rolled down and struck against the coffin. Earth flowed into the grave. The coffin began to disappear” (Roumain 177). This particular imagery resonates to the biblical description of Jesus’s burial and resurrection as documented in the final chapters of the synoptic Gospels.

‘Now you’re dead, Chief, dead and buried. But your words we won’t forget. And, if, one day on the hard road of this life, weariness should tempt us with, what’s the use? and It’s not worth the trouble, we’ll hear voice and we’ll be of good courage. ‘Well, it’s finished,’ Antoine said. May you find rest, Brother Manuel, in that eternity of eternities?’(178)

The last statement is on par with Jesus’s own words from the cross proclaiming “It is finished” (John 19:30). For Antoine the life and deeds of Manuel lead to a specific conclusion or *telos*: Manuel’s messianic mission is fulfilled in salvation-history as the completion of the will and intention of God. Speaking to Louisime Jean-Pierre, the mother of Manuel recounts what his son had told her before his death: “Here’s what Manuel, my boy, told me. ‘You’ve offered sacrifices to the *loas* [Vodou spirits or deities], you’ve offered the blood of chickens and young goats to make the rain fall. All that has been useless. Because what counts is the sacrifice of a man, the blood of a man” (181). This stunning statement echoes a number of biblical texts commenting on the peculiar meaning of Jesus’s death in early Christian thought. The author of the book of Hebrews declares that “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4)... “Which cannot make the worshipper perfect in conscience” (Hebrews 9:9). The sacrifice of Jesus whose goal was to remove sins also clears up the conscience of the beneficiaries. This same author also pronounces, “He [Christ] has appeared once for all...to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself... Christ has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins....” through the offering of his own body once for all (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12).

As Biblical scholar Leon Morris observes, “In the New Testament, when the sacrificial terminology is used, it is mostly to emphasize what Christ has done. The sacrifice that matters is the death of Jesus on Calvary’s cross” (66). Put it another way, the death of Manuel as an atoning sacrifice is akin to that of Jesus, and has saving merits.

We might come to the incontestable inference that Manuel was aware of his messianic consciousness, role and mission, as biblical scholars inform us about Jesus’s self-understanding of his messianic identity. In the words of Søren Kierkegaard, Manuel was the “martyr of the future” (de Vries 160, 164).¹¹ Manuel’s death is self-giving; it aims at restoring communion between the peasants at Fond Rouge—even with those who refused to accept his message of reconciliation and peace.

Continuing the conversation with the attentive peasants, Delira also adds: “He also told me, ‘Go and find Larivoire. Tell him the wish of my blood that has been spilled---reconciliation, reconciliation!’ He said it twice. ‘So that life can begin anew, so the day can break on the dew” (Roumain 181). Here, blood and reconciliation are connected with Manuel’s vicarious death, and blood and life are also linked intimately in view of the previous declaration above. First, it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life and because of the important linkage of life and blood, atonement is made possible (Morris 53).¹² Manuel sees his own blood and life closely interconnected. To put life and blood in such an intimate association indicates that there is not much difference between them (53-4). Therefore, his life is redeeming and salvific, leading hypothetically to communal reconciliation and unity. Notably, Manuel does not dissociate blood

¹¹ Kierkegaard writes about Jesus’s death in this manner, “For between God and man there is a struggle and it’s a matter of life and death—wasn’t the God-man put to death?”

¹² Also in Leviticus 17:11, it is read, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”

from death itself, and in his understanding blood signifies both death and life. Such reading however proves “that atonement is made, not by death, but by the offering of life...Atonement is secured when life is surrendered, released, set free for a new function” (Morris 56-7).

Manuel’s life is given in violent death as a vicarious act. The passing of the hero of the story foresees the breaking-in of a new community and the ushering of a new world in which peace, truth, justice will reign supreme. This particular reading of the “new creation” as a theological motif in *Masters of the Dew* supports Jacques Roumain’s theo-political utopianism correspondingly to the theology of the new creation in the Gospels and in Paul’s theory of cosmos renewal. In addition, it seems to us that the writer of the novel has deployed the sacrificial mechanism to remake the world of the peasants a place in which the need to sacrifice—in the rhetorical and symbolic sense—others can be eschewed as it is the case of the Gospels’ interpretation of Jesus’s self-giving sacrifice. Manuel had projected a new world of self-giving grace, forgiveness, and a world of total inclusion and embrace (Volk 295). The new life that is anticipated has deep roots in his spilled blood, the foundation-stroke in the project of communal renewal and peace.

As theologian Miroslav Volf points out, “Since the new world has become reality in the crucified and resurrected Christ it is possible to live the new world in the midst of the old in an act of gratuitous forgiveness without giving up the struggle for truth and grace” (294). The rhetoric of hope and redemption has not only awaited the project of collective reconciliation but “It (reconciliation) presupposes a relation of alienation and its effects a relation of favour and peace. This new relation is constituted by the removal of the ground for the alienation”

(Murray 42).¹³ Substantially, reconciliation is the thrust of *Masters of the Dew*. Morris speaks instructively about the scheme of reconciliation:

Reconciliation is a term we use quite commonly and in much the same way as people used it in Bible days. It means 'restore to friendship,' 'make up after a quarrel'... It means bring people into a state of friendship after they have been at loggerheads. It means turning people from being enemies into being friends. It means replacing enmity with friendship. It means ending a quarrel. (133)

Speaking to Nerestan, Delira brings to surface Manuel's decisive vision:

I came to bring you the last wish of my son. He was talking to me, but he was really talking to all of you, 'Sing my mourning,' he said, 'sing my mourning with a son of the *coumbite* [collaborative labor]!' It's customary to sing mourning with hymns for the dead, but he, Manuel had chosen a hymn for the living—the chant of the *coumbite*, the chant of the soil, of the water, the plants, of friendship between peasants, because he wanted his death to be the beginning of life for you. (Roumain 182)

First, the purpose of both statements above seek to convey to us that Manuel had envisaged a new and redeemed community at Fonds Rouge. As the prediscursive logos in the story, he had conferred a new intelligibility on the broken, fragmented, and fallen Fonds Rouge (Dash 79). "His manner is conciliatory, and his words paint visions of harmony and plenty, if they will only work together" (Fowler 230). Second, the close connection between death and life is another way Manuel had interpreted his life functionally for the common good of the community and asserted his job of reconciliation and restoration.

Jacques Roumain presents Manuel's death as a vicarious event in the same way Paul talks about the gist of Christ's death to the Christians in Corinth: "For our sake, he made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of

¹³ In the same page, Murray makes the following observation about Christ's death, "The ground is sin and guilt. The removal is wrought in the vicarious work of Christ, when he was made sin and guilt, the condemnation and the curse of those on whose behalf he died."

God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Brian Vickers points out that “Paul asserts that Christ’s death was representative, saying, ‘one died for all,’ thus stressing the vicarious nature of the cross—that Christ died ‘for all,’ i.e., in their place... The context of 2 Corinthians 5:21 suggests that Paul is referring to Christ as a sacrifice for sin with the phrase ‘made to be sin’” (167).¹⁴

The saving significance of Manuel’s activistic life is foundational for communal compassion and alliance and the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation thereof. As Vanhoozer notes in regard to the saving death of Jesus, it is “a practice that is ineffably beautiful” (“The Atonement” 391). The passing of Manuel is foremost an act of sacrificial love. The narrator at the end of the story remarks that “They [the peasants] had been working lately right by the spring itself, at the very head of the water. They had followed Manuel’s instructions point by point. He was dead, Manuel, but he was still guiding them” (Roumain 185). This passage is enlightening in the special way that the peasants remember Manuel, re-create his presence and memories, and follow his tactful guidance. The people in the village see themselves continuing Manuel’s plan of teamwork and networking as well as the program of social development and human progress. The last statement alludes to the manner in which Jesus—assuring his unfailing mystical presence with his followers—speaks prophetically in his post-resurrection appearance: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19). The dictum could also signal Jesus’s announcement of the immediate coming of the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit) as “a future event” (Hamilton 84)—and his guiding role as Teacher to his followers: “He [The Spirit] will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). It is also observed in the same text that “He [The Paraclete] will

¹⁴ Paul states to the Christians at Corinth the following, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).¹⁵

The fact that Manuel is remembered through his guiding words may lead us to the conclusion that the people will participate in his form of life as if he were actively present with them and guiding their way to future hope. So to speak, Manuel’s rhetoric of motives and rhetoric of activism might serve as the moral and relational empowerment to the individual peasant and the community at large. The closing words of the novel equate Manuel’s bewildered death with the eventual revitalization of the community:

A thin thread of water advanced, flowing through the plain, and the peasants went along with it, shouting and singing. Antoine led them proudly beating his drum.

“Oh, Manuel! Manuel! Manuel! Why are you dead?”

Delira groaned.

“No,” said Annaise. She smiled through her tears.

“No, he isn’t dead.”

She took the old woman’s hand and pressed it gently against her belly where the new life was stirring. (Roumain 188)

In this last conversation between Annaise, the soon-to-be mother of Manuel’s child, and “the community of hope,” Jacques Roumain intimately associates the theme of sacrificial death to the notion of rebirth and restoration. He understands these motifs coalescing to provide a basis for understanding Manuel’s messianism and the vicarious life he gave. The new life that was stirring in Annaise’s belly is symbolically representative of the new creation and the new community to be made at Fonds Rouge.¹⁶ To express this in another way, the new life that

¹⁵ For further research on the role of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, see D. G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit, Christian Foundations* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000); D.A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); G. M. Burge, *The Anointed Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); M. Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); D. E. Holwerda, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in the Gospel of John* (Kampen:Kok, 1959).

¹⁶ Theologians and Biblical Scholars speak of Jesus as the “Suffering Servant;” the concept of “new creation” is also treated in Vickers 164.

was moving in Annaise's stomach will signify the reincarnation of Manuel, the Promethean pioneer of the new people to be. As Kaussen perceptively discerns, "The novel ends with a chapter entitled 'The End and the Beginning,' a reference to the Hegelian notion of cyclical time, in which the end of history is defined as the fulfillment of an original reconciliation and reciprocity" (122).

Masters of the Dew underscores sustaining hope and redemption—in the midst of human tragedy and collective suffering—as the climax of the story which Manuel Jean-Joseph emblematically achieved through his vicarious sufferings and death for the future good of Fonds Rouge. The novel interprets the problem of pain and suffering as a terrific human dilemma that had conditioned the rise of its protagonist as messiah-hero and redeemer. From a theological point of view, the narrative reinforces the substitutionary significance of Manuel's death. The author presents Manuel's life and death penally as a response to combat the tyranny of evil in the world. To put another way, the passing of Manuel like the death of Jesus—as interpreted in Christian theory of salvation-history—intends to set humanity free from the chaotic social order, oppressive rule, and ultimately from the problem of evil (Boyd and Eddy 113-131).

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- Kaplan, Hilary. "Nature's Equal, or Her Conquerer: Two Island Vision of Drought, Land, and Community." http://www.yale.edu/sangha/PDF_FILES/KaplanHilary2000.pdf. May 3, 2011. Jacques Roumain depicts Manuel's death as the "wondrous exchange" to appropriate.
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a theoretical concept from the French Reformer and theologian Jean Calvin. Manuel's expiation is expressive in what systematic theologian Kevin Vanhoozer phrases "the greatest act of reconciliation"—underscoring the saving significance of Jesus's death on the cross—toward the real and permanent wellbeing of Fonds Rouge peasants (*The Drama*, 2005). It is Manuel's death that would be the seal that binds the villagers in their new collaborative endeavors, and the water as a symbol of new life in the community responds to communal need and wholeness (Fowler 230, 233). *Masters of the Dew* teaches us that without suffering, there will be no compassion; without sacrificial death and selfless love, there will be no redemption.

Notes