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Battling a World of Hate with Hope: Unearthing the Life and Work of Adolphe Duhart

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Abstract

During the era surrounding the Civil War in the United States, a time when the country was at its most racially tense and divided, a group of writers in Southern Louisiana endangered their livelihood by publishing their essays, short stories, and poetry. This group consisted of free Creole men of color, who wrote fervently, showing that they too could create art like their white counterparts. These writers would frequently publish in black-run newspapers, often protecting themselves from violence by writing under pseudonyms. This is the case for Adolphe Duhart, who wrote emotionally and politically charged poetry under the name "Lelia D….T" in some of New Orleans most successful French language newspapers, such as *La Renaissance Louisianaise* and *La Tribune de la Nouvelle-Orléans*. Through exploring Duhart's life as an educator, spiritualist, soldier, and prolific poet, this paper examines the influence of Duhart and his colleagues, such as Armand Lanusse, Joanni Questy, and Henry Louis Rey, on American literature and society. Through the presentation of work by Duhart, this paper answers questions about his life in New Orleans—such as the reason behind his pseudonym, how he was influential in Louisiana spiritualism, and why the newspapers he worked for were often victims of hate crimes—and uncovers a significant part African American history that has often been systematically erased.

Keywords: French and Francophone Language and Literature, American Literature, United States History, African American Studies

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During the mid-nineteenth century in New Orleans, a group of free men of color challenged the social, economic, and political injustices that plagued their community. At a time when slavery was still legal, this group flourished, using their standing as free men to integrate themselves into the political and intellectual life of the city where they fought for the civil rights of those less fortunate. One of the most prolific and involved members of this group was Adolphe Duhart, who spent many years as a teacher and writer, publishing poems and stories under the pseudonym "Lélia D….T." As a member of this community, Duhart cultivated ideas of social and political equality for all citizens, which would come to guide his life. In the historical context of before, during, and after the Civil War, Duhart's writing and public efforts would be a key addition to the advancement of people of color in New Orleans during one of the most crucial eras in American history.

Pierre Adolphe Duhart was born on February 1st, 1830 to Adolphe Louis Duhart and Francoise Palmire Brouard in New Orleans, Louisiana ("Louisiana Birth Records"). Ancestry records show that Duhart's family originated from Saint-Domingue, in present day Haiti, as was the case for many families in New Orleans due to the surge in immigration to Louisiana of free people of color (or, *gens de couleur libres*) from Saint-Domingue following the Haitian Revolution (B. Marshall 186). These immigrants enjoyed many of the same rights when they arrived in Louisiana as they constructed large, organized communities, the most important of which were in the 6th ward, known as the Tremé district, and in the 9th ward of New Orleans. The children of these immigrants were often deemed "creole." This term was not used to determine one's racial background, but simply indicated that one was of European or African ancestry and born in the colonies, as opposed to immigrating there or being imported in the slave trade. For Duhart, who

was born in New Orleans, but was the child of newly free people from Saint-Domingue, he would have been classified during this time as Creole, but also a free person of color.

With such Haitian roots, where the earliest successful slave revolution took place in the eighteenth century, this was a progressive environment for Duhart to be raised and educated in. With a similar focus on liberation, the community of Creoles of color in New Orleans was often unified by the idea that being of African ancestry did not make them less than white Creoles. This basic tenant of equality, nourished by the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, would come to motivate this group of free people of color for years, extending into the years of the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction that followed.

Rodolphe Desdunes, one of the most well-known Creoles of color, wrote in his book chronicling the lives of his fellow citizens, *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*[1], that Duhart attended school in France during his youth (Desdunes 1911). There, he met with French Romanticism and ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which, coupled with his personal experiences with racial injustice, would come to define his life and work. Many Creoles during this time would send their children to France to be educated and they were thus immersed in the intellectualism of the French capitol. They then brought their knowledge home to Louisiana to advance their own communities.

On his return to New Orleans from France, Duhart expanded upon these ideas by quickly making acquaintance with other Creoles of color in the community: Armand Lanusse, a fellow Afro-Creole poet and educator that published a collection of poems by seventeen Creoles of color called *Les Cenelles* in 1845, Joanni Questy, another Afro-Creole poet, writer and educator alongside Duhart, Henry Louis Rey, a public civil rights activist and leader of a spiritualist séance circle, and eventually Rodolphe Desdunes as well. Over the course of many years, these Creoles

created spaces in New Orleans where they could organize their efforts towards liberation and equality.

One of the first areas they found to congregate was in the spiritualist séance group led by Henry Louis Rey, known as the *Cercle Harmonique* (Harmonic Circle). Starting in the mid-1850s and lasting until the end of Reconstruction in 1877, this group met in New Orleans to hold séances aimed at contacting the spirits of the dead. During these séances, they received messages from important figures of the past, such as Abraham Lincoln, abolitionist John Brown, the black Union Army officer Andre Cailloux, the French priest Saint Vincent de Paul, the Swedish scientist Emanuel Swedenborg, Napoleon, Maximilien de Robespierre, other figures from the French Revolution, poet Pierre-Jean de Beranger, Haitian Revolution leader Toussaint Louverture, George Washington, Montesquieu, and Voltaire. In 1871, for example, Lincoln was recorded to have prophetically said, concerning the emancipation of slavery and the ongoing fight toward liberation:

> "Political affairs will be conducive to the emancipated [slaves] who shall be rewarded despite the apparent torpor that paralyzes the efforts of his friends in his favor. He will rise in spite of obstacles; and those who crushed him under their debasing yoke, as he wept, will also weep for their miseries" [translation from French by author] (Rey 221).

Such contacts thus functioned as a school in the eyes of the spiritualists, allowing them to learn from the experiences of important revolutionaries and intellectuals of the past. This not only united them around ideas of equality and justice, but it also gave them with the tools and inspiration needed to impact their own community of New Orleans.

Subsequently, this group often involved active members of the Afro-Creole community in their séances, such as the writers Joanni Questy, Armand Lanusse, and Adolphe Duhart himself.

In her book, *Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, Melissa Daggett explains that Duhart was a frequent participant in Rey's séances; they were close acquaintances and "indirectly connected by marriage" as Duhart's sister, Adeline, married Henry Rey's brother, Hippolyte Rey (Daggett 108). In *A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, Emily Suzanne Clark explains that, at one point in time, the *Cercle Harmonique* possibly even believed that they could contact the spirits of the living, as they once communicated with a "spirit named Adolphe Duhart, who described himself as intelligent," referred to himself as a "poor devil," and discussed the importance of religion (Clark 42). There is also record of the *Cercle Harmonique* contacting the spirit of Lélia Duhart, the name from which Adolphe Duhart derived his pseudonym. During this séance, the spirit of Lélia tells them not to weep over the dead, specifically children of Creoles who have passed, as "the child in heaven is Happiness; on Earth, he would have been, with few exaggerations, near Degradation… why, then, cry?" [translation from French by author] (Rey 26). During the years of its existence, Duhart fostered a tight knit connection with the members of the *Cercle Harmonique*; it would be one of the first spaces that these free Creoles of color in New Orleans could discuss their ideas and plan for the future of the city and its people.

Just a few years later, this same group would gather to create a school dedicated to the education of black children in New Orleans, called *L'Institution Catholique des Orphelins Indigents*[2], or the Couvent School. In 1837, a former slave named Marie Couvent, before her death, donated money and land to the establishment of a school aimed at teaching black orphans. However, during this time, slavery was still legal, and many government officials did not support the education of people of color, which made the process of properly utilizing the funds as Couvent had willed long and arduous. Desdunes states that this money was misused and abused for many

years, until an organization called *La Société Catholique pour L'instruction des Orphelins dans l'Indigence*[3] formed in April of 1847 (Desdunes 20). This group consisted of educated Creoles of color, including Lanusse, Barthelemy Rey (the father of Henry Louis Rey), and Duhart. Less than a year later, the group gathered the funds, organized on the land, and carried out Couvent's wishes by opening the school and allowing black orphans in, free of charge. Others were only asked to pay a modest tuition. Educators of the school were often educated Afro-Creoles of the area; in fact, for many years, both Duhart and his wife were employed there as teachers (Myers 102). The school taught every subject, including writing and grammar in both English and French. And in 1869, Duhart served as the principal of the school after the death of Joanni Questy (Daggett 108).

In establishing this school dedicated to black, poor, children, these men sought to tackle a problem of systematic oppression: the impact of racism on poverty and access to education. Since the black population of New Orleans "no longer needed to go and draw knowledge from European sources. The youth could receive the elements of a solid education in the classes established by [these men] and at prices placed within the reach of all budgets. Orphans and children of poor parents no longer had to fear the disadvantages of ignorance"[4] [translation from French by author] (Desdunes 1911). The founders of this school impacted the community by countering the anti-literacy laws established across the South in the years before the war. Indeed, "in Louisiana, the penalty for instructing a free black in a Sunday School [was], for the first offence, five hundred dollars, for the second offence, death" (Seeton 2019). Developing this school was therefore a high-risk and early step towards self-liberation and freedom from oppression through literacy and education.

Soon after creation of the Couvent School, business directories and census records list Duhart as a gunsmith and a teacher (Rainey 158). Records indicate that, in addition to working at

the Couvent School, he took up private students, specifically young men of color, for apprenticeship work in gunsmithing ("Indenture of Leon Lindos…"). This was until 1861, when the Civil War began and a group of soldiers formed in New Orleans called the Native Guard, which was to become the first black regiment in the U.S Army. Adolphe Duhart, Joanni Questy, Armand Lanusse and Henry Louis Rey, would all come to join. Enlisting in a group like this allowed Creoles of color like Duhart to put their ideas of liberty into action by physically fighting for that which they had been advocating for years.

In spaces like the Native Guard, the *Cercle Harmonique*, and the Couvent School, these Creoles of color could organize themselves around similar goals: uplifting people of color, either through education, spiritual inspiration, or direct action. These groups built the foundation for later political action in New Orleans that directly sought to bring justice to disadvantaged groups. In 1896 for example, the *Comité des Citoyens* (Committee of Citizens), a group which stemmed from these same free men of color, would stage a protest of racial segregation in railway cars, by having Homer Plessy, a Creole of color, board a "whites only" train car. This case would later find its way to the Supreme Court, in the famous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case that reconfirmed the "separate but equal" doctrine. Although the outcome did not go in favor of Plessy and the Committee, this was a necessary step towards reform. Later Civil Rights movements would continue this fight, finally overturning the doctrine in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954).

Amid these various forms of involvement, many members rooted their participation in sharing their thoughts through writing. Men like Duhart and others found in the collections *Les Cenelles* and *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*, who were all poets, essayists, and short story writers, would come to encompass an important voice in American Literature: that of black writers in the South, during the crucial era of before the Civil War and during Reconstruction. Because this

group wrote and published in completely self-owned and operated institutions, their voices were truly uninhibited. They did not have to filter or verify their ideas through oppressive forces, such as whites that could have added a layer of censorship that catered to their own agenda. Compared to other writings by people of color during the time of the mid-nineteenth century, which consisted mainly of slave narratives that were related orally and mediated by men who saw themselves primarily as "white saviors," these publications came directly from the well-versed and independent writers of color themselves. Not only were the ideas more direct, but their audience could also shift; now, this literature was not just for the entertainment of whites, but instead for people of color, in support of them and their education. The work published in the later black-owned and operated newspapers like *L'Union* and *La Tribune de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, as well as in collections of works like *Les Cenelles* not only advocated for liberty and justice, but their existence represented the fact that people of color were just as capable as white leaders in the community. The act of writing and publishing these poems itself, as well as constantly encouraging others to do the same, served as proof to those that doubted that people of color in the United States were equal to white citizens and should legally be treated as such.

Duhart had begun to channel his social engagement into literature during the Civil War when he began publishing poems and short stories in newspapers in New Orleans, allowing him to directly communicate his ideas of equality and justice with the public in a way that proved his ability as an intellectual in the community.

In October of 1862, the first published poem by Duhart appeared in the French language journal *La Renaissance Louisianaise*. This newspaper, however, was run by white citizens of New Orleans and was therefore mostly targeted to white readers. This is likely one of the reasons why Duhart submitted this poem under the pseudonym of "Lélia D….T.". Its final lines read:[5]

Jouis de ton printemps: le bonheur a des ailes;

Il nous fuit et ne revient pas.

Les larmes, les douleurs sont seules éternelles:

Tel est le destin d'ici-bas.

Chante, chante toujours; garde longtemps encore

Ta franche gaîté, ta fraîcheur,

Puisse le ciel conserver pour toi cette aurore,

Pur auréole de ton cœur.

Abandonne tes jours au bonheur sous mélange,

Tes nuits aux songes les plus doux;

Et, gracieuse enfant, qu'à ton réveil un ange

Te les redise à tes genoux.[6]

("Poésie À Mademoiselle ***" lines 17-28)

Perhaps he wanted to conceal his identity in case the contents of his poem were not well received by white readers, as his safety would have been at risk. This poem, entitled "Poésie À Mademoiselle ***" ("Poem for Miss ***") is about an anonymous Creole woman, who is described as gracious and beautifully radiant, and who sings despite the sadness that penetrates her life. The narrator of the poem says that although her "tears and pain alone are eternal," she must "sing, always sing," because one day, she will go to sleep with pleasant dreams and wake up as an angel, only to be returned all of the happiness that she has brought into this world ("Poésie À

Mademoiselle ***" lines 19-21). At its core, this poem is a song of hope, of knowing that good things are yet to come, despite hardships in the past.

This idea of singing and prayer as a means of surviving and retaining faith evokes the image of the "spirituals" which allowed slaves to emotionally connect to their homes in Africa and to express the community's new Christian faith. In the South, this connotation of singing songs of resilience, as slavery was still a key aspect of society at this time, would have been apparent, and Duhart likely knew that his poem about a singing Creole woman would have provoked this connection; it could have been negatively received by a white audience that was not very far removed from this history. And with his connection to other significant Creoles of color in the area, his name would have been easily recognizable and associated with specific groups that advocated for the rights of people of color. Therefore, fear for his personal safety perhaps explains why Duhart initially decided to conceal his identity.

Two years after this publication in 1864, Duhart's poetry began to appear in a newly formed newspaper in Louisiana called *La Tribune de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (Partin 2020). This newspaper was founded by Louis Charles Roudanez, a physician and Creole of color who was outspoken about founding this newspaper on ideas of protecting his fellow citizens of New Orleans and their rights (*The New Orleans Tribune*). *La Tribune* was the first African American daily newspaper in the United States, and it deliberately contained writing in both English and French, to reach a larger readership (Roudané). It quickly became known for its politically charged articles, essays, and poems that advocated for social and political equality, notably concerning universal black male suffrage and efforts towards reconstruction. In December of 1868, the newspaper published a statement that made clear its stance on the issue of racial equality. It read:

"We are the organ of the whole colored population. The *Tribune* has always defended the interest of every colored man, without regard as to whether he was free before or since the war… We have taken our brothers who have just emerged from slavery by the hand and have warmed their benumbed limbs, which were loaded with the shackles of slavery. We do not feel ashamed of them; they are of us, and we love them as we do ourselves. We are the organ of the oppressed, without distinction of race or color." – *New Orleans Tribune.* December 23, 1868 (Roudané)

On July 30, 1866, the impactful nature of the newspaper's focus was made clear when, as Chris Michaelides explains in his book *Paroles d'honneur*, during the Constitutional Convention that gathered at the Mechanics' Institute in New Orleans, a riot broke out of white citizens, many ex-Confederate soldiers, that targeted anyone of African descent (Michaelides 25). At this convention, they were discussing the most urgent Reconstruction program at the time – universal suffrage – and many people of color in the community were planning to attend. Educator and researcher Clint Bruce even states that this outbreak was planned and encouraged by the police, many of whom were Confederate Veterans themselves, and who advanced onto the scene, aiding in the total deaths; nearly 50 people, mostly black, lay dead, with some 200 more injured (Kaplan-Levenson 2016). During this panic, the editor at the time of *La Tribune*, Jean-Charles Houzeau, specifically heard a voice call out "À la *Tribune*!" ("To the *Tribune*!"), indicating to him that the newspaper itself was a target in this riot; believing it to have already been destroyed, he ran to the office, thankfully finding it protected by a group of Creoles of color (Michaelides 25). Tragedies such as this show that the newspaper itself was a radical endeavor, as well as a dangerous one.

During this era of Reconstruction, the simple act of writing stories for *La Tribune* could be a matter of life and death, and Duhart's contribution to the paper should be understood in that context.

Within its first year of operation, the newspaper began to publish Duhart's poetry, again under the pseudonym "Lélia D….T". The first of these poems is entitled "Des baisers" ("Kisses") and is a romantically written survey of the different forms that love and kissing can take. He states that there is the negative kiss, the positive kiss, the good-bye kiss, and many more. But, at the end of the poem, he says that the only kiss "that contains all the joys, all the caresses, all the prayers [of life], that is all hope and all blessing [and] that heals all suffering," is "the maternal kiss"[7] [translation from French by author] ("Des baisers" lines 22-25). Much like his first poem, this piece heavily brings awareness to women, notably the sanctity of mothers and their connection to their children, which will end up being one of the major themes throughout Duhart's poetry.

It is therefore clear that Duhart's use of the pseudonym "Lélia" goes deeper than just a name used to hide his identity. In fact, on August 3rd of 1853, Adolphe Duhart's mother gave birth to a child; her name was Marie-Lélia Duhart ("Louisiana Birth Records"). Years later when Duhart began writing, he would sign his poetry with this name, "Lélia D….T". Many scholars have incorrectly cited that the "Lélia" from which Duhart took his pseudonym was a child that he fathered and lost at an early age. However, this name actually belonged to Duhart's sister. Just five years after her birth, on July 28, 1858, Marie-Lélia passed away, and while the exact cause of death is unknown, it is likely that Marie-Lélia fell to the Yellow Fever epidemic that ravaged New Orleans in 1858. Ten years later, in 1863, Duhart and Odillia Boyer Duhart would have two children themselves, twins named Marie and Marie-Lucie (J. Marshall 2001). Tragically, both children would also pass away in the following year within a month of each other, at just fourteen and thirteen months old, respectively ("Louisiana Death Records"). There are also records that

indicate that a young girl, named Berthe Duhart, another child of the Duhart family, possibly a daughter or a niece of Duhart's, died this same year, just four days after the death of Marie-Lucie ("Louisiana Death Records"). Duhart was therefore very familiar with the loss of children at an early age, and the tragic effects that this can have on a family. Specifically, Duhart would have been surrounded by women who felt the pains of losing children so young, as both his mother and wife had to undergo these hardships.

Perhaps it was because of these experiences of the women in Duhart's life that he decided to use the pseudonyms "Lélia" and, later, "Berthe." By choosing these names, he honored the children that were lost, as well as their mothers, by symbolically shining a light on their lamentable experiences. Just like his first published poem and others that follow, many of Duhart's poems not only praise the feminine power of women, but also discuss struggles of womanhood and motherhood, such as the birth and loss of a child. By attributing his poems to Lélia, he gives this child the opportunity to have a life that she never had the chance to live. Duhart thus gives his mother the opportunity to see her child's name honored through a legacy; Lélia can now be immortalized through his poetry and can be associated with something beautiful and impactful. This is an early feminist gesture that highlights the experiences of women, brings recognition to their sorrows and pain, and, much like his participation in the spiritualist séances, gives them a voice through his poetry.

Duhart extended this honor even further by publishing a poem on October 7th, 1866 in *La Tribune* entitled "Berthe !... Lucie !... Marie !..." which directly references his own children and those of his family. This poem begins with a strong pronunciation of sadness and pain when he states, "Dolor!" ("Berthe !... Lucie !... Marie !..." line 1). Quickly, it is understood that the speaker of the poem has lost three children, the names of which make up the title. The speaker laments

over their now empty cradles, describes the pain felt during their funeral, and asks God what they have done to deserve such a punishment. Eventually the speaker describes one of the children as "the golden star of the firmament, / who in [her] breast had just hatched" [translation from French by author][8] making it clear that the speaker is the mother of these children ("Berthe !... Lucie !... Marie !.." lines 35-36). Because of this focalization through the eyes of a parent that has physically given birth to a child that has died, the sadness in this poem allows Duhart to acknowledge the pain that women such as his wife and his mother have felt, as well as allow Duhart his own cathartic expression of emotion as a father.

Due to his reference to the child "Berthe," as well as his personal connection to the name, Duhart published a poem a few weeks before "Berthe !... Lucie !... Marie !..." in *La Tribune*, that he signed "Berthe D…". This poem, entitled "L'Amour" ("Love," Sept. 16, 1866), begins with an abbreviated quote from the proverb "Of Love" (1850) by the English writer Martin Farquhar Tupper that states: "What is love ? – An inexpressible thing; a volume in a / word; an ocean in a tear; a whirlwind in a sigh" ("L'Amour"). The poem goes on to provide its own answer to the question of what love truly is. In the style of Duhart's other writings, the lines of this poem use passionately charged metaphors to describe this emotion and its intensity, as it states:

> L'amour ?
>
> C'est un foyer ardent... C'est une passion
>
> Qui se nourrit d'espoir, de folle illusion
>
> Et des rêves brillants d'une indicible ivresse,
>
> Par qui tout se colore et par qui tout caresse.
>
> […]
>
> C'est que l'amour est tout !... frénésie... avenir…

Suave émotion... éternel souvenir !

Mais l'amour c'est la Foi, c'est la molle Espérance.[9]

("L'Amour" lines 1-8 and 16-19)

These lines that praise the power of such emotion are reminiscent of Duhart's "Des baisers" as it expresses the strength of love as a guiding sensation in life, a theme that will continue to appear in Duhart's later poems. "L'Amour" fits directly within the framework of Duhart's other poetry and should be understood as a sort of "spiritualist communication" in which "Berthe D…" communicates with the world she has left behind.

In addition to these themes of motherhood, love, and emotion, other poems by Duhart take on different subjects such as death, pain, music and poetry as forms of empowering expression, hope and religion, as well as politics. For example, in the poem "Le 13 avril" ("April 13th," April 25, 1865), Duhart socially engages by writing on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. This poem has a tone of a dark despair as it describes the "terror," "horror" and "bitter tears" that filled the hearts of his peers on the night of Lincoln's death[10] [translation from French by author] ("Le 13 avril" lines 15-18). Duhart clearly expresses his opinion that this crime was a tragic loss and that Lincoln's legacy positively impacted the lives of people of color in the United States, as he states:

Un horrible attentat, un crime affreux, immense.

Abraham Lincoln est perdu !...

[…]

Pleurez incessamment... pleurez celui qui tombe,

Votre Libérateur descendu dans la tombe.

Natifs[11], vous tous, cœurs pleins de foi !...

Oh ! pleurez sur celui dont la mort vous sépare,

Sur celui qui s'en vint, comme Christ à Lazare,

Vous dire : Esclave, lève-toi ![12]

("Le 13 avril" lines 23-24 and 37-42)

Duhart concludes this poem by referring to Lincoln as "the great Liberator… Regenerator and martyr"[13] for his people, and because of this, Duhart brings into his lamenting poetry his opinions on politics at the time, specifically his support of Lincoln and the abolishment of slavery [translation from French by author] ("Le 13 avril" lines 48 and 54). In the South, a society that had at the time proven its opposition to people of color and their rights, and which would consistently prove this with violence, such as at the riot and massacre of 1866, to publish a poem like this was very much a risk. And because the poem was in response to an assassination, the violent repercussions of professing world views such as Duhart's were very apparent; his safety could be jeopardized by publishing these words. As Lincoln represented the Republican ideas of the Union, and as the Southern United States was still attached to the Confederacy at this time, a poem such as this that pledged support for Lincoln was daring. Duhart chose to speak out against a society that did not support him in order to fight for something important to him: uplifting his fellow man. By the end, this poem acts as a call to readers to remain strong in this time of sadness, as he tells his fellow people of color to rise up against the hatred that ended Lincoln's life and continue to fight for a land where every individual is free.

In addition to his significant contribution in the realm of poetry, Duhart also published a short story and novella in *La Tribune*. The first of these, "Simple Histoire" ("Simple Story"), appeared in March of 1865, and is anything but a simple story about a young slave who becomes the romantic interest of his master's daughter. Like many of his poems, this story explores love as a powerful, all-consuming emotion and force in the world, as it prevails despite the issues of racial

inequalities in the story. Through this story, Duhart comments on issues of slavery and injustice, as this young couple must hide their love on account of their different races. Duhart's longer novella, *Trois Amours* (*Three Loves*), which appeared later the same year, is a love story between the character of Lydia, a young, beautiful, and strong Creole girl, and a man to whom she cannot be married because laws at the time forbade marriages between people of European descent and people of color. This story is tragic because, despite Lydia being the most noble and powerful character, she falls victim to her society and its laws. Throughout the story, the history of Lydia's mother is also explained; she, too, was a woman of color who loved a white man. Her love is unrequited, and she gives birth to his child, just before her own death. Significantly, the story contains a white character who cares for Lydia and treats her with kindness, equality, and love above all, which provides the correct example that Duhart wishes to promote within society.

It is perhaps this same character of Lydia who would appear later as a character in a play written by Duhart entitled *Lydia, ou la victime du préjugé* (*Lydia, or the Victim of Prejudice*). This play was performed at the Théâtre d'Orléans, the premiere having been on Sunday, June 10th in 1866. It states that this was a play given in three acts: the first, "Le Déshonneur" ("Dishonor"), the second, "L'Enlèvement" ("Abduction"), and the third, "Le Pardon" ("Forgiveness") ("Theatre D'Orléans Playbill"). Based on the title, it is likely that this play explored similar themes of social and political injustice, life as a Creole of color in the south, womanhood, and legal inequality, that are found in many of Duhart's other works. Desdunes, in his writing about Duhart, mistakenly claims that the play was entitled *Lélia*, and that it was performed in 1867. According to the playbill from the theatre, it is Duhart under the pseudonym "Lélia D….T" who wrote the play, *Lydia*. Perhaps, there were multiple versions of this play, or it was performed various times, but to date,

no copy of it has been found. It is likely that most of the records and copies of the play itself were lost to a fire that destroyed the theatre the same year of the play's premiere (Lemmon 2018).

Duhart's last work to appear in *La Tribune* was "Espérance" ("Hope," Jan. 17, 1869). It is a final poetic plea to readers to remember to maintain faith and hope in difficult times, as it ends:

Croyez donc, ô poète ! en ce divin symbole

Gravé dans tout cœur désolé,

À cet espoir caché dans une parabole :

« Qui pleure sera consolé ! »[14]

("Espérance" lines 41-44)

With this, Duhart ended his career with *La Tribune* as he started it and as he commanded the entirety of his life: by inspiring his fellow Creoles of color, reminding them to stay strong in the face of injustice, and maintain hope that the fight for liberty is continuing on.

It was not until nineteen years later that writing by Duhart would appear again in print. *The Weekly Louisianian*, which often published pieces on social equality and the right to vote for all people, published two of Duhart's stories on September 17th and 24th of 1888, both signed "Lélia," rather than "Lélia D….T" as he had signed years before. The last of these stories, "Une Légende" ("A Legend"), is the telling of a legend of the building of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, wrapped inside of a story of love. Despite his claim at the beginning of the story that this legend is true, it is fictional, and likely to have been created by Duhart himself. The story of love, friendship, and betrayal that surrounds the legend of creation seems to be more important than telling a story based on historical fact.

And significantly, the first of these stories, "La Pluie" ("The Rain"), can be seen as a poem written in prose, as it is a short, vividly described unease of waiting for the rain to fall over the

earth. In this, Duhart laments that the city of New Orleans is a city where "assassins and thieves are considered to be gentlemen, where policemen wrongly use poor blacks as targets for their revolver, [and] where a stolen pig has more value than the life of any citizen"[15] [translation from French by author] (Duhart, "La Pluie"). While the writing lacks the crystalline purity of his earlier works, he captures with foreboding prescience the storm of white on black violence that has swept our nation in our own era.

As the frequency of his writing decreased, it seems clear that Duhart's focus swayed from poetry and stories to other occupations, such as teaching. It was in the year 1869 that Duhart took over as principal of the Couvent School, and it is likely that he focused on education until the end of his life. Duhart passed away at the age of 77 in his home in New Orleans on January 10, 1908.

Within these various groups and occupations to which Duhart dedicated his life, a clear objective was established: uplift those who are struggling. His life and work embody the fight for civil rights in the United States in one of its earliest forms. As an educator and member of both the *Cercle Harmonique* and the Native Guard, Duhart connected with his community, cultivated ideas of liberty and equality for all citizens, and sought to elevate those who were systematically held at a disadvantage in society. And crucially, as a writer, Duhart spoke out directly against the injustices plaguing his country, while simultaneously honoring the experiences of women and his fellow people of color, by inspiring them to focus on love and hope for the future.

Notes

1. Full title: *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire: Notices biographiques accompagnées de réflexions et de souvenirs personnels*, *hommage à la population créole, en souvenir des grands hommes qu'elle a produits et des bonnes choses qu'elle a accomplies*, originally published in 1911. In English: *Our People and Our History, Biographical notes accompanied by reflections and personal memories, tribute to the Creole population, in memory of the great men it produced and the good things it accomplished* [translation by author].

2. The Catholic Institution of Indigent Orphans [translation by author].

3. The Catholic Society for the Education of Orphans in Need [translation by author].

4. As Desdunes states, concerning the impact of this school, the black population of New Orleans "n'eut plus à aller puiser le savoir aux sources européennes. La jeunesse pouvait recevoir les éléments d'une éducation solide dans les classes établies par [ces hommes] et à des prix placés à la portée de toutes les bourses. Les orphelins et les enfants de parents pauvres n'avaient plus à redouter les désavantages de l'ignorance" [original French text].

5. All poems featured in this article have been gathered in the forthcoming book collecting the poetry of Adolphe Duhart, to be published in 2020: *Tempêtes et éclairs : poésies américaines*.

6. "Enjoy your spring: happiness has wings;
It flees from us and does not return.
Tears and pain alone are eternal:
Such is the destiny of this world.

Sing, always sing; keep forever
Your frank gaiety, your freshness,
May heaven keep this dawn for you,
Pure halo of your heart.

Give up your days to blended happiness,
Your nights with the sweetest dreams;
And, gracious child, when you wake up an angel
You put them back on your knees." [translation by author]

7. The only kiss "qui contient à lui seul toutes les joies, toutes les caresses, toutes les prières [de vie], qui est toute espérance et toute bénédiction, [et] qui guérit toutes les souffrances," is "le baiser maternel" [original French text].

8. Eventually the speaker describes one of the children as "l'étoile d'or du firmament, / Qui dans [son] sein venait d'éclore," making it clear that the speaker is the mother of these children [original French text].

9. "Love? …
It's a burning fireplace… It's a passion
That feeds on hope, crazy illusion
And bright dreams of unspeakable drunkenness,
By whom everything is colored and by whom everything caresses
[…]
Love is everything! ... frenzy … future …
Suave emotion ... eternal memory!
But love is Faith, it is soft Hope." [translation by author]

10. This poem has a tone of a dark despair as it describes the "terreur," "horreur" and the "amères larmes" that filled the hearts of his peers on the night of Lincoln's death [original French text].

11. "Natifs" was used by Creoles of color to describe themselves, referencing the group of them that were The Native Guards during the war.

12. "A horrible attack, a terrible, immense crime.
Abraham Lincoln is lost! …
[…]
Weep incessantly ... weep for the one who falls,
Your Liberator descended into the grave.
Natives, all of you, hearts full of faith! …
Oh ! weep for the one whose death separates you,
On him who came, like Christ to Lazarus,
Tell you: Slave, get up!" [translation by author]

13. "Le grand Libérateur… Régénérateur et martyr" [original French text].

14. "Believe therefore, oh poet! in this divine symbol
Engraved in all sorry hearts,
To this hope hidden in a parable:
'Those who weep will be comforted!'" [translation by author]

15. Where "les assassins et les voleurs sont considérés comme des gentlemen, où les policemen prennent, à tort et à travers, de pauvres noirs comme de points de cible pour leur revolver, où un cochon volé a plus de valeur que la vie de n'importe quel citoyen" [original French text].

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