

Martial Barrois

The time has come when heaven, most generous,
Smiles on those just desires so dear to us.
Humanity has triumphed: royal writ
Acknowledges its rights and honors it.
As well befits the noble human race,
In sacred treaties, thanks to heaven's grace,
Everywhere, near and far, throughout the earth,
Man rises to the measure of his worth;
No more the plaything of a master's whim,
Who, when his labors had quite wearied him,
Little could do but wait for death to deign
Succor him from the burden of his pain.
In vain did love of gold—vice-rich that love!—
Vie with mankind to win the fruits thereof!
In vain did crime invite hypocrisy
To flout the rights nature would guarantee!
Now is the die cast; from this day shall men
Effect kings' solemn vows. Never again
Shall we see wanton deeds' caprice condemn
Men to fell torture, wrought by men like them,
Nor innocents damned to the harshest pains:

Blacks have forevermore cast off their chains!
Too long the dregs of nature, they have ceased
Sharing the destiny of odious beast,
Waiting—consigned to tears and bonds—to be
Wrenched from their native soil as, bestially,
A slaver traffics in their blood, whilst they
Weep for their freedom, raped and ripped away.

Gone, now, those humans—vile, inhuman lot!—
Who revel in wild greed and who shrink not
From thinking that a crime-filled heaven conspires
To yield up man's rights to perverse desires!
What? The creator—whose paternal care
Protects his feeble creatures everywhere,
Each one—could flout justice divine, and would,
With mankind's sins, deface his fatherhood?
Savages! Will God's vengeance long withstand
The evil sham wrought by your vicious hand?
Do you hear heaven's voice cry, bellowing,
That you redress the Blacks' long suffering
And shameful state; that you must disavow
Their executioners, and lash their brow

With signs that mark their endless villainy?
By what right did you wreak their slavery
Upon them? With what rage did you debase
The Blacks, and strike them from the human race?
What pact made you their tyrants? Who named you
Their torturers? Yes, black they are, 'tis true.
But does the color of a mortal's skin
Measure the gifts that God has placed within?
O heartless ones! Whoever said that these
Beings sport only savage qualities,
And ever will? Are their passions not quite
As touched as ours by feelings of delight
And pleasure? Is it but low, base desire
That moves them? Know they not love's passion-fire?
Ah yes! They feel its jealousies no less
Than we! Pity too stirs their tenderness.
A son's caress will thrill them quite as much!...
Will you pretend that heavenly law is such
That it permits your crimes against them? Oh,
Folly! For, for when your victims' blood would flow,
Heaven looked down with loathing! It was gold
That spread the poison in your hearts. Age-old,
The tragedy its fury told, as it

Ravaged poor Africa, turned counterfeit
The glory of America, whose three
Centuries wrought the Blacks' dread destiny,
Digging a vast grave, where, for long years hence,
Boneyards will last as timeless monuments.

To curse those slave ships that, since yesteryear,
Have plied the ocean with their cargoes drear,
Is not enough! Our eloquence must cry
Out to the universe, to vilify
The tortures of the Blacks at fortune's hands.
Come, let us join them on the burning sands,
Gaze on their bloody woes; then might we shed
Our tears to mourn their fate unwarranted.

What do I see? Claspings his mother's knees,
A child, disconsolate, whose weeping pleas
Move not his father, who—how can it be?—
Would sell their son! His mother, mournfully
Raising her voice to heaven in a torrent
Of tears, bemoans the barbarous deed abhorrent,
Clutches her son, presses him to her breast...
Provoked, the father has no interest

In her laments and prayers. They merely waste
His precious time... Thus will the wretch make haste
To work revenge; cruel spouse and father fell,
He will sell both: his son and wife as well,
And, doubling thus his crime, their sacrifice
Will reap fine profit from the twofold price.

What? Naught to see but horror everywhere!
And naught to hear but terror and despair!...
But wait! What thing is this that meets my eye?
A woman, tugged headlong—I know not why
Nor whither!... God above! Her hands, her limbs—
Broken, blood-red—attest the heartless whims
Of soldier-monsters, born to crime, and bred
On its designs; who, terror-spirited
Killers, thirsting for their young victim's blood,
Reproach her for the welling tears that flood
Over her; fume with rage to see those tears.
And yet, steeling her soul against their sneers,
She summons all her courage, dares request
One boon: she would press to her loving breast
Her father, and console his years before
Age leads him, chill, to death's dark-shadowed shore.

“At least,” cries she, “if my dear mother were
Only alive, then might he turn to her
To ease the torments of this day. But no!
Wrenched from our side, it was her fate to go
Off to a distant land, and there to die
Far from her own...” Alas! Her plaintive sigh
And tear would touch them not. Their cowardly
Fury is softened not a jot, and she
Is mocked and jeered for weeping so... In time,
They reach the death-fraught land, the untamed clime
Where she will be enchained in servitude,
Cast in a dank hole, where Blacks, long subdued,
Shudder their anguish--groans blown on the air!—
Sobbing their fate, languishing in despair...
Scarcely has she been thrust into her cell
Of horrors, than a voice—one she knows well,
Dear to her heart—moans low its accents drear,
Wakening in her soul the souvenir—
Now, oh so cruel!—of passion burning true.
“Ah, lover mine!” she weeps. “No more shall you
And I be joined in tenderest love. For we
Must needs forsake it now, eternally!
Alas! Our lives, for beauty born, are doomed

To be forever in these bonds consumed!
What? Will I see no more that wood, whose trees
Repeated, in their darkling mysteries,
The echoes of our love, sweetly confessed?
I shall not see that palm, whose branches blessed
The cabin of my birth, and shaded it
With foliage thick... Gone, all the favorite
Things of my youth, keepsakes most loved, most cherished...
Gone, never to return... One and all, perished...
Tell me, did I deserve this destiny?
Gods! Was I born for such dire fate? Ah me!”
As thus she spoke, bowed by her shackles’ weight
And by the rigors of her woeful state,
Swooning, she seemed to thank the heavens that bore
Her off, in death, never to suffer more.

Who can describe the terrors of this place;
The agonies unnumbered of a race
Reviled? Blacks, in the springtime of their life,
Snatched from ancestral land! Oh, horror-rife,
Their piteous laments! Listen! Can you
Hear them, and see them, with one last adieu,
Bidding their strand farewell? Now will commence

Their bondage... On this deadly vessel, hence
Will they endure the cruelest martyrdom.
Chained two by two, deep in the hold they come,
Heaped each upon the other... One slim ray
Seeps feebly through the squalor... Day by day,
Night by night, on and on the slave ship ploughs
Its hellish way. The sobs and sighs, the soughs,
The vows of vengeance rise midst many a prayer
That death might put an end to their despair.
Ah, but death turns a deaf ear to their pleas:
Their lives are not their own to end; and these
Wretches, these human chattel-slaves, cannot
Hope for the Ocean's graves to ease their lot
With its wild-churning waves. Glad would they be
Were they sucked down and swallowed by the sea,
About to reach America, but never
More to be found... Escaped, but lost forever,
Innocent victims, mourning—as they drowned—
Their life's last moments, free, at last unbound!

Such is the Blacks' horrific panoply
Of woes... An image of the misery
That is their share! And, if they live in pain,

Ours is the guilt! It is our pleasures vain
That make them toil, condemned from childhood, thus,
To torments for the sake of serving us!
Fie on capricious luxuries! May they
Perish as they deserve to do! Away
With sumptuous banquets, grandiose galas, *fêtes*
Sullied by sin, and purchased with their sweat!...
But enough! No more need I prove my case,
Counting the sufferings of the Black man's race.
Let us turn now our eyes from these tableaux
Of grief; let my lines' inspiration go
Off to all corners of the universe,
Spreading the word that this ignoble curse—
This traffic foul—will be no more; that Blacks
Will cease to bow before the world's attacks;
That, set free from the clutches of their foes,
Everywhere will they find protectors: those
Of zealous bent; that kings there are today
Whose deathless mission is to sweep away
Three centuries of vicious infamy,
And, in the name of all humanity,
Proclaim its will be done, noble endeavor:
Liberty to the Blacks, now and forever.

