

## Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Literary Imagination<sup>1</sup> by Cora Kaplan

My father, Sidney Kaplan, a marxist scholar of African-American culture and history, first introduced me to the figure who stands at the centre of this talk. The St Dominguan revolutionary, Toussaint L'Ouverture, was one of a number of exemplary men and women of African descent whose histories were part of my domestic education, and whose words and actions fed my child's understanding of the 'heroic'.

Heroes of many races and nationalities: cultural heroes, political heroes – it's true that they were mostly male – were an essential part of the radical culture of my family when I was growing up in the United States in the 1940s and 50s. We were devout atheists, so heroes became in a way our household gods: Shakespeare, Marx, Tom Paine, Frederick Douglass, Toussaint, Paul Robeson, Beethoven, Lenin, Eleanor Roosevelt, Sojourner Truth. Preference was given to the hero from humble beginnings, provided they remained ethically and imaginatively loyal to his or her origins, or, if born

into privilege, sided with the poor and oppressed. As intellectuals we were naturally educated to admire great writers, artists, composers – the hero as creative genius – but as would-be revolutionaries we stood in even greater awe of those who put ideas into action. However veneration was always checked, modified by the democratic impulse at the heart of our socialism; sympathetic emulation was the affective form that identification with heroes and heroism was meant to take. As a child, many of these long-dead heroes seemed only too alive to me – a gallery of remarkable strangers whose triumphs and defeats mixed and merged with my own hopes and fears. And in the unlimited arrogance and possibility of a child's ambition selfhood was apprehended as heroism writ small.

These childhood identifications – cross-gendered, cross-racial psychic acts of self construction, working in and through a familial political imaginary, were at once extraordinarily complicated and deeply naive.<sup>2</sup> By the time I came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, I had acquired, along with my generation of new-left radicals, a more sophisticated but also radically ambivalent relationship to heroes – still mostly male – on the one hand finding them everywhere, especially in international anti-colonial struggles, but also at home – Gandhi, Castro, Che, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Mandela – on the other deeply suspicious of the category of heroism itself for its capacity to produce demagoguery and betrayal. This mistrust was based on historical example, but it was also, of course, a projection of our own fears of failure or default – the terror that we would, at critical moments, be found wanting in either ethics or courage.

Such ambivalence – one of the paradoxes of heroism – goes right back to the historical moment when secular heroism and liberal concepts of the self. of identity, first become joined. These ideas come together and become embodied in 'real' historical figures in the late eighteenth century. Almost as soon as they take shape they come under particular pressure in Europe during and in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and again in the midnineteenth century, in the decades before and after the revolutions of 1848. This is the second paradox of course: modern heroism emerges as an effect of the creation of republics and democracies - the more equality, the more heroes. Heroic identifications, together with their inevitable discontents and disappointments, were, we might say, a narrative process of idealization and disenchantment, central to the making of modern subjectivity. From the late eighteenth century through to the mid-nineteenth century, philosophers. poets, novelists, political thinkers were unusually busy theorizing heroism, arguing about its job description, giving it a special place in the definition of what makes man in the generic, but also in the gendered and the ethnic or racial sense, fully human.

For the Human with a capital H was also a category that was undergoing ever-expanding scrutiny and revision in these years, as science speculated about the origins and differences between human types. Was man a single species? (the notion of what a species itself is was not clear) or several?

Were races – what they were was also not clear – in a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, or were any differences including the physical ones of skin, size or physiognomy to be ascribed to the long-term effects of environment and culture? The qualifications for both heroism and genius, I will be suggesting, were framed, more than is generally supposed, within the context of these larger questions.

### TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

Toussaint Breda, who discarded his surname, the name of the plantation of his former owner, and reinvented himself as Toussaint L'Ouverture - 'he who makes an opening' - more than any of the other leaders of African descent of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, came to represent the contested figure of the modern black hero. An ex-slave born in St Domingue, he entered world history in 1791 in his mid to late forties when he joined black rebel forces on the island. A small man, already grey when he became a public figure, but, as legend has it, of enormous stamina - a great equestrian - he was, more important, Christian and literate. He had, it is said, the free run of his benign master's considerable library. Toussaint had worked as a coachman and a veterinarian and had been freed by his owner. For a free black - an affranchi - he was relatively well off; his wife, Suzanne Nolan, had brought him some property and he had employed hired slaves himself. The rebel forces that Toussaint joined and eventually led were briefly allied with the Spanish royalists against the French revolutionary government, but they shifted allegiance to the French at the point where slavery was outlawed by the decree of the Convention in France in February 1794. There exists a well-known portrait of the St Dominguan deputy to the French convention Jean-Baptiste Belley, a rather more elegant figure than Toussaint himself, leaning against the bust of the Abbé Raynal, whose anti-slavery arguments Toussaint had read. Raynal, says historian of slavery Robin Blackburn, became 'the prophet of the new order' in St Domingue. But it was Toussaint's skill as a political and military strategist that made this 'new order' possible. When the English and the French carried their war to the Caribbean theatre in the mid 1790s. Toussaint was instrumental in defeating the English invasion and arranging for the defeat and orderly withdrawal of the remains of the British forces in 1798. His clemency towards the British - in line with his policy of 'no retaliation' - became part of his affirmative legend. With blacks, mulattos and whites in his entourage and command, he emerged as the ruler of St Domingue by the spring of 1800. His regime, which has been compared in style to that of an autocratic and independent-minded colonial Governor, introduced a new constitution and a harsh labour system meant to restore the colony's ravaged agrarian infrastructure. This independence was short lived. While Toussaint had attentively followed and identified with Napoleon's career, addressing at least one unanswered letter 'From the First of the Blacks to the First of the

Whites', the relative autonomy of black rule in the colonies was no part of Bonaparte's agenda. While Toussaint and his administration were attempting to restore St Domingue's economy, shattered by over a decade of civil and foreign war, Napoleon was plotting the 'annihilation of black government' in St Domingue. He appointed his brother-in-law General Leclerc as Governor General of the colony, and with a force of 16,000 men Leclerc set out to break the power of Toussaint's army and reintegrate St Domingue as a French colony. Despite strong resistance, Leclerc was successful enough militarily to make Toussaint's generals capitulate in return for the retention of their ranks and commands, while Toussaint himself seemed ready to retire to his estates with his personal guard. Nevertheless Leclerc remembered his instructions; he arrested Toussaint on 6 June 1802 and transported him to France. Just before that, in May, the Tribunat restored the legality of slavery and the slave trade in the French colonies. Toussaint was imprisoned in the freezing, damp dungeons of the Fortress of Joux in the Jura mountains, and died there on 7 April 1803 after months of abusive, humiliating treatment. His capture, however, did not spell the end, but the continuation of the struggle for St Dominguan liberty. Although Leclerc's successor, Rochambeau, waged a genocidal campaign against the blacks, a successful alliance between black and mulatto forces defeated the French. Eventually, in 1804, the Republic of Haiti was declared.<sup>3</sup>

In his own age, and in ours, Toussaint stands as an exemplary figure at the gateway – the opening – of a political modernity inaugurated by a succession of democratic revolutions in the nations that bordered the Atlantic in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Recognized immediately as new kind of black figure, a charismatic leader of the first successful black anti-colonial revolt and the founder of a new state, he became in his lifetime a transnational avatar of the threat, as well as the promise, of the spread of freedom and political autonomy to non-white peoples. Paul Gilroy has invented the suggestive term 'Black Atlantic' to map the historic and geographic flow of cultures and ideas originated by diasporan blacks from the eighteenth century onwards and crucial to the making of modernity.4 While Toussaint's contribution to the history of modernity had a powerful impact on the relentlessly modernizing white Atlantic World, his achievement, circulating in the imagined community of the Black Atlantic, created a set of possibilities and questions for the future of people of African descent that had not previously existed; these in turn gave rise to others that Toussaint and his fellow rebels could not have anticipated.

Initially and inescapably yoked to the figure of Napoleon – the age's other – and more famous – quintessential 'new' man, the poetry and fiction made of Toussaint's life by white writers from the early to the middle years of the nineteenth century became part of the elaboration and revision of heroism more generally. Here I am not aiming to extract a 'real' historical Toussaint, or a 'true' version of his revolutionary role from the palimpsest of stories made of his life, even if such could be found; rather I am interested in what

certain literary representations of him can tell us about the history of heroic identification as it became negotiated through, and helped to construct, a gendered and racialized aesthetic.

## WORDSWORTH, NAPOLEON, TOUSSAINT AND A MYSTERIOUS LADY

'Identities', writes Stuart Hall, 'are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past.'5 In pursuit of this other history, the history of identity and heroic identification, I will be looking first at how two generations of British writers, eminent romantics and Victorians, celebrated, and in one case vilified, Toussaint L'Ouverture's character and acts. William Wordsworth's sonnet 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' is the best known and most praised of all literary tributes to the St Dominguan revolutionary. Composed, most probably, in August 1802, the month in which Toussaint was made prisoner in the Fort de Joux near the Swiss border, it was published in the liberal English paper the Morning Post on 2 February 1803, two months and some days before his death. The poem was well received: it anticipates, in a somewhat bizarre fashion as we shall see, the sympathetic accounts that followed the later disclosure of Toussaint's martyrdom and death at French hands. In the midnineties, when Toussaint was fighting the English during their disastrous campaign in the West Indies, he was a much demonized figure in the mainstream English press, where representations of him echoed prevailing racial assumptions about the vengeful and savage propensities of the darker races. But by 1803 relations with France had worsened after the brief and troubled peace following the Treaty of Amiens. A second invasion of the Swiss republic, led by Napoleon, hastened the decline of Bonaparte's support among that group of first-generation romantic writers which included both Wordsworth and Coleridge. These men had initially greeted his rise, hoping that he would rescue the faltering fortunes of revolutionary France, and had hailed Bonaparte as a new type of multi-talented hero, soldier and statesman joined.<sup>6</sup> And a more general disillusionment with Napoleon widened sympathy with Toussaint in the wake of his capture and imprisonment, briefly including not only abolitionists who supported his cause, but a broader English constituency who feared the aggrandizing power of Napoleonic France. Wordsworth's response belongs emphatically to this conjunctural moment. Anti-slavery had not, as it had with Coleridge, caught his political imagination in first youth, and, although it remained a troubled item on his political agenda throughout his life, finding its way into his later poetry, it was never a very high priority as a cause either during the years of his youthful radicalism or in the extended period of his later conservatism.

Twenty-six sonnets, the majority of them composed in 1802-3, several of them written during a trip to Calais with his sister Dorothy in the summer of 1802, are gathered together as 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' in the first

volume of the 1807 Poems in Two Volumes. They describe Wordsworth's pained and angry response to the betraval of those revolutionary hopes that he had entertained from the early years of the French Revolution. Napoleon Bonaparte's transition, in Wordsworth's eyes, from liberator to despot provided the political occasion for the beginning of the poet's long goodbye to the radical politics of his youth. This farewell is well documented in his poetry and will find its best-known form in his great autobiographical poem The Prelude. Yet Wordsworth's poetic engagement with Bonaparte was never simple or simply antagonistic. Wordsworth's own half-formed ambitions to fulfill the role of a man of action on a stage more public than poets could occupy - a soldier in the first instance and later a statesman are bound up in his obsession between 1802 and 1804 with the career of Napoleon Bonaparte, whom he calls 'one Man, of Men the meanest too/Raised up to sway the World, to do, undo. . . '7 In Wordsworth's dreams of his own and Bonaparte's omnipotence we can recognize a young man's multiple and still unresolved fantasies of the alternate roads to fame, perhaps even a vague desire to be able to have it all - to roll military exploits, direct political leadership and literary genius into one set of ambitions. We can see then why Bonaparte might be, for Wordsworth, a figure ripe for identification, competition, envy - and finally rejection. Yet we should understand that the idea that the age could throw up such multitalented composite figures of heroism and genius was a widely-shared, optimistic fantasy, especially attractive to the euphoric vision of self-realization of other romantic thinkers and writers. To grasp why and how Toussaint briefly replaces the failed figure of Napoleon in Wordsworth's imagination we need to look first at a key sonnet that Wordsworth composed in May 1802 and published twice in the Morning Post, once on 16 September 1802 and again on 29 January 1803, just a week before 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' appeared. 8 It is the poem in which Wordsworth disengages himself at once from the idea of military heroism and the dream of composite genius.

I griev'd for Buonaparte, with a vain
And an unthinking grief! The vital blood
Of that Man's mind what can it be? What food
Fed his first hopes? What knowledge could He gain?
'Tis not in battles that from youth we train
The Governor who must be wise and good,
And temper with the sternness of the brain
Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood.
Wisdom doth live with children round her knees:
Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
Of the mind's business: these are the degrees
By which true Sway doth mount; this is the stalk
True Power doth grow on; and her rights are these. [157–8]

Bonaparte's fall from ideal heroism is so complete that poetic grief for his decline is wasted, 'vain' emotion, based on false reasoning - 'unthinking'. To have sympathy with his own loss of the heroic object, to identify, as it were, with the failed heroic as if it were simply a failure of ordinary humanity, is, the speaker implies, an error for which one should have no sympathy. The recognition that Bonaparte cannot be a true hero is posed at its most extreme as a grave misrecognition of Bonaparte's status as human, a revelatory question about his alien nature and nurture - what 'blood'?. 'What food'?: gothicised figures that both refer back to Bonaparte's 'mean' origins, and take their contemporary power from theories of racial and racialized class difference. The cool withdrawal of grief for the death of the heroic idea and the living hero is an act of poetic/aesthetic murder that must. it seems, be followed by something more constructive. Contrasting the socialization and education of the General and the Governor, the sonnet cuts an unbridgeable ethical gulf between two types of leaders, military and civil. The speaker has recognized his error which is, interestingly, an error about the structure of sexual difference: he finds, on reflection, that a hypermasculine, physically active, but ethically flawed soldier, narrowly trained 'in battles', could never be a 'wise and good' Governor. The terrain on which male leadership can be constituted must therefore be mental, not physical, but the mental too must be reconceived. A radical, if only mildly shocking form of cross-gender identification displaces an alignment with dangerously violent masculinities. The good Governor must temper the (masculine) sternness of the brain by infusing it with the nurturant affection of the only too traditional maternal, not literally of course, but as a trope of mind only: 'Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood./Wisdom doth live with children round her knees'. Reverting quickly to a masculine mode, which now includes the tempering elements of 'good' maternal femininity, the poem then describes the proper preparation for Governorship, which looks remarkably like the cerebral education of the middle class male English poet - 'Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk/Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk of the Mind's business'. 9 In this crucial sonnet Bonaparte's claim on our sympathy as either successful or failed leader is turned back by a query about his species likeness to the poet and his readers. The revision of ethical leadership on the other hand involves the incorporation of masculinity with femininity - identification within the most visible difference of a narrowly classed, national and racial community.

But if 'I griev'd for Buonaparte' renders false heroism 'alien' through tropes of race and gender which give priority to known and familiar identities – those of a domestic, English bourgeoisie – 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' gives the outsider, the rank stranger, pride of place, substituting a defeated hero for a failed one. In 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' Wordsworth extends and elaborates Coleridge's racially radical judgement, expressed in the *Morning Post* a few months earlier, that Toussaint was 'a hero as much Napoleon's superior in genius as in goodness'. <sup>10</sup>

### To Toussaint L'Ouverture<sup>11</sup>

Toussaint, the most unhappy Man of Men!
Whether the rural Milk-maid by her Cow
Sing in thy hearing, or thou liest now
Alone in some deep dungeon's earless den,
O miserable Chieftain! where and when
Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a chearful brow:
Though fallen Thyself, never to rise again,
Live and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and Man's unconquerable mind. [160–61]

The most striking revision of heroism in this sonnet is the provocative positioning of Toussaint L'Ouverture, so recently an enemy rebel fighting the English, as the representative 'unhappy Man of Men' - all 'Men', even, perhaps, generic 'Man'. Wordsworth and Coleridge were implying that a man of African descent, and an ex-slave, can be that exemplary, generic figure - a cross, we might say, between those legendary heroes, the stoic Cato and Prometheus. The poem's universal address thus resisted a broad strand of racial thinking which would have barred both Africans and slaves from such a role. At the same time the speaker is careful to invoke neither Toussaint's race nor his previously enslaved status; the generic positioning of Toussaint depends on these elements of his identity remaining unstated, although known to the poem's readers. Colour, for example, is significantly absent from Toussaint's description - in fact, only the word Chieftain gestures at an 'indigenous' or African origin. Next, the martyred or betrayed hero – the soon-to-be dead hero – is made into the ideal hero. True heroism is tied most closely to the justice of the cause fought for, not its immediate success. As with Toussaint's origins, the 'cause' itself is left for the reader to supply; the less it is specified the more it can be abstracted into a generalized wish for liberty. Yet 'liberty' and 'freedom' are also implied but unspoken desires; the words themselves are missing from the poem's text, whose focus is on imprisonment and death. I have quoted in full the 1807 text above, but in the first version of the poem, published in the Morning Post, when Toussaint is in real time still alive, but clearly on his way to death, (in any case 'never to rise again' as an active leader) we see Wordsworth struggling awkwardly with how to manage the question of live and dead heroes. In the Morning Post, the living Toussaint is told to 'be thou/Life to thyself in death; with chearful brow/Life, loving death'. [160] In the 1807 version, the one I have printed above, when Toussaint is definitively dead this can be safely altered to 'Yet die not . . . Live, and take comfort' in the

'Powers' 'Thou has left behind': advice that, faute de mieux, can be taken only in the realm of representation, in the imagination of his dead legatees. And these, the sonnet tells us, are not Toussaint's still-active, campaigning Generals, or even the anonymous masses that fought with them. Instead they are 'powers' more enduring than mortal armies – those natural, eternal and sublime powers through which liberty is disseminated – 'air, earth, and skies;/the common wind', as well as ever-loyal 'allies' from the company of human feelings: 'exultations', 'agonies', 'love' and reason – 'Man's unconquerable mind'.

Increasingly, for Wordsworth and Coleridge at least, these abstracted personifications of nature and affect which underpinned the creative and imaginative genius, come to replace earlier identifications with the French revolution and its only-too-active living figures. In these substitutions, nature, mind and exalted feeling become bound narcissistically to the self-identification with a poetic integrity that survives and sustains mankind when utopian social and political projects miscarry. By associating Toussaint with these metaphysical allies – the poet's 'friends' – Wordsworth raises both poets and black freedom-fighters to the same plane of imagined and imagining heroism. The emphasis on Toussaint's martyrdom which provides the rationale and occasion for such an association works to elevate, generalize and defer his cause, rendering it immediately less threatening to British readers.

The structures and strategies of heroic identification in 'I griev'd for Buonaparte' and 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' are similar – Bonaparte should have been more like a poet; Toussaint in death will become a part of the poetic. Their aim is to reject or repress disturbing difference and to assimilate the cleaned-up, unproblematic versions of the 'other' - whether femininity or black heroism - to a familiar ideal. In 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' the anti-colonial black rebel and the white poet become rhetorical 'allies' in an affective struggle for liberty that is timeless, almost virtual, conducted through emotions half-severed from subjects in history. Yet the mortality of these historical subjects, Bonaparte and Toussaint, their uncomfortable, inconvenient embodiment, erupts in both poems, which are linked by their macabre - even murderous - logics. In the first, Bonaparte is 'griev'd for' as if dead: killed off, rhetorically, two words into the first line. In the 1803 version of 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' the living hero is commanded to love death, this posture coming as close as possible to a passive, Christian version of Cato's honourable suicide; in the 1807 revision, the dead hero must 'die not' so that he can join the disembodied company of the romantic heroic sublime. The sonnets perform a kind of poetic triage, strongly implying that revolutionary heroes are perhaps better dead before they inconveniently betray our ideals and our idealization of them. Founders of new states, new times, should certainly be so - indeed they may only be truly heroic once dead. They should 'live' as symbols only of a freedom struggle deferred to the liberations of a future day.

The two poems, I would suggest, are part of a single argument in which affective mental power, the power to imagine, alone survives as the lasting basis for heroic figuration. Yet the second poem betrays a residual nostalgia for the lost cause of composite heroism: 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' yokes the figure of betrayed poet with the martyred black Governor and General. They can briefly co-exist, even coalesce, in the aestheticized, imaginary space of the revolutionary horizon. The prior move that makes this detente possible is the merging of masculine stoicism and feminine endurance. If Toussaint follows Wordsworth's advice - and he is, after all, in no position to refuse it - he becomes the 'patient' prisoner philosophically and cheerfully awaiting death, a position which infuses the military and political leader with just enough of that womanly 'meekness' desirable in those who deserve 'true Sway' and 'true Power', while still associating him firmly with 'Man's unconquerable mind'. The instrumental substitution of Toussaint for Bonaparte works, therefore, by excluding and/or repressing the elements of Toussaint's identity as man and hero that were potentially disruptive and unassimilable for the English poet and his white audience. It is founded in part on a crucial if tentative and compromised set of identifications with women and racial others. No surprise then, that the destabilizing forces of gender and race return to disturb this fragile resolution in the next poem I want to discuss.

Nine days after the publication of 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture', on 11 February, another sonnet, entitled 'The Banished Negroes', later simply called 'September 1st, 1802', appeared in the Morning Post. And while in the 1807 edition three sonnets are placed between 'I griev'd for Buonaparte' and 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture', altering, or at least blurring, the narrative logic I have sketched out above, 'September 1st, 1802' always follows 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture', not only in the 1807 Sonnets but in all subsequent editions in Wordsworth's lifetime. Now Wordsworth was an obsessive reviser of his poems, but he made relatively few changes to 'To Toussaint'. 'September 1st, 1802' however is constantly changed right through to the mid eighteenforties, by which time it is virtually another poem. And it is in this fascinating sonnet about a 'a Negro Woman' who travels with Dorothy and William Wordsworth on their journey back to England that Wordsworth's left-over anxieties about race, gender and the capacity for heroism, react against both their facile resolution in 'I griev'd for Buonaparte' and their banishment from 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture'. The 1807 version follows:

### September 1st, 1802 [1807]

We had a fellow-Passenger who came From Calais with us, gaudy in array, A Negro Woman like a Lady gay, Yet silent as a woman fearing blame; Dejected, meek, yea pitiably tame, She sate, from notice turning not away, But on our proffer'd kindness still did lay
A weight of languid speech, or at the same
Was silent, motionless in eyes and face.
She was a Negro Woman driv'n from France,
Rejected like all others of that race,
Not one of whom may now find footing there;
This the poor Out-cast did to us declare,
Nor murmur'd at the unfeeling Ordinance. [161–62]

In striking contrast to the abstractions of 'To Toussaint' this sonnet uses the everyday and anecdotal to underline the depths of Bonaparte's abdication from the ideals of universal humanism. The woman's race is highlighted not suppressed, and the reputation for sexual licence that might, at least in the white reader's eyes, accompany it, is used to draw the reader into the poem. She is 'gaudy in array,/A Negro Woman like a Lady gay' – perhaps someone's mistress or worse. However she has a demeanour at odds with her dress, or perhaps caused by what it signals. She is 'silent as a woman fearing blame;/Dejected, meek, yea pitiably tame', – a meekness so abject that it exceeds anything required of virtuous womanhood.

What her interlocutors draw from the 'languid speech' and speaking silence however is that her 'shame' in this instance may not be the result of personal, sexual culpability but of French racist policy. 'She was a Negro woman driv'n from France/Rejected like all others of her race/Not one of whom may now find footing there.' Wordsworth is here referring to the statute of 2 July 1802, which forbade people of colour from entering the continental territories of France and warned that any residing there without government approval would be expelled. 12 In the Morning Post version, the last couplet, challenging France, and Bonaparte in particular. reads: 'What is the Meaning of this Ordinance/Dishonored Despots tell us if you dare!' However this blustering challenge from poet to despots gives way by 1807 to the version cited above, where, for some twenty years, it is the woman's patience and her absence of vengeful thoughts that is highlighted, an emphasis that marks her profound distance from the category of the heroic, and distinguishes her isolation and helpless suffering from Toussaint's willed patience and imaginary alliances. This very gendered division of the forms of suffering make way for a complex and visible identification of Wordsworth with the woman, each 'driv'n from France' by French despotism, equating her forced exclusion with his own willing selfexile to England. The occasion for William and Dorothy's trip to Calais was a visit to his ex-mistress Annette and his daughter, to make financial arrangements for them, prior to his imminent marriage to Mary Hutchinson. The combined farewell to youthful passions, sexual, emotional and political, find oblique expression in the sonnet through an overlapping set of identifications, which, by 1807, are fully located within the sonnet sequence. Wordsworth's memories of revolutionary springtime, 'like the

May/With festivals of new-born Liberty' when 'A homeless sound of joy was in the sky', are, in the second sonnet of the 'Poems of 1807', situated in a walking-tour taken with his friend Robert Jones, 'on foot together' [156-57]. Both Wordsworth and the Negro woman have now lost their 'footing' in a France which has reneged on its promise to give 'new-born Liberty' and those that praised and fought for it a permanent home. Now each of them is suffering from the deprivation of political hope and sanctuary. In the poem's description of her deeply feminine abjection, with its contradictory accusation and disavowal of racially charged sexual transgression and degradation, the poet locates some of the expressive despair that cannot be lodged in the rewritten script of poetic heroism.

At the same time, the nervous small changes that are made to the poem, over the years, express the level of social discomfort Wordsworth felt at his and Dorothy's transient association with a black woman of dubious morality and class, however victimized. In sequential revisions the woman is anxiously changed from 'fellow-passenger' to 'female' and back again, perhaps because fellow-passenger, as Page suggests, places her too close to the other travellers, but especially to sister Dorothy who in the very next sonnet in the 1807 poems, is called Wordsworth's 'Dear Fellow Traveller'. [162–63] A polemical headnote detailing the contents of the ordinance is added in 1827, and at this point the poem – and the woman – begin to undergo a radical transformation:

## September 1st, 1802 [1827]<sup>13</sup>

Among the capricious acts of tyranny that disgraced those times, was the chasing of all Negroes from France by decree of the government: we had a Fellow passenger who was one of the expelled.

We had a female Passenger who came
From Calais with us, spotless in array, –
A white-robed Negro, like a lady gay,
Yet downcast as a woman fearing blame;
Meek, destitute, as seemed, of hope or aim
She sate, from notice turning not away,
But on all profferred intercourse did lay
A weight of languid speech, or to the same
No sign of answer made by word or face:
Meanwhile those eyes retained their tropic fire,
That burning independent of the mind,
Joined with the lustre of her rich attire
To mock the Outcast – O ye Heavens, be kind!
And feel, thou Earth, for this afflicted Race. [162–63]

The woman's dress first becomes 'spotless' rather than 'gaudy'. In the very

final revision in 1845, printed above, she is a study in contrasts, a 'whiterobed Negro'. Lines 10 to 14, revised in 1827, make her at once exotic, tropically passionate, possibly vengeful and emphatically non-rational. She is more formidable perhaps in this incarnation, but also more stereotypically represented, 14 and the disturbing lack of connection between her passions and her mind - 'burning independent of the mind' - definitively mark her exclusion from the possibility of the heroic. She might even be threatening if the 'tropic fire' of her eyes, so suspiciously at odds with the rest of her demeanour and situation, were not 'joined' with her equally inappropriate 'rich' clothes, did not make her incipient madness merely pathetic, mocking her abject, exiled condition. With the clumsy appeal to the philanthropy of abstract powers - 'Heavens' and 'Earth' - to 'feel' for a subordinated, 'afflicted' race, the light traces of the poet's identification with the woman have been wiped out, effacing the possibility, present in the earlier poem, of a more productively ambiguous sexual and racial representation of 'fallen' figures, lost hopes and the poetics of heroic martyrdom. For if we read 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture', together with the earlier version of 'September 1st, 1802', as the positioning of the poems surely means us to do, we can follow the poet's complementary and conflicting identifications with racially inscribed heroism and martyrdom. The later revision radically changes the relationship between the two sonnets, setting in stone the symbolic Promethean and Magdalenesque tropes of each. Gender is now only too firmly fixed; worse, embodied 'race', with all its natural and cultural attributes, becomes deeply tied to exotic, sexualized, irrational femininity.

Judith Page makes an interesting suggestion that many of the revisions to the poem might have been affected by Wordsworth's possible encounter after 1820 with a resonantly revolutionary painting of 1800 by Marie-Guilliamine Benoist, which depicts a black woman in a white turban (signalling her freed state) and bared breast (the symbol of liberty). But another incident, in 1821, which involved Wordsworth's immediate family and friends and the ongoing history of Haiti, almost certainly influenced these revisions, and sheds further light on the anxieties about race implicit in both versions of 'September 1st, 1802' and in 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture'.

The British abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson, and his wife Catherine were good friends of the Wordsworth menage. In 1822 the Clarksons were playing host to the widow and daughters of the deposed and dead King of Haiti, Henri Christophe, who had, during his lifetime developed strong ties to British abolitionists. Wordsworth and his sister-in-law Sara Hutchinson found the thought of the 'distressed Negro Widow', the 'sable princess' by Mrs Clarkson's fireside, irresistibly funny, and as Dorothy tells Catherine Clarkson, they composed 'with much loving fun' and laughter, a jolly parody of Ben Jonson's poem 'Queen and Huntress, Chaste and Fair':

Queen and Negress chaste and fair! Christophe now is laid to sleep Seated in a British Chair State in humbler manner keep Shine for Clarkson's pure delight Negro Princess, Ebon-Bright!

Let not \*Wilby's holy shade
Interpose at Envy's call
Hayti's shining Queen was made
To illumine Playford Hall
Bless it then with constant light
Negress excellently bright!

Lay thy diadem apart
Pomp has been a sad deceiver
Through thy champion's faithful heart
Joy be poured, and thou the Giver
Thou that makest a day of night
Sable Princess. Ebon Bright!

\*Mrs Wilberforce calls her Husband by that pretty diminutive 'Wilby' – you must have heard her. 16

As amused as William and Sara, sister Dorothy injudiciously sent the poem off to her friend Catherine Clarkson, an act which occasioned a stiff silence of several months, until Dorothy rather ungraciously apologized for 'our joke on poor fallen royalty'. 17 The Jonson parody, with its cruel, crude play on the supposed illuminating shininess of black skin as the only quality of royalty that black people can have, suggests how little of the high seriousness of Wordsworth's tribute to Toussaint had survived. While Toussaint's successors, Dessalines and Christophe, were certainly not the ideal governor imagined by Wordsworth in 1802/3, their shortcomings become the pretext for racial ridicule. Neither heroes nor martyrs, courageous nor abject, black female exiles are no longer proper subjects for humanist poetics, but a topic ripe for burlesque. The 'joke on poor fallen royalty' included as well a thinly-veiled, aggressive assault on the British antislavery project, making fun not only of the grotesque regal pretensions of Christophe's widow but, obliquely, of the Clarksons' politically-driven hospitality. The gratuitous reference to Britain's leading anti-slavery campaigner, William Wilberforce, by his wife's pet name 'Wilby', completes the poem's rendering of abolitionism as itself a kind of 'pretty diminutive': inflated social idealism reduced in practice to social solecisms and feminized domestic farce. The brutality of the parody and the fact that it was sent to the Clarksons at all, itself the occasion for an embarrassing social rift, suggests how much free-floating anxiety was generated by the mere idea of equal social intercourse between whites and blacks in William, Dorothy and Sara. It is perhaps in the light cast by this vignette that we should interpret Wordsworth's distancing revisions of 'September 1st, 1802'.

# HARRIET MARTINEAU, WORDSWORTH, TOUSSAINT AND THOMAS CARLYLE

In May of 1839, Harriet Martineau, then aged thirty-seven and at the height of her success as a popular writer on social, economic and political topics, broke a journey to Switzerland with a brief detour, to visit, for purposes of research and homage, the prison and grave of Toussaint at the fortress of Joux. Her account of this visit is framed within the conventions of the gothic novel. Accompanied by a friend impersonating the maid specified in her travel papers, Martineau crossed the French border at Jougne, proceeding through valleys,

each narrower than the last, more dismal with pines, and more chequered with snow. The air of desolation here and there rendered more striking by the dreary settlements of the charcoal-burners, would have been impressive enough, if our minds had not been full of the great negro, and therefore disposed to view everything with his eyes.

At Joux, they overcame the reluctance of the lieutenant in charge, and were shown through the damp vault and passages into the cell with its 'rotten floor, shining like a pond, the drip of water, the falling flakes of ice' where Toussaint had died under mysterious circumstances in the spring of 1803 after some ten months' imprisonment by Bonaparte. 'No words can convey a sense of its dreariness.' In the last pages of her 1841 novel, *The Hour and the Man*, on Toussaint's rise to power, his capture and death, Martineau's first-hand 'sad impressions' are written into her account of Toussaint's last months. The novel was conceived during this pilgrimage, itself the culmination of an interest of 'many years' in Toussaint and his history, and was written from her sickbed during a long period of illness that followed her trip to Joux.

The Hour and the Man appeared at a critical moment in the history of anti-slavery activism in Britain, coinciding with the failure of the Niger expedition and the increasingly anti-humanitarian stance of the British government. It was intended, and was seen, to be a strategic intervention into debates about the future of the newly-freed slaves in the West Indies, and the direction of anti-slavery activities. The novel's appearance marked the end of a ten-year period during which Martineau had written regularly to a wide English-speaking public on the evils of slavery, but it departs radically from her earlier strategies in that it is the first publication by her in which black men and women are given a voice. In her widely-read volumes on her travels in the United States, Society in America (1837) and Retrospect of Western Travel (1838), it is the white abolitionists and

slaveholders whom she met and debated whose ideas and actions were made vividly present. Now however, Martineau settled on a figure whose associations with the French Revolution and with black anti-colonial struggles made him doubly controversial for early Victorians, presenting him to readers as the quintessential modern hero. As with Wordsworth, Martineau's motives are caught up in a web of public and private histories where liberal contradictions about the conditions of personhood become entangled with her own complex history of heroic identification and her transgressive desires for forms of heroic agency.

The poet himself is an ambivalent presence in Martineau's promotion and depiction of Toussaint – at once a source of her investment in Toussaint and a prior, now discarded, heroic identification. Not only is 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' quoted in full in the appendix to The Hour and the Man, but Martineau's interest in Toussaint dated back to what she describes as the 'period of a few years' in her youth (presumably her late teens, the early 1820s) 'when I worshipped Wordsworth. I pinned up his likeness in my room; and I could repeat his poetry by the hour'. 19 But by the time Martineau was rereading Wordsworth in the 1830s her enthusiasm for his poetry had paled and his dead contemporaries, Keats and Shelley, stood higher in her regard. In 1846 she moved to the Lake District and Wordsworth became a near neighbour. In Martineau's autobiography, written in the mid 1850s, after Wordsworth's death and following the publication of his autobiographical poem, The Prelude, she sketches him memorably in his unheroic old age, famous and egocentric, suffering from 'a life too self-enclosed'. Martineau valued Wordsworth for his simplification of the language and the topics of poetry but not for the emotions registered or evoked by it - 'the heart element in him', she thought, 'was not strong'. She criticized his 'self-derived, self-conscious and subjective' perspective – and wondered why for so long he had been mistaken as a 'philosophic poet'. 20 As Napoleon Bonaparte had served for Wordsworth, Wordsworth, in his turn, functions overtly for Martineau as a failed culture hero, neither right-hearted nor strong-minded. Yet Wordsworth's pervasive influence on Martineau appears all the stronger for this explicit rejection, surfacing with peculiar force in her depiction of Toussaint, where both her critique of and affiliation with Wordsworth are powerfully expressed. Martineau's version of Toussaint avoids the metaphysical abstractions and the philosophical waffling she disliked in Wordsworth; instead it is strong on historical incident and everyday detail, yet it is still recognizably Wordsworthian: Toussaint rewritten as the poet's just Governor. Although properly stoical - we first see him reading the Stoic philosopher Epictetus - Toussaint is never a Promethean loner, but rather devout, bookish, very married, a caring father. In fact he turns out to be just that combination of Governor, soldier, family man and sociable intellectual whom Wordsworth describes as deserving the heroic mantle in the sonnet 'I griev'd for Buonaparte'. A wholly selfless if charismatic leader, moved only by the chance to free his people, Toussaint ends up as an ethical foil for narcissistic heroism in any sphere of life. Through Toussaint Martineau's portrait reinvents the composite heroism of the romantic imaginary.

For Martineau it was crucial that Toussaint was a 'great reader'. 'It appears', she writes in the Appendix to *The Hour and the Man*, 'that in the years of comparative leisure, he was completely engrossed by one book at a time, reading it all spare moments, meditating its contents while in the field, and quoting it in conversation, for weeks together'.' The Appendix goes on to list Toussaint's formative reading. After the Stoic, Epictetus, and the Abbé Raynal, his chosen texts are overwhelmingly military, historical and political, ranging from Caesar's commentaries to Marshal Saxe's *Military Reveries* – this, the practical Martineau implies, properly prepared him for the tasks of leadership he would undertake. A military man and strategist as well as a just and non-retributive General, Martineau's Toussaint reconstructs the hero as soldier/statesman.

Martineau's embattled relationship with the figure and example of the poet-hero is played out subliminally in The Hour and The Man, but while this particular narrative is key to the generational story I am telling, it would be wrong to see it as more than one strand in the novel's orchestration of the heroic. Equally crucial to Martineau's construction of Toussaint were the contradictory assumptions about race and agency in nineteenth-century liberal thinking. A humanist and an environmentalist, Martineau believed absolutely that there was 'the same human heart everywhere' - all other differences were created by 'circumstance'. Slaves, she says 'claim our compassion by their vices yet more than their sufferings' for their vices, she argues, are all brought about by the condition of slavery itself.<sup>22</sup> And this condition, which she, along with others, believed to be one of utter degradation, made her terrified of seeing a slave - she 'never lost the painful feeling' - a 'miserable restlessness' caused to a stranger by intercourse with slaves.<sup>23</sup> For Martineau the pain almost exceeded the sympathy. As a unitarian - later a free-thinking follower of the philosopher Auguste Comte and a liberal, to be fully human meant for her that one must have or desire freedom and autonomy. The act of rebellion on the part of the slave or exslave was for Martineau, as for many abolitionists, the decisive moment in which they secured their equal status in the human race. On the other hand such acts were tainted by revenge, and the fear of vengeful atrocities haunted the white Western imagination - making the slave rebellion at once the proving-ground of human agency and the imagined site of the most inhuman acts of violence.

There is a double psychic move here of projection and condensation that cannot be philosophically reconciled, for such a theory of the human projects on to the slave's rebellion the symbolic act of violent assault on repressive authority, the authority of state or family, on which the emergence of all independent agency might be seen to depend, but which inevitably draws upon that rebelling subject a phantasmatic retribution, at its most extreme

the destruction of self, or of its abstraction, full human status. We might see this narrative of agency as classically oedipal and masculine, but it is above all a cultural narrative with which both sexes, from different subject positions, could and did identify. Martineau's relationship to each stage of the emancipatory trajectory – to the abjection of slavery, the moment of resistance and the threat of retribution – was, not surprisingly, troubled and uneasy, but while she could express that discomfort very fully in her discussion of her relationship to the abject slave, the logic of resistance and punishment could not be explored in the same way, but had at all costs to be rationalized. If the revolutionary black hero was to stand as an exemplary, universal hero, the violence that engenders freedom must be detached from him as a person; he must be seen as free of vengeful passions. Martineau therefore chose to emphasize Toussaint's clemency, especially his policy of 'non-retaliation'. 24 In a long and bloody conflict Toussaint's moral integrity as Christian man and ethical soldier emerge as inviolable.

In The Hour and the Man, Martineau gives free reign to an identification with male heroism, but her feminism finds its place, if only a subordinate one, in her narrative. A web of romantic subplots details the love affairs of Toussaint's sons and daughters, and the novel features a tragic mulatto figure, Thérèse, the former slave mistress of a white planter who becomes the wife of Toussaint's successor, Dessalines. Through the story of Thérèse and of Toussaint's daughters, Aimée and Génefrède, we can, if we like, see Martineau elaborating and altering Wordsworth's vignette of the mysterious Negro woman. Martineau's women are not all cut from the cloth of feminine meekness. Her black women are not candidates for the male heroic mantle; they remain bound within the conventions of nineteenth-century domestic and romantic femininity, but they are neither voiceless or abject. At the same time these fictional women are not allowed to compete with Toussaint or indeed his narrator for the heroic or martyred role.

Toussaint, the 'soldier, the statesman, the martyr': the American abolitionist Wendell Phillips saw Toussaint's heroism as something to be written by the future 'in the clear blue, above' all other Western heroes.<sup>25</sup> The condition of martyrdom was essential to abolitionist representations of Toussaint - his martyrdom elevated their cause, confirmed black agency and both punished and exonerated the mode through which it had been seized. In this sense, but also in a more private and idiosyncratic register, martyrdom is absolutely crucial to Martineau's narrative, as her naked obsession with the traces of Toussaint's last days at Joux make only too apparent. Martyrdom as a form of transgressive celebrity had deep roots in Martineau's psychic history – one might say that since childhood she had been looking for a guilt-free identification with martyrdom, and found it in Toussaint. As a child Martineau had been particularly vulnerable to the seductive and quasi-erotic appeal of martyred heroism, imagining herself in bed at night as a Catholic saint and wishing for the kind of attention that a little crippled friend received for her patience and virtue under suffering. These thoughts deserved punishment; in her Autobiography Martineau links them causally to the adolescent onset of her deafness. 26 Yet fantasies of martyrdom lingered on, expressing themselves in the kind of desire for a life of action, risk and danger, a wish for the celebrity accrued by active heroism that women, together with intellectuals, often seemed to harbour. Not only did Martineau relish as energizing the threats to her life in the American South because of her supposed 'almagamationist' views, in her account of her American travels she describes, without seeming to notice its perversity, a wish to take the place of certain white American abolitionist martyrs attacked or murdered in the cause.<sup>27</sup> Writing the life and death of Toussaint, captured by Napoleon in the very month of Martineau's birth, imaginatively answers several of these wishes. Her idealized production of him in the novel enacts a kind of literary miscegenation, bearing out her 'almagamationist' view that whites and blacks, although unlikely to so desire, had the theoretical right to marry. Toussaint's life and martyrdom provided at once origin and rationale for the dangerous drama of midcentury abolitionism; his suffering validated her participation in and enjoyment of the excitement, violence and notoriety surrounding male abolitionist activities.

The male martyr could also be the occasion for a distinctively feminine, indirect form of heroics, and one whose reward might be traditional marriage. In the Appendix to *The Hour and the Man*, Martineau includes as a kind of afterthought a revealing 'anecdote... received from high authority' in which the Empress Josephine is solicited by the fiancée of the next occupant of the dungeon of Joux, 'the Marquis de Rivière', to aid in his release. The two women 'caused a model of the cell at Joux to be prepared' and set the miniature of the 'horrible abode' in front of Bonaparte, who was so appalled at the conditions it revealed that he released the Marquis, who subsequently married his fiancée.<sup>28</sup> The novel itself, together with its appendix of sources guaranteeing its authority, Martineau almost implies, might be seen as a similar 'model' – an alliance between dead black hero and white woman writer, aimed at enabling Toussaint's liberation, and that of all black slaves, in the minds of its readers.

No exploration of the subtexts and undersides of Martineau's heroic identification should detract from the political impulse and effect of the novel. The Hour and the Man was a strategic intervention, well timed to shore up British belief that they had not erred in abolishing slavery in its colonies in 1833. It struck deeper, attacking the doubt even among those whites who abhorred slavery, that people of African descent could be equal and even superior to themselves. While it attracted praise for its message and 'eloquence' it was criticized for 'unrealistic' characters and its 'absurd exaggeration' of Toussaint's virtues and achievements. Yet its effect was not wholly discounted by those who most disliked its message. In his satirical response to the book, Martineau's friend, Thomas Carlyle, suggests just how cleverly Martineau had condensed in her 'great negro' the proletarian

impulse to liberty and its elite supporters. Writing to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Carlyle acknowledges that it was curious 'to have the real History of the Negro Toussaint; and his *black* Sansculottism in Saint-Domingo; the most atrocious form Sansculottism could or can assume. This of a "black Wilberforce-Washington" as Sterling calls it, is decidedly something.'29

The Hour and the Man appeared in the same year, 1841, that Carlyle published his hugely influential lectures, Heroes and Hero Worship, and the two books should be seen as in radical disagreement about the history and meaning of heroism. While Carlyle is relatively restrained, if patronizing, about Martineau's novel, her idealizing portrait of Toussaint as black revolutionary rankled and irritated him. Toussaint had made a brief appearance in Carlyle's Chartism (1839) as a hypermasculine villain, a threatening example of the limits of black capacity and morality: 'A sooty African can become a Toussaint L'Ouverture, a murderous Three-fingered Jack'. 30 The Hour and the Man can plausibly be read as a long and detailed reply to such racial defamations, as well as a challenge to Carlyle's profoundly antidemocratic ideas of heroism. The Hour and the Man together with other celebratory portraits of Toussaint in the period, kept Martineau's 'great negro' in the public imagination, so that when Frederick Douglass, ex-slave and American abolitionist toured Britain in 1846, he was frequently compared to Toussaint.31

Black heroism as an attribute of living or dead black leaders required delegitimation. When, in December 1849 in *Fraser's Magazine* Carlyle wrote and published his notorious racist essay, 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', arguing that ex-freedmen should be returned to quasislavery (an essay which he soon after circulated in pamphlet form as 'The Nigger Question'), he no longer invoked the figure of the black hero in order to criminalize it. Instead he represents the free slave as illiterate, half-human, unproductive, harmless and feminized – 'a pretty kind of man . . . a handsome glossy thing . . . a merry-hearted, grinning, dancing, singing, affectionate kind of creature' sitting up to his ears in a field of pumpkins. <sup>32</sup> Carlyle's caricature is not new; we have seen something like it in action in Wordsworth's parody of Ben Jonson. 'The Nigger Question' suppressed the existence of men like Toussaint, as either villains *or* heroes, and in shifting his tactics, Carlyle adopted a strategy of racial representation that would be only too successful in the future expansion of racial thinking.

## TOUSSAINT IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY BLACK IMAGINATION

Carlyle's oblique assault on Toussaint's legend is the final vignette in my nineteenth-century narrative of race, gender and heroic identification, but it represents one staging only of Toussaint's figurative role in the history of heroism and its representations. In the twentieth century a number black intellectuals, poets and artists – among them C. L. R. James, Jacob Lawrence and Ntozake Shange – have made Toussaint's career the basis for the rethinking of the meaning of heroism. In this final section I want to suggest, very briefly, how these revisions open up new questions about the heroic, identification and cultural identity.

In the late 1930s C. L. R. James, the Trinidadian writer and activist, then resident in England, turned his longstanding historical research on the Haitian revolution and its first leader into a play, Toussaint L'Ouverture, produced at London's Westminster Theatre in 1936 and starring the black American actor Paul Robeson, and a book, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution, published in 1938.33 Conceived before he left Trinidad for Britain in 1932, James's project was born of a determination to write 'a book in which Africans or people of African descent instead of constantly being the object of other people's exploitation and ferocity would themselves be taking action on a grand scale and shaping other people to their own needs'.34 As the plural 'Africans' and 'people' indicate, Toussaint and the black masses are the composite heroes of James's narrative and analysis, written at the optimistic height of his Trotskyist sympathies. 'The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organize themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day' is the 'epic' theme of the book as laid out in James's preface, in which he reminds the reader of the well-known marxist maxim that not only do revolutions make leaders, rather than the other way round, but that while 'Great men make history.... Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment'. 35 Yet resisting at once the tendency that he sees operative in historical writing from 'Tacitus to Macaulay' to attribute the downfall of old societies and the birth of new ones to God's intervention, weak men, Christianity or absolute monarchs gone wrong, and the marxist 'reaction' which sees abstract 'social forces' personified as the sole agents of history, James gives significant determining power to the 'individual leadership responsible for this unique achievement'. 36 Play and book highlight Toussaint's 'political personality' and its limitations as elements of his historical agency. And in both texts the crisis that marks Toussaint's decline as leader is the execution of his adopted nephew General Moïse, figured by James as both a man in full sympathy with the people and Toussaint's close adviser.<sup>37</sup> Moïse, in James's history, becomes the representative and favourite of the black masses and the principled defender of the autonomy of the embryo nation state from appropriation or destruction by both France and Britain. The betrayal and judicial murder of Moïse symbolizes the failure of Toussaint's identification with the masses on whose behalf the revolution was initiated. Moïse's execution makes way for the compromise of the independence of the revolution, and, in James's version, sets in train Toussaint's own capture and the rise of his successor, the strategically canny, but ruthless and power-hungry Dessalines, who will crown himself Emperor of Haiti. The title of The Black Jacobins encodes the most complex and

ambivalent association in the history it writes, the crucial appropriation by Toussaint and some of his co-revolutionaries of the ideologies and politic styles of the French Revolution.

The representation of those identifications, their extent, their necessity and their tragic irony, is central to James's story. It requires another essay to explore that topic. However, James begins in this early work to tease out the syncretic and the culturally specific strands of what would emerge as a definition 'West Indian' radical culture. The Black Jacobins includes a running analogy between the Russian and the Haitian revolution; it draws overt parallels between Lenin and Toussaint, Moïse and Trotsky and an unstated one, perhaps, between Dessalines and Stalin. James's account of Toussaint's personal weaknesses however are not displaced assessments of twentieth-century socialists, but are more reminiscent of Wordsworth's strictures on Bonaparte, although for James, Toussaint's 'naturally silent' and reserved nature, 'formed by military discipline', is bound up with his admired strengths as a leader.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless his autocratic and authoritarian personality, James argues, prevented Toussaint from explaining his rationales fully to his generals, forfeiting their confidence and trust.<sup>39</sup> The absence therefore, of two kinds of affective connection, with the people and with the rest of the revolutionary leadership, proved fatal to him personally if not, in the end, to his cause.

By making the right kind of affective identifications so central and determining in his exploration of Toussaint's political personality and the historian's larger mission, James shows how necessary elements of romantic heroism are to his argument, even when in the service of and qualified by a materialist analysis which give the people collective agency. The preface acknowledges the book's romantic roots by concluding with an explicit disavowal of Wordsworth's ordering of art and emotion, refusing even to cite Wordsworth's proper name. Declaring that historical writing combines the scientific with the artistic, James suggests:

The violent conflicts of our age enable our practised vision to see into the very bones of previous revolutions more easily than heretofore. Yet for that very reason it is impossible to recollect historical emotions in that tranquillity which a great English writer, too narrowly, associated with poetry alone.

For James, as for Martineau, Wordsworth's aesthetic economy is both too chilly and too generically bounded; for James also a posture of tranquillity in the violence of the twentieth century, is either 'philistine' or 'to be acquired by the deliberate doping of the personality'.<sup>40</sup>

James's negative citation of Wordsworth called my attention of course to the poet's influence on just those elements of James's narrative that seem to revisit the Romantic and Victorian uses of Toussaint. These emerge with particular force if we compare the play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* with *The Black* 

Jacobins. The play embeds the revolution and its leading male figures in a heterosexual and sexualized eighteenth-century milieu in St Domingue, introducing the stock character of the tragic mulatto Marie-Jeanne, once the property and forced mistress of Toussaint's owner, who becomes the wife of Dessalines. Toussaint himself is represented as having not only a wife but many mistresses; among the latter, Mme Bullet, the white wife of his former master. These women, intelligent and spirited, are nevertheless subaltern figures whose role in the revolutionary drama, as victims, lovers, double agents and ethical witnesses, is always instrumental, but their presence in the drama constructs sexual difference as a site of revolutionary identification and gender relations as an index of political personality.<sup>41</sup> In sharp contrast, The Black Jacobins is a book in which all the players are male – its affective palate and its acts of identification are homosocial whether between historians and poets, masses and leaders, or races and nations. While the play socializes and complicates the scene of revolution and the development of the male hero, the book gives free reign to the imaginative possibilities and limitations of pure masculinist heroism. Its story is of the making of a modern nation from which female agency as fact or issue has been excluded.

The Black Jacobins remembers and idealizes the age of democratic revolution from the perspective of the age of socialist revolution, insisting on an impossible fidelity of leaders to their peasant and proletarian constituencies. We need only to push that congruence one step further to say that the revolutionary narrative itself is the idealized heroic; its agents can never fully enact its supra-human sublimity. But where Wordsworth and Martineau were fixed on Toussaint's martyrdom and death as a condition for his heroism, James is much more interested in him as an origin – the leader of 'the only successful slave revolt in history' – an exemplary figure who would illuminate through his extraordinary talents and his limitations the determining conditions for success – his post-mortem on heroic but flawed leadership looks towards an achieved revolutionary present.

In the very same years, 1937–38, that James, in London, was writing *The Black Jacobins*, Jacob Lawrence, a young African American artist from New York's Harlem, was producing his first great work – an astonishing series of forty-one narrative paintings about the St Dominguan revolution and Toussaint, exhibited in Baltimore in 1939. The rocky history of Haitian independence was a central theme for the writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance. The young Lawrence may have been responding, as Richard J. Powell suggests, to the challenge set by W. E. B. DuBois's earlier call for diasporan blacks to be given the knowledge and power 'of modern culture' to work their further emancipation. Lawrence's series is painted in what has been called the 'flat' cubist style for which he would become known – a modernist geometry that works not through distortion in depth but in flattened planes of colour, a sophisticated simplicity that plays on our idea of the naive or primitive visual representation, a cartoon that simultaneously strips the history down to its essential parts and raises it to legend, pictorially

representing its emblematic, epic moments.<sup>43</sup> These are not self explanatory, and Lawrence makes the pedagogic purpose of the series clear; each painting has a short caption which tells the story of the revolution from its genesis in slavery's oppression to Toussaint's capture. Accessibility and simplicity were part of Lawrence's explicit aesthetic - his pictures both evoke and critique 'primitivist' strategies of Atlantic modernism. Indeed we might see the whole series as a challenge to the racism involved in the 'exotic' use of African images as atavistic and anti-modern; Lawrence emphasizes not only the appropriation of French revolutionary dress by the San Domingue revolutionaries, but also shows them planning campaigns and marching in disciplined ranks. And while Toussaint is an organizing figure for the series, he too retains a kind of legendary anonymity; Lawrence's images do not personalize the actors in the drama - faces are absent or generic - instead it is the critical moments of the revolutionary drama that take on a kind of political personality, and their whole structure and narrative curve take up the space of the masculine heroic. Women figure prominently and heroically in later historical series by Lawrence, and in his painting more generally, but the Toussaint series is, like The Black Jacobins, a depiction of male struggles and male heroism.

James's play was written and produced in part as a protest against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Against the frightening advance of aggrandizing imperial nation-states in Europe, and the phobic racism of Hitler's regime, these representations of Toussaint by James and Lawrence implicitly centre him as the last hero of Atlantic Revolution and nation building, as well as a figure of continuity, of heroic resistance to colonial rule, adumbrating the future of heroism in the anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles which would follow World War Two.

It takes the social movements of the post-war period, civil rights, black consciousness, second-wave feminism and the cultural production so central to it, to bring the celebration of masculinist heroism that Toussaint so often seemed to evoke in twentieth-century black male representations under the critical scrutiny of black women claiming a new kind of cultural, political and critical authority. As I suggested at the beginning, women coming up in radical formations of the post-war period were offered - and took - a broad spectrum of male leaders as figures for identification; feminism did not so much foreclose this process - how could it? - as make it much more selfconscious. Toussaint figures as a hero in that reflective mode in Ntozake Shange's verse play - her first major work - for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf. The play's first staging was in a women's bar, the Bacchanal, near Berkeley; after many revisions and changes of cast it arrived on Broadway two years later. A 'woman in brown', one of the seven players whose stories comprise the drama relates her eightyear-old discovery of Toussaint. Sick of a surfeit of children's books -'christopher robin ... pioneer girls & magic rabbits' she comes across Toussaint in the 'ADULT READING ROOM' of her local library

### TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

waz the beginnin uv reality for me
in the summer contest for
who colored child can read
15 books in three weeks
i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
at the afternoon ceremony

waz disqualified

cuz Toussaint
belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM
& i cried

& carried dead Toussaint home in the book
he waz dead & livin to me
cuz TOUSSAINT & them
they held the citadel gainst the french
wid the spirits of ol dead africans from outta the ground
TOUSSAINT led they army of zombies
walkin cannon ball shooting spirits to free Haiti
& they waznt slaves no more<sup>44</sup>

TOUSSAINT becomes her 'secret lover' and imaginary friend and confidante, 'we discussed strategies/how to remove white girls from my hop-scotch games/& etc'. '1955 waz not a good year for lil blk girls' in St Louis, so she decides to run away to Haiti until, by the river she meets and joins forces with a black boy called TOUSSAINT JONES; then 'I felt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE sorta leave me/& I waz sad/til I realized/TOUSSAINT JONES waznt too different ... no tellin what all spirits we cd move/down by the river/st. louis 1955'.45

Shange's brilliantly funny and touching vignette says and does a lot in a short space, laying out a light-hearted lesson on the uses - for children and adults - of political identification, resolving through a poetic translation of the work of the unconscious, the issue of 'dead & livin' heroes that so troubles the texts of Wordsworth and Martineau, situating heroic identification both in its place and moment, 'st louis 1955' and instancing its dissemination through the diasporic process of transmission that James and DuBois had called for. Shange's TOUSSAINT highlights the African voodoo rather than the enlightenment legend of the St. Domingue revolution - the child already has, at her disposal, however bounded by idiot regulations, desegregated access to the former in the Public Library, an access that had, needless to say, been fought for over several generations. By taking possession of TOUS-SAINT, inscribing him in a black girl's self-construction as rebel, Shange returns the legendary hero and the revolution itself to the imagined community of men and women, whose rebellious acts will be made, if at all, together. In one of those intergenerational encounters that are a free gift to



'feeling I don't belong. Walks through leafy glades with a baseball bat by my side.' Photograph by Ingrid Pollard, 1992.



'it's as if the Black experience is only lived within an urban environment. I thought I liked the Lake District; where I wandered lonely as a black face in a sea of white. A visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of unease and dread . . .' Photograph by Ingrid Pollard, 1992.

cultural historians, C. L. R. James, in a late, pro-feminist essay on 'Three Black Women Writers: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange' praises Shange's poetry for its high purpose, its humour and its rage. She is, he says, 'very serious', 'very funny' and 'very mad'.<sup>46</sup>

What heroes read and what we read about them has been a *leitmotif* here, and the passionate eight-year-old reader in Shange's poem brings us back to the question of the aesthetics of race and heroic identification. As I draw to a close I want to let Toussaint L'Ouverture himself 'sorta leave me' – though abandoned heroic identifications always leave their traces, as Shange's 'sorta' slyly suggests – and turn finally to the everyday effects on aesthetics, politics and identity that are the unfinished legacy of the black diaspora.

I want to take us back to England, to 'Wordsworth country', the Lake District with which the poet's aesthetics and his persona have been so long identified. Against the grain of my critique, 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' has, for two centuries, been a touchstone for writers and readers who want to think heroism, and modernity, in a different key. Yet it remains true that the sonnets Wordsworth wrote in 1802 and 1803, including those on Toussaint and the Negro woman, were part of a literary, psychic passage through which the poet worked himself home, made England as home a heroic, patriotic landscape, and a place of greater safety for himself and those like him. As the dissonance between the universalist trajectory of Wordsworth's 'Toussaint L'Ouverture' and his later Jonsonian parody suggests, England's welcome of black exiles and immigrants has been much more reserved.

Nevertheless succeeding generations of the African diaspora have chosen to make England their home. Their projects include black artistic and personal negotiation of the cultural histories and canonized geographies of white England. In a resonant photo-essay from the 1980s, Pastoral Interlude, the Guyanese-born photographer, Ingrid Pollard, depicts a black woman on holiday in the English countryside, placing her, with camera, in typical 'tourist' poses within the rural landscape. While the images are of relaxation and pleasure the accompanying text partially subverts them, telling a different story. Pollard writes '... it's as if the Black experience is only lived within an urban environment. I thought I liked the Lake District; where I wandered lonely as a black face in a sea of white. A visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of unease, dread...' and 'feeling I don't belong. Walks through leafy glades with a baseball bat by my side'.47 Less sanguine, perhaps, than Shange, about the trajectory of change, the disson-ance between image and text in Pollard's essay marks her refusal of an easy settlement, of a compromise or composite identification with a white English aesthetic or its 'universal' cultural appeal. What has become the most banal and picturesque of Wordsworthian images clouds and daffodils - becomes a very specific evocation of the fear and dread of the romantic sublime, against whose pastoral threat a very un-English piece of wood, the baseball bat, - symbolizing perhaps an un-English vocabulary of resistance – seems an appropriate weapon. Pollard is

one of many who are creating a searching aesthetic and politics for and about, 'Those people who are in Western Civilization who have grown up in it but yet are not completely a part, [who] have a unique insight... and something special to contribute'.<sup>48</sup> That productive aesthetic in its restless critique of the politics of cultural iconographies and its crafting of new images is, like identity and the identifications that shape it, always provisional, addressing what has been called, 'The whole question of modernity – the struggle not simply to recover ourselves in past histories, but to produce ourselves as new subjects for the future'.<sup>49</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 This essay is a revised version of an Inaugural Lecture at the University of Southampton on 10 March 1998. In revision I have tried to retain something of its spoken address, while expanding parts of its argument. For their advice and comments at various stages of its production I would like especially to thank Simon Bainbridge, Stephen Bygrave, David Glover, Paul Gilroy, Catherine Hall, Stuart Hall, Mary Jacobus, Paul Kaplan, Ed Larrissey, Jacqueline Rose, Bill Schwarz and David Turley.
- 2 Psychoanalytic definitions and discussions of 'identification' underlie my use of the term throughout this essay. In contemporary psychoanalytic thought identification has increasingly come to be seen as the chief mode through which the human subject is constituted, both as the subject identifies her or his own self with the other, and in which the subject identifies the other with her or himself.
- 3 My account of Toussaint's career and the long struggle for independence in St. Domingue is largely drawn from Robin Blackburn's brilliant synthesis in *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 1776–1848, London, 1988, especially chapters 5 and 6.
- 4 See Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, Cambridge, Mass., 1993.
- 5 Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, London, 1990, pp. 222-37.
- 6 For a fascinating analysis of Romantic poets and the figure of Bonaparte, see Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism*, Cambridge, 1995. My reading of Wordsworth's engagement with Bonaparte is greatly indebted to chapter 2, 'In such strength of usurpation: Wordsworth's Napoleonic imagination', pp. 54-94.
- 7 William Wordsworth, 'Poems in Two Volumes', and Other Poems, 1800–1807, Jared Curtis (ed.), Ithaca, 1983, p. 170. All citations to Wordsworth's 'Sonnets dedicated TO LIBERTY' are from this edition. Page numbers are in brackets in the text.
- 8 My discussion emphasizes the sonnet's first publication in the *Morning Post*, and subsequent revisions. The republication of 'I griev'd for Buonaparte' is of particular interest here.
- 9 On the question of reading and socialization, Bonaparte, reputed to be a 'passionate reader', may have the last laugh. A recent newspaper article reveals that his chosen reading while in exile on Elba included Fanny Burney's Camilla, Ann Radcliffe's Julia and Maria Edgeworth's The Absentee, and Priscilla Wakefield's Letters on Botany.

Napoleon was similarly surrounded by literature during his second exile on St Helena from October 1815 until his death, where his crates of imported books from Europe were supplemented by 'hundreds' more volumes from the library of the British governor, General Sir Hudson Lowe.

Ben Macintyre, 'Bookworm Boney loved English tales', The Times, 31 Jan. 1998, p. 20.

10 Bainbridge, Napoleon and English Romanticism, p. 26.

11 Recueil général annoté des lois, décrets, ordonnances, etc. 1789-1830, 16 vols, Paris 1836. The statute and its relevance to the sonnet is discussed in Judith W. Page, Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women, Berkeley, 1994, p. 69. Page adds that 'a note [in the statute] refers

specifically to sending these people to San Domingo, where Napoleon had reinstituted slavery in the summer of 1802... there is also a clause forbidding intermarriage between whites and people of color'. In her excellent chapter on 'Wordsworth's French Revolution' Page analyses the sonnet and its revisions both in relation to Wordsworth's politics and his personal situation. Although we come to very different conclusions, our readings of the sonnet dovetail at several points.

- 12 Cited is the 1845 version.
- 13 Page argues that in the later revisions 'Wordsworth's presentation of both race and gender seems more general and formulaic'. Page, Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women, p. 72.
  - 15 Page, Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women, pp. 73-74.
- 16 D. W. to Catherine Clarkson, October 24, 1821 in Alan G. Hill (ed.) *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd edn, vol. 3, *The Later Years*, Part I, 1821–1828, Oxford, 1978, p. 87–91. Dorothy's own comments on the Clarksons' guests suggest her collusion with the poem's authors.

If you could see the lively picture I shaped to myself of the sable Queen sitting with her sable daughters beside you on the sofa in my dear little Parlour at Playford you would thank the newspapers for being so communicative respecting your visitors! I placed them in the *little* parlour because it is always first in my thoughts when I turn them thither; but Sara says 'No, they will sit in the great room.' . . . I hope they are good and grateful – and know the value of such a Friend.

- 17 D. W. to Catherine Clarkson, 16 January 1822.
- 18 Harriet Martineau, The Hour and the Man, London, 1904, 'Appendix', pp. 348-49.
- 19 Harriet Martineau, Autobiography, London, [1877] 1983, vol. 2, pp. 238-239. The Autobiography was written in 1855, at a time when Martineau believed herself to be dying, but was published only in 1877, the year after her death. For Wordsworth's pervasive influence on Martineau's thought see Shelagh Hunter, Harriet Martineau: The Poetics of Moralism, Aldershot, 1995, pp. 104-147.
  - 20 Martineau, Autobiography, pp. 238-240.
  - 21 Martineau, The Hour and the Man, p. 347.
  - 22 Martineau, How to Observe Morals and Manners, London, 1838.
  - 23 Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel, London, 1838, Vol. 1, p. 232.
  - 24 Martineau emphasizes this point in her Appendix.

He pardoned his personal enemies... and he punished his followers, as the most unpardonable offence they could commit, any infringement of his rule of 'No Retaliation'.... All the accounts of him agree that, from his earliest childhood, he was distinguished by a tenderness of nature which would not let him hurt a fly (The Hour and The Man, p. 345).

Martineau therefore condones Toussaint's execution of his General, Moyse (or Moïse), because he broke the rule by hating and killing whites. Later commentators would see Moïse's character and execution in a different light.

- 25 Cited by W. E. B. DuBois, 'Africa and the French Revolution', Freedomways 1, Summer, 1961, reprinted as 'Toussaint L'Ouverture', in Eric J. Sundquist (ed.), The Oxford W. E. B. DuBois Reader, Oxford, 1996, p. 301. DuBois also quotes Wordsworth's sonnet.
- 26 'I am sure that my nervous system was seriously injured, and especially that my subsequent deafness was partly occasioned by the exciting and vain-glorious dreams I indulged in for many years after my friend E. lost her leg.' Martineau, Autobiography, vol. 1, p. 45.
- 27 See Martineau, Autobiography, vol. 2, pp. 46, 56. 'I happened to witness the martyr age of its [slavery's] reformers; and I am thankful that I did witness it. These were times when I was sorry that I was not the victim of the struggle, instead of Lovejoy, or some other murdered citizen.'
  - 28 Martineau, The Hour and the Man, p. 351.
- 29 Thomas Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 9 December 1840, in Charles Richard Sanders (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, Durham, N.C., 1985, p. 356.
- 30 Thomas Carlyle, Chartism in Selected Writings, Alan Shelston (ed.), Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 195.
  - 31 For the context in which Douglass is compared to Toussaint, see David Turley, 'British

Unitarians, Frederick Douglass and Race' in Martin Crawford and Alan Rice (eds), Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform, Atlanta, 1999, forthcoming.

32 Thomas Carlyle, 'The Nigger Question' [1849], in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, 5

vols, London, 1899, vol. 4, pp. 348-83.

- 33 There was also an abortive plan to make a film about Toussaint, starring Robeson, and directed by Serge Eisenstein. For James and Robeson in England, see Bill Schwarz, 'Black Metropolis, White England', in Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (eds), Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity, London, 1996.
- 34 C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution, London, 1980, pp. v and vi.
  - 35 C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins, pp. ix and x.
  - 36 C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins, p. x.
- 37 While Martineau rationalized Moïse's execution by charging him with a vengeful and murderous hatred of whites, James insists that Moïse was 'not anti-white'. *The Black Jacobins*, p. 278.
- 38 James's portrait of Toussaint allows for powerful, unreconcilable contradictions in his character, and this perhaps, more than anything else marks a break with nineteenth-century representations:

Despite Toussaint's despotism, his ruthlessness, his impenetrability, his unsleeping suspicion of all around him, his skill in large-scale diplomacy and petty intrigue, to the end of his life he remained a man of simple and kindly feelings... His 'no reprisals' sprang from a genuine horror of useless bloodshed... He loved children and they loved him. (*The Black Jacobins*, pp. 254, 255.)

- 39 C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins, p. 287.
- 40 C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins, p. xi.
- 41 The play is later renamed *The Black Jacobins*, and so appears in its reprinting in Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C. L. R. James Reader*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 67-111.
- 42 Richard J. Powell, 'Re/Birth of a Nation' in Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance, Berkeley, 1997, p. 32.
- 43 For a discussion of Lawrence's style, see Patricia Hills, 'Jacob Lawrence's Expressive Cubism', in Ellen Harkins Wheat (ed.), *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter*, Seattle, 1986, pp. 15-22.
- 44. Ntozake Shange, for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf, London, 1997, pp. 26-27.
  - 45 Ntozake Shange, for colored girls, pp. 27-29.
- 46 C. L. R. James, 'Three Black Women Writers: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange', in *The C. L. R. James Reader*, pp. 411-17.
- 47 Ingrid Pollard, 'Pastoral Interlude', in TEN.8 2: 3, Spring 1992, TEN.8, 'Critical Decade: Black Photography in the 90's', pp. 102–103. Only two of the five images comprising this essay are reprinted in TEN.8. Thanks to Ingrid Pollard not only for permission to reproduce part of her essay, but for directing me towards a reading of it that highlights the complex relationship between image and text.
  - 48 TEN.8 1: 16.
- 49 Editorial, TEN.8 2: 3, Spring 1992, 'Critical Decade: Black Photography in the 90's', p. 7.