

John Patrick Walsh

Free and French in the Caribbean: Toussaint Louverture, Aimé Césaire, and Narratives of Loyal Opposition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. x + 193 pp. (Paper US\$ 26.00)

Since the bicentennial of Haitian independence in 2004 both historians and literary scholars have focused anew on Toussaint Louverture's role in bringing an end to the richest colony in the French Empire, Saint-Domingue. Toussaint's capture by guile, his middle passage in reverse to a remote military prison in the Jura Mountains on the border with Switzerland, his one-sided correspondence with First Consul Bonaparte, and his lonely death are the stuff of legend. Whereas historiography and literary theory have both benefited from this renewal of interest, rare are the studies that attempt to cross disciplinary borders. J.P. Walsh has produced for the nonspecialist reader an excellent analysis of the historiographical discourse on Toussaint Louverture and Aimé Césaire with a focus on the meaning(s) of decolonization in the late eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The originality of his study lies precisely in its interdisciplinarity. Organized into two sections devoted to Toussaint and Césaire respectively, *Free and French* situates itself at the intersection of historiography and the literary essay. Walsh demonstrates convincingly that emplotment (the setting of details into a narrative) is the overarching discursive problem to be addressed: "what is at stake is an understanding of the narrative art of historiography and, therefore, of the implications for interpretation found at the juncture of history, literature, and, in the case of Toussaint, mythology" (p. 30). With specific reference to C.L.R. James's two editions of *The Black Jacobins* (1938, 1963), David Scott's reading of James (2004), and Hayden White's theory of metahistory (1973), he does a fine job of sorting out the ideological implications of emplotment.

Walsh recognizes in David Geggus the preeminent historian of the Haitian Revolution in English. Geggus, he tells us, "stays close to the historical moment," yet "resigns himself to the mysteriousness of Toussaint" (pp. 30–31). Walsh concludes that "it is perhaps impossible to avoid rendering judgment on Toussaint as a world historical figure. Perhaps the space between historical and mythical representation has collapsed in the figure of Toussaint" (p. 31). The slipperiness of his subject, represented by the repetition of "perhaps" above, points to the space that ideology will fill, whether one wishes it or not. I write as a historian of Caribbean letters who participated in both literary colloquia and published volumes devoted to the Haitian bicentennial. The heroism with which the literary imagination has invested Toussaint since the mid-twentieth century testifies to the strength of the mythopoetic drive that Pierre Nora described as a "particu-

lar kind of relationship of the individual in history. It is a relationship of lineage and identification, a block of crystallized beliefs" (2001:413). The history of the political memoir under the Old Regime provides Walsh with the opportunity to rehabilitate the *Mémoire du général Toussaint Louverture* (1802) as well as Toussaint's authorship, which some historians had disputed.

Walsh applies the same historiographical method of emplotment to Aimé Césaire, whose poems, plays, and one historical essay return periodically to the problem posed for French West Indians by the Haitian Revolution. Among Césaire's literary critics few venture beyond the oft-quoted line from his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*: "Haiti where negritude rose for the first time." Fewer still have questioned the historiographical relationship between Césaire's 1963 play *The Tragedy of King Christophe* and his 1961 essay *Toussaint Louverture: La Révolution française et le problème colonial*. This Walsh does, bringing to the fore Césaire's tragic vision of Toussaint, which led him quite quickly to a tragedy in which Henri Christophe is the flawed hero.

It becomes clear in Walsh's analysis that for Césaire both Toussaint and Christophe function as historical embodiments of the tragic vision of *négritude*, which he relates to Césaire's political trajectory. He notes the significance of the discovery in 2008 of an unfinished play by Césaire in which Toussaint is the tragic hero of the Haitian Revolution (Gil Fuentes 2010). It would appear that Césaire abandoned this early literary effort (1941–43) precisely because he could not solve the problem of emplotment. Walsh might well conclude: Q.E.D.

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