

2010

Pen as Sword: Combating the Historical Record in  
Fignolé's *Moi, Toussaint Louverture, avec La Plume  
Complice de L'Auteur*

Mariana F. Past

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholar.dickinson.edu/faculty\\_publications](https://scholar.dickinson.edu/faculty_publications)



Part of the [Other French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

Recommended Citation

Past, Mariana. "Pen as Sword: Combating the Historical Record in Fignolé's *Moi, Toussaint Louverture, avec La Plume Complice de L'Auteur*." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 16, no. 2 (2010): 162-74.

This article is brought to you for free and open access by Dickinson Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact [scholar@dickinson.edu](mailto:scholar@dickinson.edu).

*The Journal of Haitian Studies*, Volume 16 No. 2 © 2010

---

**PEN AS SWORD: COMBATING THE HISTORICAL RECORD IN FIGNOLE'S  
MOI, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE, AVEC LA PLUME COMPLICE DE L'AUTEUR**

**Mariana Past**  
Dickinson College

---

*Depuis deux cents ans, je survis dans la mémoire des peuples. Même  
dans celle de mes adversaires. Depuis deux cents ans, je survis par  
la légende qu'ils ont bâtie autour de mon nom et de mes actions.  
Depuis deux cents ans ... je suis. Cela dit tout.*

—*Jean-Claude Fignole*  
Moi, Toussaint Louverture,  
avec la plume complice de l'auteur

In *Écrire en pays assiégé: Haiti: Writing under Siege*, Marie-Agnès Sourieau and Kathleen Balutansky propose that Haitian literature, perpetually *engagée*, has long served as “the locus for social criticism and activism under political oppression.” (25) One of the major weapons that is wielded in these literary undertakings is the figure of Toussaint Louverture, who, the authors suggest, has operated “both as a founding myth for the nation and as a catharsis in the process of self-recognition.” (26) Although Toussaint indisputably plays a crucial part in the Haitian imaginary, and that of the Caribbean at large, I believe that the function he serves is not necessarily that of triggering or facilitating “catharsis,” because the term connotes an effect which is excessively stable or static. On this question, Charles Forsdick concurs in a chapter of the recently published *Echoes of the Haitian Revolution*, “Arguing around Toussaint”: “Far from being reduced to the status of a static historical figure, fixed through the processes of monumentalization, Toussaint has continued to trigger reflection on the colonial past and the postcolonial present—and this not least in Haiti [...]” (43) Indeed, some of the most recent literary representations of Toussaint are lively interrogations of both past and contemporary realities, stirring up fighting words and images—hardly releasing tensions or eliminating complexes, but rather exaggerating them and deliberately troubling the waters. These texts are works of war, lashing out against ignorance and oppression on all levels.

An excellent example is Jean-Claude Fig nolé's *Moi, Toussaint Louverture, avec la plume complice de l'auteur*, which was published by Éditions Plume et Encre during Haiti's bicentennial year, and to date has not received substantial critical treatment. As a poignant "fictional autobiography" (the first literary endeavor of its kind<sup>1</sup>), this text employs what I call "imaginative deconstruction" to simultaneously explain and critique the Haitian Revolution and analyze what has happened to the Republic of Haiti since 1804. *Moi, Toussaint* is fascinatingly complex and historically dense, incorporating a number of Spiralist tendencies<sup>2</sup>: the text surveys and cross-examines over two hundred years of history, speculates as to the personal motivations underlying the actions of the renowned Haitian leader, and demonstrates why Toussaint is central to, but controversial within, Haitian history. I argue that Fig nolé's representation of Toussaint provides a tertiary space within which to establish a revisionist dialogue about Haiti's place in the world and world history. The writer mobilizes Toussaint as a *porte-parole* to deconstruct the history of Haiti, contest the historical record, and reframe the relationship between the world's first black republic and the world at large.

*Moi, Toussaint* is structured as a conversation that supposedly takes place over twenty-four hours between the general and Fig nolé himself (although the author is never explicitly named). Their stream-of-consciousness exchange reads at times like a confession, and at others, a confrontation. Toussaint, from within his freezing prison cell in the Jura,<sup>3</sup> introduces the "jeune homme" that is his interlocutor. Although at first their rapport is rather formal, Toussaint initiates an eventual change from "vous" to "tu": an important, if imaginary, shift, which signals familiarity and a measure of trust. Fig nolé thus lends his ear to the currents of thought and emotion beneath the surface of the history books, permitting the symbol that is Toussaint Louverture to explain himself directly to the world and his critics, and ultimately to have the last word. Forsdick observes that such attentiveness is a distinctive feature of contemporary texts about the Haitian Revolution: "Continued representation of Toussaint—fictional and historiographic—is accordingly tempered by a growing awareness of the pitfalls of monumentalism, hagiography and hero creation, and of the construction of representativity or exceptionalism—as well as associated exclusions—that these imply." (46)

Acute self-awareness permeates the creative performance of Fig nolé's Toussaint, who forever remembers, and explicitly references, his iconic status (as well as the impact of literary genres). For example, the fictitious autobiographer explains how he learned to penetrate the consciousness of a crowd, create myths, and thus enter the imaginary of a people. (*MTL*

63-4) He gives birth to his own legend by stopping a horse and carriage to save the life of a child: “Ainsi naquit la légende autour de mes pouvoirs surnaturels et de mes dons d’ubiquité. Etre ici et ailleurs en même temps.” (*MTL* 106) Reflecting the process of history-making itself, *Moi, Toussaint* reads less than smoothly: the narrative is disruptive, full of fits and starts. “Toussaint” stops the narrator short early on: “Arrêtez! Ce serait trop banal que l’histoire de Toussaint Louverture commençât comme un petit roman feuilleton [...] Faites-moi naître un après-midi d’orage ...” (*MTL* 17) His perspective is overwhelmingly omniscient, and anachronistic references abound—from the legendary ceremony of Bois-Caïman, to reflections upon Bismarck, Hitler, Mao, De Gaulle, the phenomenon of *déchoukaj*, Graham Greene, the debate concerning reparations for slavery in the United States, and the ongoing war in Iraq. Fignolé’s protagonist asserts his command of twentieth-century terminology—economic, political, psychoanalytic, etc. Jealousies, whims, and emotions all surface, with a sarcastic, ironic, yet earnest tone pervading the text. There are lighthearted moments, such as when Toussaint proclaims, in effect, “this ‘eagle’ metaphor stuff was good, no?” (*MTL* 241)

Sometimes sympathetic, sometimes monstrous, Fignolé’s Toussaint exposes the conflicting discourses that surround the revolutionary hero. The character is obsessed with what historians and biographers have said about him, as well as with history itself. Toussaint references Pauléus Sannon, Michelet, Price-Mars, and Fanon, then protests how Dorsinville depicts him, calling his work a meager “formule.” (*MTL* 227) And he takes issue with Léon-François Hoffmann about the notion that “Bois-Caïman” never existed. The supposed royal lineage of Toussaint Louverture is another myth that Fignolé deconstructs: the general denies being the descendant of a Dahomey King called Gaou Dégénou. Cynically, he observes that a village in Benin, where traces of Gaou-Guinou had been found, proceeded to erect a statue of Toussaint on the spot, “en grande pompe.” (*MTL* 22) And Toussaint points out that no one even thought of inviting him to the inauguration ceremony; he speculates that it is because “je n’ai rien à voir avec cette Afrique qui ne peut pas être celle de mes ancêtres.” (*MTL* 23) After dismantling this myth, Fignolé’s all-omniscient Toussaint goes on to attack theories of Pan-African solidarity. He categorically refuses the idea of the “Black Atlantic,” or a deep solidarity between Africans and members of the Caribbean Diaspora and beyond, declaring, “les nègres se haïssent depuis la Guinée.” (*MTL* 24) Toussaint travels through time to attend twentieth-century Black Diaspora conferences; he concurs with a professor from Gabon that contemporary debates on reparations for African Americans are ridiculous. “Nous avons beau assumer être leur

diaspora . . .” (*MTL* 23) Moreover, Fignolé’s *porte-parole* opines that no part of the slave past must be romanticized: we are not brothers, because we sold one another into slavery. (*MTL* 24) This calculatingly provocative statement contests not only the fundamental tenets of Négritude, but all discourses of black solidarity.

Another important tension in *Moi, Toussaint* is Toussaint’s relationship with his rival and fellow icon, Napoleon Bonaparte. They are similar men; as the protagonist puts it: “We both experienced social climbing pains.” “La même parodie du héros antique. Et tragique.” (*MTL* 70) But Toussaint is confident that he will one day be judged more favorably than his rival: “Si l’Histoire doit faire la part équitable entre nous deux, sans aucun doute elle m’absoudra. En me donnant raison contre lui. Je voulais construire. Il n’a aidé, il n’aide encore qu’à détruire.” (*MTL* 271) At this point Jean-Michel Cusset’s dramatic piece *1802 ou le deuxième jour* comes to mind, wherein the figures of Toussaint and Delgrès put the dying Napoleon on trial, to the same end. Fignolé’s Toussaint insists upon how his triumph over Napoleon led the French general to abandon his territorial claims in the New World, thus allowing the United States’ destiny to be fulfilled. (*MTL* 149) Such a claim is tantamount to C.L.R. James’s radical proposal that the conditions in Saint-Domingue ultimately catalyzed the French Revolution. Another target for Fignolé’s myth busting is the notoriously conflicted relationship between Toussaint and the mulatto revolutionary general, Rigaud. Additionally, he makes a frontal attack on the Marxist approach—and other ideologies and methodologies, distant and misinformed when applied to Haiti—which is depicted as utterly irrelevant.

But the most poignant question that Fignolé advances in this narrative inquiry is whether Haitians can ever have a common destiny. His protagonist declares, resolutely, “Non.” (*MTL* 119-20) Toussaint explains that his was a *mission impossible*; individual interests will forever trump those of the nation. (*MTL* 130) Although he never intended for Saint-Domingue to become the Haiti of today, and he disputes his title of “précurseur,” he allows his part in laying the groundwork for political strife in the years to come. The general admits to having succumbed to the “tentation du césarisme,” which he bequeaths to the “chefs futurs de l’armée indigène.” (*MTL* 185) He observes that poverty has always been fetishized, or patronized, in Haiti: in his day, the ex-slave soldiers bravely went into war barefoot, conscious of their soon-to-be epic status. Toussaint disassociates himself from the country that has come to be, telling his interlocutor, “Il y a dans ton pays, aujourd’hui, une apologie de la pauvreté, qui m’angoisse [ . . . ] Ce pays n’est pas le mien. Je suis un général français qui fut fonctionnaire dans ton île.” (*MTL* 205)

The figure of the “jeune homme,” representing Fignolé, is little more than a pretext for the musings of Toussaint: frequently ambiguous, he is too weak to be a true foil. The youthful character occasionally passes judgment, or comments on the appearance of the *vieux général*, but most often remains silent. At one point he wonders whether to leave, but decides to stay, though Toussaint may “divaguer,” and he questions whether Toussaint trusts him as he writes. Another problem in the narrative appears: Toussaint has managed to get into the head of the narrator, and is influencing his own thoughts:

*Le contact du général est contagieux. Voilà que j'argumente ses silences, m'embarrasse de ses soucis, parle à sa place par transfert de personnalité. Me méfier. Sinon je m'emballe, prenant fait et cause pour lui, l'incitant sans doute à taire la vérité. Oui me méfier! (MTL 81)*

In calling Toussaint contagious, is Fignolé merely blurring the lines between his consciousness and that of his subject, or commenting on the danger of allowing oneself to be overly—and literally—impressed by one’s national history? It is not at all clear, but I find the latter possibility compelling. More importantly, perhaps, this conflation of perspectives between writer and subject is a hallmark of the Spiralist movement.

Although *Moi, Toussaint* is a novelistic autobiography, the text reflects many of the aesthetic patterns introduced within Spiralist fictional work, as outlined by Glover:

The Spiralists challenge notions of chronological temporality, verisimilitude, and pre-established literary myths; they celebrate the disintegration of the plot in favor of the development of themes and any possible deviations [ ... ] The Spiralist novel [ ... ] proposes an intricately woven web of accumulated images, repeated sequences, and ambiguous characters among which its reader stumbles virtually unguided. (247-48)

Indeed, Toussaint warns his interlocutor, “Tu t’es sans doute aperçu que je mélange les faits, les dates, les lieux et peut-être les acteurs. Impute-le à une mémoire vacillante qui se cherche dans le fouillis des siècles.” (*MTL* 167) However disingenuous this may be (since his memory elsewhere is just fine), Toussaint/Fignolé, or Fignolé/Toussaint, is insisting on the need to wander in history, and to retell his own story, using whatever elements of reality he finds most convincing. Again, as Glover indicates, this approach is archetypically Spiralist:

With the violence and frenzy of the whirlwind, the spiral incorporates all in its path, without distinction, judgment, or hierarchy. Interested, above all, in the immediate and the experiential, Frankétienne, Fignolé, and Philoctète embrace what fragments of reality they are able to seize, and thus integrate the episodic and the unstable into the very foundations of their works. Questions are constantly posed, yet answers are neither provided nor sought. Speech is literally displayed as the authors exult in the impulsiveness and sincerity of the cry. [...] Frankétienne, Fignolé, and Philoctète still believe that words are so many “armes miraculeuses” with the power to seize and transform the world. (254)<sup>4</sup>

The supreme confidence Fignolé displays in the power of the pen, and in the power of language, will be further discussed subsequently.

Fignolé’s all-knowing Toussaint objects that nothing has changed in Haiti since the Revolution, and that things have gone from bad to worse:

N’y a-t-il pas dégradation par rapport à mon époque? La vie des nègres, certes, ne valait pas grand-chose, mais leur existence demeure conditionnée à générer la délinquance politique et ses dérivés sociaux, économiques, culturels. Le nègre haïtien, de nos jours, est un résidu. Il a développé son mental autour de la mémorisation inconsciente de son passé. Sans cesse révolté, toujours enchaîné, il est en permanence une pulsion vers la liberté. (*MTL* 270-71)

I read this “pulsion vers la liberté” negatively, as a lack of agency on the part of contemporary Haitians; it is possible, though, that Fignolé intends the phrase to be understood otherwise.

Turning what he implies to be *indigéniste/noiriste* presuppositions upon themselves, he opts to ally himself instead with the ideals of the French Revolution that, even though they were not brought to fruition and did not fully incorporate the rights of all men, were nonetheless noble at the outset (he opines). A short while later, Toussaint explains his desire to extend control of Saint-Domingue to the eastern part of the island, under one French administration; he sees the East as strategically valuable, and basically invents a philosophical reason to go there. “J’en fis un prétexte officiel: nécessité de porter à l’est l’étendard de la liberté au nom des principes généraux de la Révolution.” (*MTL* 225) In so doing, Toussaint inscribes himself into universal history and consecrates his hero status:

La prise de possession de l'Est confortait ma vision d'un gouvernement impérial de l'île. Cette campagne, je l'inscrivis dans le cadre homérique des grands mouvements de l'histoire. Ce n'est pour rien, c'est l'expression consacrée, qu'on m'appelle précurseur. (*MTL* 226)

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Toussaint's self-related story climaxes with the "Affaire Moïse." While writers other than Figolé have portrayed (the historical) Toussaint as somewhat of a sellout for having ordered the execution of his left-leaning nephew and thus betraying the Haitian people, Figolé's more openly constructed Toussaint is a good deal more nuanced. As he begins to recount the infamous episode, *Moi, Toussaint* proclaims that Moïse was a "cheval fou" who refused to enforce his orders that the ex-slaves remain on their former plantations (which was an integral part of his vision for the new Saint-Domingue). Moïse, "affectant d'être humain, trop humain," criticized him for having been "too French," and for having neglected his people. (*MTL* 259-60) With dreadful logic, Figolé's Toussaint claims that he has at last achieved racial equality in Saint-Domingue, by killing 300 blacks to avenge the execution of a group of whites (which Moïse had approved): "Pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'humanité, la vie d'un blanc valait celle d'un nègre." (*MTL* 266) Despite all of this, what is important is that Toussaint realizes, and confesses, that he made a mistake:

J'ai confondu l'histoire de Saint-Domingue avec celle de ma fortune, donnant l'épopée à écrire comme la geste que je faisais ou comme celle qui m'était juste ... Sans m'en rendre compte, j'ai joué mon sort contre l'histoire en marche ... j'ai tenté de bloquer la marche de l'Histoire. La liberté est un tout. Au niveau de la conscience des peuples, elle ne s'accommode ni de la subtilité des dirigeants ni des écarts consécutifs à leur fortune. (*MTL* 268-69)

Figolé subtly distinguishes between the unfolding "histoire," as personally experienced by Toussaint, and the official development of "l'Histoire"; the revolutionary figure is thus humanized in a manner unachievable by history books. That the dreams of "papa" Toussaint were disappointed in turn saddens the narrator, or "jeune homme," as well:

Je dérive dans la mouvance de papa Toussaint ... Ses rêves ont sombré dans la désespérance pour ne donner naissance qu'à un peuple d'ombres. Saint-Domingue, définitivement, a perdu sa grandeur. De l'apprendre, une pitié déçue dévore



le général. Si seulement il pouvait changer, réintégrer son image, se couler dans un monde qui lui accorderait la chance de revivre dans une Saint-Domingue où l'espoir ne serait pas un simple mot. Mais non, il est trop tard pour tout. (MTL 277)

Even more moving is the final realization on the part of Toussaint, who wishes aloud that he had been a better communicator, because that could have helped avoid future cycles of violence in Haiti:

Cela eût-il suffi à sauver des rêves devenus alors communs? A nous sauver nous-mêmes? C'est-à-dire à créer un destin autre à Haïti. Peut-être que oui. Bien loin d'imposer mes projets d'en haut, nous les eussions construits ensemble avec la masse des nègres que nous voulions affranchir de l'indignité de l'esclavage." (MTL 285)

Toussaint speaks about his fellow black citizens from a certain distance, in a tone that could at best be deemed ungenerous. More than once he admits to having had absolutely nothing in common with the slaves, leading them out of a sense of false brotherhood (MTL 49), and wanting to manipulate "cette masse informe, agglutinée autour de ses maléfices" that had nothing but a death wish. (MTL 50) All of this is, of course, imaginable; that is precisely Figiolé's point.

The dying revolutionary hero, contrite but still somewhat on the offensive, is inscribed into the Haitian landscape (instead of returning to Africa, which would not have accorded with his worldview), lending him the mantle of legitimacy: "*Un beau pays, malgré parfois la rudesse de la nature [...] Ses yeux se voilèrent, s'embuèrent de la détresse nue des mornes. Leur désolation le renvoya à l'image d'un paradis perdu dont il s'était efforcé de se souvenir. Dans la douleur et dans l'impuissance des mots. Sa voix se fana.*" (MTL 285-86) And Toussaint expires, feeling not a little betrayed—thus reversing the criticism made by a number of contemporary Caribbean writers, suggesting that he betrayed his people. His final utterance claims victim status for himself as well: "Le pays! Mais quel? Lui aussi a trahi mes rêves!" (MTL 286)

If Toussaint Louverture has lived for over two hundred years in the memory of the Haitian people—and elsewhere, of course—then why does he need to die again, for Figiolé's purposes, after relating his life story? How does the celebrated figure's re-death relate to this Haitian writer's revisionist project? To begin with, Figiolé is hardly espousing the same concept of tragedy proposed in Césaire's canonical play. If we regard Fabienne Pasquet's *La deuxième mort de Toussaint Louverture*, the protagonist

is obviously destined to die a second time, but her Toussaint is dissimilar to this one (although dreamlike, philosophical qualities permeate the text). For Pasquet, Toussaint is more of a sage, a repository of knowledge and experience that is progressively imparted to his cellmate and foil, the Prussian poet Kleist, who asks him questions such as, “Ce qui m’intrigue le plus, c’est de savoir comment des gens, privés depuis toujours de liberté, se débrouillent pour survivre sans qu’on leur dise ce qu’ils doivent faire.” (*DM* 74) And Toussaint fills in the blanks for his European interlocutor, who at the end of the novel is utterly transformed by his new understanding of the Haitian hero. As Toussaint lies dying, Kleist implores him to stay alive; the (unquestioned) hero gently but firmly refuses, saying he must rejoin the land of his ancestors. In contrast, Figiolé’s Toussaint has categorically rejected the Vodou religion—although it supported his military efforts at one time—saying that such beliefs reflect backward thinking (in that the ex-slaves thought that death would bring them liberty, through a return to Africa), and are thus his worst enemy. So in *Moi, Toussaint* one does not find a sense of rebirth for Toussaint—rather, a more final kind of ending (at least in terms of the plot), and a figurative settling of scores. Figiolé’s work, though not necessarily fixated upon death—a common trope in Haitian literature—reveals distrust for the historical record as such, and demands that one read it reparatively, with certain notions put permanently to rest. If the main speaking subject is deceased, no one can challenge him directly, and his statement is the last one to go on the record.

Figiolé’s literary project seeks to articulate, if not actually answer, the burning “what ifs?” of Haitian history as it relates to the West. What if Toussaint had bribed Napoleon into giving Saint-Domingue its independence? It was actually offered at one point, Figiolé/Toussaint explains: “un épisode peu connu de nos tumultueux rapports.” (*MTL* 47) What if Toussaint had had a navy? And so on. Throughout *Moi, Toussaint* the process of asking questions is more important than the fact of answering them. Strong emphasis upon the reflective side of Figiolé’s protagonist suggests that the edges of established historical discourse about the Revolution are softer than they appear.

Though the author concludes his fictitious autobiography of Toussaint on a rather pessimistic note, the aesthetic he espouses in the text—flowing from the Spiralist tradition of focusing on chaos and disorder—allows for a decisive attack on all sides insofar as contemporary problems in Haiti are concerned. A tendency to idealize the Haitian Revolution and its leaders masks the real adversities, the ongoing violence, and the repetition of the master-slave dynamic in Haiti, which is now perpetrated by “les Blancs noirs de notre histoire: Lambert, Borno, Duvalier.” (*MTL* 156) The

post-Duvalier crisis and Aristide's destitution can be read as unsuccessful revolutions, or "H'Éros-Chimères," borrowing the words of Frankétienne, that result in chaos and disorder.

Though certainly in *Moi, Toussaint* Fignolé evinces cynicism about the current state of affairs in Haiti, what he is fundamentally lobbying for is a more human approach to Haiti in general—based upon the following radical notions: that an accumulation of "truths" have been constructed around Haiti's past, which may or may not be accurate; that the process of constructing history is never absolute; and, finally, that people are people, and should be understood as such. All this to counter the advancement (from outside Haiti, primarily) of academic or scientifically based arguments about where the country went wrong, at what point in history. In short, a truer form of solidarity needs to be established between Haiti and the rest of the world, in the place of artificial/foreign interventions that do nothing to help the world's first black republic move closer to any of its original ideals.

Instead of working to realize any kind of cultural or psychological catharsis, then, literary interventions such as Fignolé's seek to up the ante and keep the fight going. It is indeed possible—and necessary—to come to a better understanding of Haitian history, but one must never remain passive about it. If the wound closes, one can forget about the scar. But if the wound is kept open, one is amply reminded that it exists, and therefore encouraged to keep thinking (critically) about how it got there.

The total lack of references Fignolé makes either to, or in, Kreyòl is conspicuous and puzzling, given that numerous political and social issues revolve around language use in Haiti. The only line in the Haitian language that appears in his text is "Ètre savé à la lecti" ["To be learned/literate"], a phrase uttered by Toussaint's fellow citizens to describe his level of erudition. (*MTL* 65) I do not wish to imply that Haitian writers must write in Kreyòl, in part or in whole, to be effective, convincing, or in any way "authentic"—in this aspect Fignolé's work simply differs from that of many other Caribbean writers who have taken on the revolutionary trope. *Moi, Toussaint* demonstrates a strong level of confidence in the written word, as well as in the oral/personal transmission of legend. This position corresponds well to the Spiralist stance, as Glover suggests:

The Spiralists insist, not unlike the majority of twentieth-century Francophone Caribbean writers, that every intellectual has both the potential and the obligation to put his or her exceptional creative abilities at the disposal of the collective. [... Their work expresses] a belief that, used

correctly, the written word might serve as an instrument of revolt, the vehicle for a solitary cry with the power to awaken the collective. (252)

Citing Fardin's "Entretien avec Jean-Claude Fignolé" (27), Glover goes on to suggest that "Haiti is still in the process of being born, of readying itself to assume its 'destin de peuple.' Haitian literature must, therefore, not only reflect but help facilitate this rebirth and (re)insertion into world culture." (Glover, in *Writing under Siege*, 249) Accordingly, a number of Haitian intellectuals, such as Fignolé and Frankétienne in particular, have been "as dedicated to creating and participating in projects for the development of the community as they have been to the more solitary task of creative writing." (Glover, in *Writing under Siege*, 241) In *Moi, Toussaint*, Fignolé's writing with communal (and political) purposes in mind seems apparent. Perhaps the fictitious autobiography is written entirely in French so that it can be most easily understood by readers abroad, and thus combat negative perceptions of Haiti.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, Fignolé's work is part of an emergent trend: the ongoing struggle to frame Haiti's revolution and history in global terms, and to inscribe Haiti into a larger framework, instead of allowing the Revolution to be (at best) simply romanticized as an exceptional but isolated event. Neither hero-worship on the one hand, nor hero-condemnation on the other, should jeopardize an appreciation of the political, cultural, and artistic power of the Haitian people. But it is equally essential to realize that the shortcomings conventionally ascribed to Haitian leaders have their own histories and trajectories, and that our "understandings" of their failures may be based on little more than erroneous, or unforgiving, historical accounts or propaganda. Haiti's historical legends have been interpreted in unkind and even wrongful ways, by Haitians and non-Haitians alike. Revolutionary heroes and ideals will and should nevertheless live on, because it is in the collective endeavor of deconstructing and re-constructing such figures—"arguing around" them, collectively—that a people can define and better understand itself, and thus prepare to meet new challenges involved in reconstructing the nation. So if cultural production represents one of Haiti's greatest riches, and thereby its most important export, then Toussaint's figurative pen can be a mighty sword for "[...] un peuple pris au piège par des forces de domination irrépressibles mais déterminé à persévérer, [...] un peuple privé de ses droits fondamentaux mais acharné dans son combat et résolu à vivre [...]." (Balutansky and Sourieau 9)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Other autofictions and autobiographies addressing issues of decolonization have enjoyed success in the recent past, however.
- <sup>2</sup> In “Physical Internment and Creative Freedom: The Spiralist Contribution,” a chapter in *Writing under Siege*, Kaiama Glover points out that the theoretical and aesthetic concerns of Fignolé and Frankétienne, his fellow Spiralist, are “subject to constant change and reevaluation” (254) because the pair have continued to publish up to the present date; while *Moi, Toussaint* does not participate as directly in that current, I believe that its effectiveness depends largely upon elements of the Spiralist approach, which Fignolé incorporates.
- <sup>3</sup> Fignolé’s description of the setting is remarkably similar to the opening of Fabienne Pasquet’s *La deuxième mort de Toussaint Louverture*: a mysterious, dreamlike tone prevails.
- <sup>4</sup> Glover notes that the phrase “armes miraculeuses” is borrowed from Aimé Césaire’s *Les armes miraculeuses*. (1970)
- <sup>5</sup> In a 1991 interview for *Notre librairie*, Fignolé explains his annoyance with metropolitan speakers of French who repeatedly comment upon how well he speaks and writes in the language. Pointing out this relative cultural impasse, which is due to a fixation upon formal aspects of language, Fignolé raises the question of whether inclusion in the category of “francophonie” is useful for Haiti at all: “[La francophonie] devrait être une rencontre au niveau d’un espace langagier entre des peuples différents. Rencontre ouverte pour un enrichissement réciproque, mais s’il faut voir le français comme un outil de communication à l’usage de la France et que l’on doive s’étonner que les autres l’utilisent différemment à bon escient, alors j’ai peur que la francophonie n’ait pas de sens pour nous et que l’on y voie une nouvelle forme d’impérialisme.” (Magnier 48)

## Works Cited

- Balutansky, Kathleen M., and Marie-Agnès Sourieau, eds. (2004) *Écrire en pays assiégé: Haïti: Writing under Siege*. New York: Rodopi.
- Césaire, Aimé. (1963) *La tragédie du roi Christophe*. Paris: Présence africaine.
- Cusset, Jean-Michel. (2002) *1802 ou Le dernier jour: théâtre*. Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge.
- Fardin, Daniel. (December 1972) “Entretien avec Jean-Claude Fignolé.” *Le petit samedi soir*.
- Fignolé, Jean-Claude. (2004) *Moi, Toussaint Louverture, avec la plume complice de l’auteur*. Montréal: Éditions Plume et Encre.
- Forsdick, Charles. “Arguing around Toussaint: The Revolutionary in a Postcolonial Frame,” in Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw (eds), (2008). *Echoes*

*of the Haitian Revolution, 1804-2004*. Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, pp. 41-60.

Glissant, Édouard. (1961) *Monsieur Toussaint*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Glover, Kaiama L., "Physical Internment and Creative Freedom: The Spiralist Contribution," in Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnès Sourieau (eds), (2004). *Écrire en pays assiégé: Haiti: Writing under Siege*. New York: Rodopi, pp. 231-256.

James, C.L.R. (1938) *The Black Jacobins*. New York: The Dial Press.

Magnier, Bernard, and Jean-Claude Figolé. "Jean-Claude Figolé, poète de la Mémoire." *Notre librairie: Revue du Livre: Afrique, Caraïbes, Océan Indien* 104 (1991): pp. 45-48.

Pasquet, Fabienne. (2001) *La deuxième mort de Toussaint Louverture*. Paris: Actes Sud.