

RESEARCH ARTICLE

New Beginnings Without New Heroes? 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution and the 2010 Earthquake in Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (2012)

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This article analyses Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (2012), a young adult novel which joins together, across parallel narrative threads, stories of Haiti's 1791–1804 Revolution and its post-2010 earthquake present. I examine the novel's use of twinning, explicitly rooted in the complex figure of divine twins in Vodou, *marasa*, and the parallels and tensions that this variation of a 'multistranded narrative' (McCullum 1999: 36) creates in the novel's vision of Haiti's futures. The twinning of the two narrative strands in Lake's *In Darkness* works across multiple levels. First, it effectively popularises the knowledge of a key historical event, the Haitian Revolution, and Haiti's more recent history, pointing to their contemporary relevance. Second, it presents the reader with a range of subject positions, formed around individual responses to violence, that invite nuanced conceptualisations of selfhood and intersubjectivity. Thirdly, the coming together of the two narratives in the novel's consideration of individual and collective futures exposes the tensions within the teleological trajectory of rescue and recovery: escaping such linear designs, the collective work of recovering is an open-ended and asynchronous process. Finally, in its turn to the Revolutionary history, the novel points to the ways in which Haiti's radical past provokes new visions of collective futures, ones that take up the task of recovering, and working towards the realization, of the guiding ideals of the Haitian Revolution.

Keywords: Haiti; 2010 earthquake; young adult literature; Nick Lake; *In Darkness*

Introduction

I am the voice in the dark, calling out for your help. I am the quiet voice that you hope will not turn to silence, the voice you want to keep hearing cos it means someone is still alive (Lake 2012: 1).

One night that rebellion caught like a flame in Haiti, the slave named Toussaint swung down from his horse. It was a good horse—it had been a gift to him from his master, Bayou de Libertas, and despite its age it still served him well. (...) Soon, though, there would be no more masters, and no more slaves (Lake 2012: 37).

Captivating, confusing, and gripping, these are the opening sentences of two beginnings of Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (2012), a young adult novel which joins together, across parallel narrative threads, stories of Haiti's 1791–1804 Revolution and its post-2010 earthquake present.¹ Published only couple of years after the Mw7 earthquake shook the island on January 12th, 2010, Lake's creative text is one among many cultural and literary responses to the country's more recent and distant past. In its dual focus on the 1791–1804 Revolution as well as the 2010 Haiti earthquake,

¹ This article is a single-text focused analysis that draws on a comparative discussion of Lake's novel in *Disasters, Vulnerability, and Narratives: Writing Haiti's Futures* (Mika 2019). Therein, I discuss, in more contextual and comparative manner, Lake's use of the zombie figure and the movement from darkness to light that complements the twinning of the two narrative strands. The use of twinning, as explored in the article, already points to the key limitations that are further accentuated in Lake's use of zombies and turn to the light and darkness metaphors.

In Darkness joins a wide ranging corpus² of narrative responses to the January 2010³ disaster and literary representations of the Revolution, famously declared by Aimé Césaire the 'first Negro epic of the New World' (Césaire: 2000 [1967]: 90). By invoking the story of the Revolution, which has been the subject of numerous creative works⁴ and 'has always been an ideological battleground' (Kaisary 2014: 3), the novel seems to suggest the need for a reconsideration of founding national narratives and their relevance to the shattered post-earthquake context. In twinning the two events and trajectories of individual and collective rescue and recovery, *In Darkness* probes the ways in which the Revolutionary past provokes renewed visions of the country's post-disaster futures.

Across its many forms and expressions, Haiti's "'popularity' is often, after Kaiama L. Glover and Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, anchored in 'the narrative of Haiti's exceptional nature' (Glover and Benedicty-Kokken 2016: 2). Such persistent discursive and epistemological framings of Haiti's radical establishment, its past and its present, as Deborah Jenson, argues 'have been narrated in a mode one might describe as the writing of disaster (Jenson 2010: 104).' Indeed, despite the growing scholarly interest in and public awareness of Haiti's global significance, the country's history remains largely unknown or is often reduced to a series of disasters, dictatorships, and ever-growing poverty that followed the heroic, but ultimately fatal, revolutionary impulse. As one illustrative newspaper headline put it days after the earthquake, Haiti's history seemed to be 'a long descent to hell' (Henley 2010). Its futures, if one follows this trajectory, are unimaginable.

In what follows, attending to the generic conventions Lake's *In Darkness* draws on and its thematic and formal complexity, I will examine the novel's use of twinning and the parallels and tensions that this variation of a 'multistranded narrative' (McCullum 1999: 36) creates in the young adult novel's vision of Haiti's futures. Specifically, I want to look at this relationship between violence, recovery, and futures, across the two alternating narrative threads. Through a series of close-readings of key moments in the respective protagonists' journey from sense of incompleteness to wholeness, and their eventual twinning, I will argue that while suggesting the possibility of an individual trajectory from violent pasts to violence-free futures, *In Darkness* equally points to the limitations of a romance-like teleological trajectory of heroic new beginnings and happy-endings in the context of collective post-disaster futures.

At the most basic level, *In Darkness* presents the reader with a story of a young Haitian boy, Shorty, who is trapped under the rubble of one of Port-au-Prince's, Haiti's capital, hospitals. He was treated there a few days prior to the disaster, following a shooting between rival gangs in Cité Soleil, one of the Haitian capital's most deprived neighbourhoods. Across this narrative strand, Shorty tells his own story and takes part in it. His first-person account is narrated consistently in the present tense but also incorporates past memories and flashbacks; the narrative unfolds in time, with the reader and the narrator being equally uncertain of its outcome. Moreover, the novel's opening, *in media res*, draws the reader immediately into the focalized story and the uncertain world of a young boy's darkness and dreams. *In Darkness* is dedicated to 'the people of Site Solèy' (Haitian Kreyòl for Cité Soleil) and opens with two epigraphs. The first is an extract from Toussaint L'Ouverture's⁵ letter to Napoléon Bonaparte, and the second consists of the last six lines from William Wordsworth's 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' (1802).⁶ Although initially the link between the dedication, the epigraphs relating to the Haitian Revolution, and the subject of the novel (the 2010 earthquake) seems rather unclear, the rationale behind this pairing becomes apparent, thirty-seven pages later, when the reader encounters

² A number of fictional works were published in the wake of the earthquake as well as a few publications aimed specifically at children and young adults, among them: Edwidge Danticat's *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti* (2010), Ann E. Burg's *Serafina's Promise* (2013), and, more recently, Laura Rose Wagner's *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go* (2015).

³ Mika 2019 offers an extensive analysis of some of the narrative responses to the earthquake, including a comparative discussion of Lake's novel and Laura Wagner's young adult novel (Part IV). Other critical works include Munro (2014) and Vanborre (2014).

⁴ In *The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imaginary*, Philip Kaisary emphasises the role of the Revolution as an inspiration for a number of literary works, pieces of art and works of music from the nineteenth century onwards (Kaisary 2014: 4–8).

⁵ *In Darkness* spells the Revolutionary leader's name as 'L'Ouverture' although most commonly used spelling is Louverture. When discussing the book, however, I will keep the author's original spelling.

⁶ The following fragment of the letter is used for the epigraph: 'At the beginning of the troubles in Haiti, I felt that I was destined to do great things. When I received this divine intimation I was four-and-fifty years of age; I could neither read nor write.' Lake, epigraph. Although unacknowledged, this seemingly direct extract from L'Ouverture's letter to Bonaparte is actually a citation from John Rely Beard. *The Life of Toussaint L' Ouverture, The Negro Patriot of Hayti: Comprising an Account of the Struggle for Liberty in the Island, and a Sketch of Its History to the Present Period*. Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853. Beard, an English Unitarian minister, wrote the biography in order to 'supply the clearest evidence that there is no insuperable barrier between the light and the dark-coloured tribes of our common human species' (Beard 1853: 1). In his work Beard argues for Louverture's supremacy as a military and political leader over George Washington or Bonaparte. For Beard, Louverture's ultimate failure to liberate Haiti and his untimely death were the product of unfortunate circumstances—not an indictment of his character or leadership abilities' (Hutchins 2004).

the second beginning, the opening of the 'Then' narrative. This division into 'Now' and 'Then' sections, is maintained throughout: 'Now' thread tells the story of Shorty, and 'Then' thread is a fictionalised account of Toussaint L'Ouverture's life, the beginnings and the development of the Haitian Revolution, up to his imprisonment.

While the epigraphs act as framing devices, foreshadowing the text's narrative structure, they also suggest, thematically, the complex significance of these two events—each being a historical marker in its own right—for Haiti's post-earthquake futures. Consequently, through its use of multistranded narratives, or what can also be seen as 'multivoiced narration' (Day 2010: 66), this young adult novel turns to the history of the revolutionary establishment of the world's first black republic in an attempt to imagine Haiti's futures, in the long aftermath of the January 2010 disaster. 'Multistranded narrative', sometimes also referred to as 'alternating' (Nodelman 2017: 18) or 'multivoiced' (Day 2010: 66) narratives can be defined as, in Robyn McCullum's gloss, 'two or more interwoven or interconnected narrative strands through which events (or different versions of events) are narrated' (McCullum 1999: 36). An ever increasing formal feature of recently published Anglophone literature aimed at young readers (Nodelman 2017: 12), this use of alternating narratives takes on a highly specific cultural translation in Lake's text: the book's use of twinning and twins—as a theme, a formal device as well as a conceptual metaphor—to think about post-disaster futures is explicitly rooted in the complex figure of divine twins in Vodou, *marasa*.

Haiti and the Genre of Young Adult Literature

In Darkness was Nick Lake's first young adult novel, received wide critical acclaim, and was the winner of the Michael L. Printz Award (Sellers 2013). Nick Lake is a British author, who grew up in Luxembourg and was educated at Oxford, currently working as the Publishing Director at HarperCollins. Since the success of his first book, he published: *The Blood Ninja* trilogy (2010–2013); *Hostage Three* (2013); *There Will Be Lies* (2015); *Whisper To Me* (2016); and *Satellite* (2017) (United Agents). Across these works, *In Darkness* is not the only text to engage with recent socio-political events. *Hostage Three*, for example, 'followed the fate of a family kidnapped by pirates off the Somali coast' (Corbett). *In Darkness*, as Lake explains in an interview, was inspired by an actual story of a boy trapped and then rescued from under earthquake rubble (Bloomsbury). In this way, the novel bears surprising parallels with another publication aimed at a younger audience, namely *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti* (2010) written by Edwidge Danticat and illustrated by Alix Delinois. Intended for a much younger audience, *Eight Days*,⁷ also tells the story of an imprisoned boy, Junior, 'trapped beneath his house after the Port-au-Prince earthquake, and his joyous rescue' (Danticat 2010).

Within the wider context of Young Adult Literature (YAL), both *Eight Days*, *In Darkness*, as well as other literary responses aimed at a younger audience such as Laura Rose Wagner's *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go* (2015), clearly demonstrate that 'literature for adolescents might be stylistically complex, that it might withstand rigorous critical scrutiny, and that it might set forth thoughtful social and political commentaries' (Sotter and Connors 2009: 63–4).⁸ At the most basic level, YAL can be seen as '(1) that written especially for [young adults], and (2) that which, while not written especially for them, is available for their use' (Alberghene 1985: 135). Or one that, in Karen Coats's words, 'has its own constellation of concerns that mark it as distinctive from literature for either children or adults' (2011: 317), often organised around 'the same sorts of tensions that occupy the physical bodies and emotional lives of its intended audience' (316). Apart from these general characteristics, the very definition of what 'young adult literature' is, or what it can or should do, remains a topic of an ongoing scholarly debate, rendered all the more complex by the recently introduced category of 'new adult' fiction (Pattee 2017).⁹ As Michel Cart observed already in 1996, to 'even to try to *define* the phrase "young adult (or adolescent) literature" can be migraine inducing' [*italics original*] (1996: 8). In one attempt to move beyond the definitional debate within the field, recent criticism is 'consciously seeking new paths of analysis' (Allen 2012: 260), emphasising the heterogeneity and sophistication of the genre. Shaped and transformed 'by topics and themes that years ago would have never ever been conceived' (Kaplan 2005: 11), such as biotechnology, post-humanism and, not least, environmental hazards, YAL can also be an effective site for non-stereotypical representation of minority voices (Hughes-Hassell 2013), neurodiversity (Letcher 2010; Van Hart 2012; Wickham 2018) or be a starting point for addressing questions of white privilege (Garcia 2013).

YAL's thematic sophistication is inseparable from the aesthetic possibilities the genre offers through focalization and intertextuality (McCullum 1999) or the aforementioned alternating (Nodelman 2017), multistranded narratives. Multivoiced and multistranded narratives, specifically, as Robyn McCallum (1999) demonstrates,¹⁰ allow for a more nuanced conceptualizations of selfhood and (inter)subjectivity. While introducing an added level of formal complexity,

⁷ The publisher's page suggest PreK-K, 1–2, 3–5 grades as the target audience for the book.

⁸ In their analysis of YAL, its merits beyond relevance to adolescents, and its perception by secondary school teachers and literary critics, Sotter and Connors provide an extensive list of young-adult novels that engage with larger socio-political questions and conflicts. See Sotter and Connors 2009: 63–4.

⁹ Pattee 2017 provides a useful overview of critical works which have attempted to 'distinguish young adult texts within the literary continuum' (218).

¹⁰ His analysis extends Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and dialogism and Maria Nikolajeva's discussion of polyphony in children's literature specifically (Nikolajeva 1996).

they present the reader with a range of viewpoints and positions, creating '[a] representation of selfhood as being formed in dialogue with others and with the physical, social and cultural world and for the positioning of implied readers in active subject positions' (McCallum 1999: 23). Seen in this light, the polyphonic form of Lake's work invites a sustained reflection on subjectivity and Haiti's history and constructs 'a range of perceptual, attitudinal and ideological viewpoints' (McCallum 1999: 36), both rooted in the reader's alternating immersion in two subject positions and the complex world-views they inhabit and contexts they try to negotiate.

Yet, for Katie Orenstein the novel's creative interweaving of the Revolution and the immediate aftermath of the earthquake as well as its use of Vodou (or 'voodoo' as she insists on spelling) symbolism are the main limitations of the text. Her assessment is clear:

Shorty passes time by recalling his violent childhood in the slums, and shares a psychic (read: voodoo) connection with Toussaint L'Ouverture, the rebel slave leader and hero of the 18th-century Haitian revolution. (...)

But the real issue is tone. "In Darkness" paints a portrait of Haiti as a nation of almost nefarious subspecies: it's all about zombies, corruption, murder, violence, infanticide. Not that these things don't exist in this culture, but as in so many Western images of Haiti, they can eclipse all else (Orenstein 2012).

This extended critique identifies a clear tension between the imaginative and ethical possibilities of YAL, on the one hand, and, on the other, the risks that aestheticization and pairing up of these nation-defining events entail. Productively, the review points towards the ways in which the sense of analogy and the dual thematic-conceptual twinning that Lake's novel suggests, can partake in the wider politics of representation, at the level of discourse, structure, and imagery, being, possibly, just yet another reiteration of appropriated and misused complex cultural tropes of Haiti's past and present.

However, as I will go on to demonstrate, in its use of multistranded narrative as a way of engaging with the Haitian Revolution, Haiti's contemporary history (e.g. the debated presidencies of Jean Bertrand Aristide or the even more controversial UN involvement in Haiti), and the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, Lake's novel creates a doubly complex space. *In Darkness* asks the readers to pause (across over 300 pages) and listen to Shorty's stories, to Haiti's history, while directly admitting to the selective, and at times simplified, nature of this engagement. Similar to other narratives of the 2010 disaster, *In Darkness* is first and foremost, a literary *representation*. A necessarily partial and contestable account, it shatters, in Rachel Douglas's words, 'any notion that "all" of the story of the earthquake can be told within the bounds of a single artistic work or book' (2017: para. 38). Yet despite these limitations and, following Orenstein, their potential politically problematic implications, *In Darkness* still effectively introduces a primarily Anglophone young adult readership to underrepresented global history and more recent events. In the process, the novel attempts to offer, with varying levels of success, a more nuanced portrayal of Haiti, linking this to the explorations of questions of agency and identity. In so doing, the two narrative strands, focusing on Haitian protagonists, also have the potential to forge a counter-storytelling aesthetics, seen by Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso, as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told," (Solórzano and Yosso 2002: 26).¹¹ In its attempt to join scales of time and experience through twinning—from personal to collective and structural; and from historical to contemporary events—and use of focalization, *In Darkness* gives such a space, forging a form of counter-storytelling aesthetic, one rooted in the figure of twinning.

Characters at crossroads

Violence, under the different forms that it takes, is the key aspect of the two multistranded narratives, the contrasts between them, as well as, in the opposite move, of the gradual *rapprochement* of the narratives and lives of the two protagonists. As the reader moves with and across the two threads she/he is presented with a range of ethical positions, formulated around the protagonists' reactions to violence and their journey of (re)twinning and becoming a whole self, ones that are directly linked to visions of possible futures that the novel charts. The first position is that of Shorty trapped under the rubble of a hospital who tries to explain to the unnamed narratee his current predicament. The 'Now' thread is addressed to an imagined 'you', the recipient of Shorty's account, inviting, from the start, the reader's understanding and a certain degree of sympathy. When we meet him as readers, Shorty is fighting against 'double death': that of not being found in time by the disaster rescue teams and that of being forgotten without being forgiven.¹² He recreates, without an apparent chronological order, the key events from his life that, as he hopes, will justify his subsequent life choices and the current position he finds himself in, all rooted in his sense of subjective void after the loss of his sister, his other *marasa* half: 'We were Marassa, man (...) We shared the same soul, so when she was gone I became half a person' (Lake 2012: 9).

¹¹ For an extended discussion of some of the examples and strategies of counter-storytelling in YAL, see Hughes-Hassell (2013).

¹² For Shorty forgetting someone is synonymous with destroying that person: 'Not only have I lost her [his mother] in the darkness, but I've also lost the memory of her. She's destroyed completely' (Lake 2012: 329).

Marasa, the divine twins, occupy an unchallenged position within Vodou's divine pantheon. A simple set of twins, which can be of different gender, is referred to as *marasa de* whereas a set of three is called *marasa twa*. *Dosou* denotes a male child born after a set of twins, whereas *dosa* signifies a female. The child complements the twins and is seen as being even more powerful than the twins themselves (Bellande-Robertson 2006: 104). In the Vodou-inspired worldview, the Divine Twins are a whole and a three (Deren 1953: 41): in *marasa* terms, one plus one equals three ($1 + 1 = 3$). The twins, as Maya Deren explains, contain 'the notion of the segmentation of some original cosmic totality' and are 'a celebration of man's twinned nature: half matter, half metaphysical; half mortal, half immortal; half human, half divine' (1953: 39). This continued metaphysical importance of *marasa* results in a special regard for twins, who are also seen as two parts of a whole: whatever affects the one (e.g. violence or disease) threatens to affect the other and if the two *marasa* are not treated well, then the third twin restores justice (Deren 1953: 39).¹³ Sometimes referred to as *kalfou marasa* (*kalfou/kafou* is Haitian Kreyòl for intersection or junction, crossroads), they are also considered to be 'guardians in control of the crossroads and (...) are linked to the Lwa-spirit Legba, who opens the gate to the crossroads' (Bellande-Robertson 2006: 105; Desmangles 2006: 42–43).¹⁴ This equally powerful and significant site, crossroads, is where 'Legba, spirit of change and transformation, appears before humans' (Michel 2016: 206). A meeting point of the visible and the invisible realms, crossroads, in its wider sense has also been taken up to describe Haiti as 'the crossroads of Atlantic experience (Farquarhson 2012: 4),' with the 'unthinkable' Haitian Revolution (Trouillot 1995) as 'an entirely novel historical event that was, however, universal in its political aspirations and ideological implications' (Kaisary 2014: 1). Within Lake's novel itself, the movement from parallel to intersecting and finally joined narrative threads and Haiti's recent and more remote past that they embody, evokes that image of the crossroads, as a turning point, at which Haiti finds itself, following the 2010 earthquake.

Following this early call to the narratee, Shorty's collage acquires a redemptive character with the listener's hoped for understanding becoming a sort of absolution, in its wider meaning, as: '[f]orgiveness of offences; pardon' (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and '[d]ischarge or formal release from an obligation or an oath (...) liberation' (*OED*). This release Shorty yearns for, then, is both material and symbolic: ever more uncertain whether the rescue teams will come on time, he still hopes to have a chance to express the suffering he had experienced, and caused, as a 'vre chimère', in his own words.¹⁵ In a moment of retrospective observation, he concludes:

When you keep hurting someone, you do one of three things. Either you fill them up with hate, and they destroy everything around them. Or you fill them up with sadness, and they destroy themselves. Or you fill them up with justice, and they try to destroy everything that's bad and cruel in this world.

Me, I was the first kind of person (Lake 2012: 87).

In this moment of critical self-evaluation, Shorty realises the ways in which the sense of subjective emptiness and the subsequent abundance of hurt and revenge-driven violence trapped him in an immobilising sadness, leading to an existential dead-end.

Violence, the defining component of Shorty's life also shapes Toussaint L'Ouverture's transformation from a coachman to a revolutionary leader. In contradistinction to the immersive opening of Shorty's focalised story, the second 'Then' thread is a more conventional third-person narration, with the omniscient narrator describing events directly preceding the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution, its key figures and military and political developments (e.g. Dutty Boukman; or the French general Charles Leclerc; the 1802 fire in Cap Haitian), through to Toussaint L'Ouverture's imprisonment. Although it is never revealed who the narrator of the historical narrative is, as the novel evolves it seems increasingly possible that Toussaint's story unfolds in Shorty's dreams. On other occasions, however, an image, theme, or prolepsis bridges the two strands. These linkages in terms of imagery or plot line—for example, Toussaint also had a twin sister who 'had died and [whom] he could only remember (...) as an indiscriminately visage ghost' (Lake 2012: 38)—are extended over to include the novel's key concern with violence. In words directly echoing Shorty's self-reflexive observation, the narrator of Toussaint's thread presents a clear interpretation of plantation violence:

(...) there were three kinds of slaves, three kinds of people. There were those who were so filled with hate by their experience, by their oppression, that they snapped and destroyed property or people. There were those who were so filled with sadness by their experience that they snapped and destroyed themselves (...) The third kind of

¹³ I would like to thank Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken for pointing out to me the third twin's role to restore justice.

¹⁴ As Leslie G. Desmangles explains: 'Legba is the divine medium through whom men's requests and prayers can be channelled to the respective *loas*. Legba is the interlocutor, the interpreter, the principle of crossing and of communication with the divine world.' (Desmangles 2006: 42–3).

¹⁵ This is a highly complex term that means both 'a real ghost' and 'a real gangster.' In the contemporary Haitian context, the designation also has obvious political connotations as it was used in the mainstream media as a derogatory term for Jean-Bertrand Aristide's supporters, who were accused of using violence against Aristide opponents.

person, though, was filled by their experience with a fierce desire to make things right in the world, to redress the balance.

In the darkness, Toussaint fancied that he was the third kind of person (...) (Lake 2012: 93).

Here, thanks to the high level of self-reflexivity of the passage, the historical figure is brought alive and rendered more relevant to the contemporary reader, being presented as a sensitive individual struggling to accept and hoping to redress the unjust reality around him. Within this design, the correspondence and contrasts between the two observations, *In Darkness* presents the reader with two radically different reactions to the experience of violence: the boy's self-destructive pursuit is in stark opposition to Toussaint's transformative aspirations.

At the same time, to a certain extent, the novel undoes that seemingly straight-forward binary of 'good' vs. 'bad' path of the twinned narrative strands. Along with the voices of other characters, the reader's immersion in the boy's perspective and its logic, effectively undermines easy judgements of his choices. Moreover, the consistent, and repeated, invocation of the imagined 'you' adds to the dialogism of the narrative and directly acts as a way of anticipating and challenging the implied narratee's, and the reader's, reactions to Shorty's description of his life in Haiti. For example, having recounted how he and his sister played at being *marasa* in Vodou ceremonies, Shorty responds to an anticipated reaction of shock or disbelief: 'You think this was meant to manipulate people (...) But it wasn't. It was a reality' (Lake 2012: 81). On this and other occasions, these directed interruptions are effective formal ways of engaging with the oft misrepresented Haitian material, aside from the Haitian Revolution, with which the novel engages such as Vodou, as well as discourses of Haiti's exceptionalism and its exceptional poverty that resurfaced, yet again, following the 2010 earthquake. From Pat Robertson's (Bailey 2010) and David Brooks's (2010), to Lawrence Harrison's (2010) now infamous statements, Vodou has repeatedly been invoked, after the 2010 disaster, as a proof of Haiti's 'progress resistant culture' (Brooks 2010) and the reason behind the country's many problems. Seen in this wider context, the interweaving of contextual material across *In Darkness*—from the controversies surrounding Aristide or the UN's role in raids on Cité Soleil (Lake 2012: 136–7), and criticism, for example of foreign aid—as presented through Shorty's focalised perspectives is a much needed, if partial, corrective to such false portrayals of Haiti.

A similar ambition can be discerned in the 'Then' thread of the novel where the fast paced account of the Haitian Revolution creatively engages with an impressive range of historical details and material. These include: the beginnings of the Haitian Revolution and the Bois Caïman ceremony; the development of the revolutionary struggle, e.g. the burning of Cap Haitien in 1802; or the fictionalized letters between Toussaint L'Ouverture and General Leclerc and the letter exchange between the Haitian general and Brunet (Lake 2012: 271–2; 277–8) to L'Ouverture's imprisonment. The incorporation of these details adds a layer of intricacy to the novel's fabric, introduces the younger reader to the complexity of the Haitian Revolution—beyond its oft misunderstood beginnings and iconic declaration of Independence—popularizing, among its audience to a modernity-defining historical event which they might not otherwise encounter, in European or British history curricula (Pierre 2017).¹⁶

Still, as the author repeatedly makes clear, again in the paratextual material to the novel, verisimilitude not veracity is key here. The historical narrative, as explained in 'The Author's Note', functions as a point of departure for an unorthodox creative engagement with the country's recent and more remote past:

I occasionally simplified and adjusted the facts to fit into the shape of the story (...) The simple answer is that I believe that the book is true in essence (...) It was necessary to smooth out the history to some extent (Lake 2012: 339).

Here, the motivations guiding the structure of the text are spelled out clearly. Rather than attempting to convey the intricacies, or an authoritative overview, of the late eighteenth-century Revolution or the early twenty-first-century earthquake, *In Darkness* hopes to be 'true in essence,' and prioritises an immersive, affective experience for the reader that might then inspire him/her to learn more about these two epochal events. Such complementary material is hinted at in the publisher's closing note: 'For more information (...) including an author interview and a reading guide, visit www.in-darkness.org' (Lake 2012). The dedicated website (recently discontinued as a stand-alone page), gave, among other things, a brief overview of the key figures and events from the book. The page also had a list of recommended reading on Haiti and the slave trade, a downloadable reading guide, and even an indirect fundraising appeal.¹⁷ Seen

¹⁶ For example, the Haitian Revolution is not explicitly listed French Government's list of obligatory historical topics (Les programmes du college: 2018; Pierre: 2017).

¹⁷ The following works (in this order) are listed on the page without any explanation or even a brief gloss on their content, scholarly value, or relevance to the novel: *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography* by Ellen Gibson Wilson (William Sessions Ltd., 1996); *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* by Simon Schama (BBC Books, 2006); *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* by Adam Hochschild (Macmillan, 2005); *The Grand Slave Emporium: Cape Coast Castle and the British Slave Trade* by William St Clair (Profile Books, 2006); *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* by Peter Fryer (Pluto Press, 1984); *Slaves Who Freed Haiti* by Katherine Scherman (1954); *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James (1963); and *This Guilded African, Toussaint L' Ouverture* by

together, the authorial comment and the paratextual features point to the ways in which each narrative account, regardless of the extent of its realism and factual accuracy, represents a 'smoothing out' of historical complexities.

In effect, the author's self-reflexive comments, as well as the book's genre, seem to then, at least in part, pre-empt the twin charge of uncritical appropriation of the Haitian Revolution and sensationalization of the 2010 earthquake and Haiti's present—the core of Orenstein's critical analysis. While usefully pointing to the risks that Lake's fictional narrative takes, her review does not engage in any way, or even acknowledge, the author's own recognition of the limitations of his creative endeavours or the possibilities that the multistranded narrative offers. First, the very scope of the book, the immersive character and the pace of its two narrative threads, akin to the 'lively writing' of other popularizations of the Revolution (Sepinwall 2005: 94),¹⁸ make it into an attractive text for both young and older readers not familiar with Haiti's history or some of the reasons behind the country's current challenges. Second, while working on the personal level as an exploration of individual responses to violence, the multistranded narrative also suggests the need for a historicised, longitudinal, view of the 2010 earthquake. It does so by engaging at a considerable length with the complex lived reality of the 'vulnerable normal', represented to an extent via Shorty's story, that transformed the earthquake into a disaster of such scale and continues to hinder the country's recovery.

Recovering Futures

As the novel develops, the two narrative threads become less and less distinct, resulting in an increasing blurring of lines between Shorty's and Toussaint's account, the subject positions, and the historical realities they embody. The young protagonist, no longer a child but not yet an adult and unsure of what is real and what is merely a dream, occupies a liminal space. In it, magic acts as a catalyst for Shorty's subjective transformation as well as the young adult reader's socialization, 'by portraying an alternative—and perhaps subversive—view of society' (Lathan 2007: 62). Whereas the analogy established across the aforementioned scenes worked to present a contrast between the protagonists' respective reactions and to heighten the dilemmas their face, the increasing coming together of the two threads complicates and puts to the test the novel's vision of individual and collective futures.

The text's exploration of twinning, as an individual and collective metaphor, culminates in the last 'Then' section. Crossing together the lives, and souls, of Shorty and Toussaint, this chapter imagines a symbolic coming together of the two. In a magical, or dreamed moment the spirit of imprisoned and dying leader travels to take up residence in Shorty's body:

His [Toussaint's] journey had ended; his exodus was over.
He *had* returned.
But to where? (...)
He was in a body once again, though not his own, apparently (...) [italics original] (Lake 2012: 324–325)

In many ways, a climax of the novel, the imagined coming together of Toussaint and Shorty extends Lake's use of twins, *marasa*, and twinning as a thematic concern and a conceptual metaphor. First employed to depict Shorty and his sister biological bond as well as to describe their community function and significance that stems from it, twins and twinning are, in the second move, taken up as a metaphor for the country's history and individual and collective futures. In effect, this layered use of twinning, allows to formulate more nuanced visions of possible recoveries and futures in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Following the symbolic union of Shorty and Toussaint, the boy is thrice saved. He is rescued from the rubble, from the risk of being forgotten, and makes a firm resolve to turn away from violence:

Yes, I died, over and over.
But now I've been reborn.
Yes...
Yes...
Yes...
I was in darkness, but now I am in light (Lake 2012: 337).

Wenda Parkinson (1978). In contrast to other discontinued supporting material, the reading guide is still available in an updated and abridged form from the publisher's (Bloomsbury) book page and consists of a brief summary of the text. It also provides a number of extracts from the novel, followed by a list of suggested questions to related topics such as those of power, healing, religion and spirituality, which can be easily discussed in a variety of classroom contexts and which vary significantly in terms of the complexity and level of knowledge they assume.

¹⁸ From Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall's review of Laurent Dubois's *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (2004): 'Its narrative is a model of lively writing, likely to attract a wide general audience interested in Haiti. Because of its scope, it will be of particular use to students and to scholars in other fields not already familiar with the literature on the Haitian Revolution' (Sepinwall 2005: 94).

With this image of light and triumphant rebirth the novel draws to a close, offering the reader a potentially cathartic experience of a passage, echoing Plato's parable of the cave, from the underworld to the realm of light, where things can be as they are, not as they appear to be. The doubts and ethical dilemmas of the multistranded narrative are temporarily halted and resolved in this arguably a happy ending (at least for the young protagonist). The triple 'yes' answers the triple affirmation of love, recalling the third more powerful *marasa* twin ($1 + 1 = 3$) and the promise of the restoration of justice and redress that might well start, as the scene implies, with Shorty's reconciliation with his mom. The hope-filled tone of the ending adds to the balance-restoring qualities of the scene and also has didactic potential: the revolutionary rage against injustice and the roar of *goudougoudou*¹⁹ are communicated as Shorty's voiced resolve to become a better person; he takes up the task to 'make things right in the world'. The scene caps this narrative's movement, after David Scott, of 'overcoming', enacts and completes the 'distinctive rhythm and pacing, a distinctive direction [that tells the story] of salvation and redemption' (Scott 2004: 8). That direction points towards, in a teleological and didactic, if somewhat naive mode, a horizon of a saved future, free of violence.

Although Shorty's trajectory is one of a hopeful overcoming, at least temporarily, the narrative vision for collective new lives does not follow such a resolution-oriented course. The novel's penultimate chapter, entitled 'Always', is key to a consideration of the implications Lake's work might have for the politics of the disaster and its collective aftermath. Here the dissonance between rescue and recovery are clear and so are the limitations to the romantic-like trajectory towards a 'certain (utopian) horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving' (Scott 2004: 8). The 'We' chapter is the penultimate section and follows on from the experience of Shorty and Toussaint becoming one, and the narrative voice adopts the first-person plural 'we':

We are always in the darkness (...)

Far beyond our walls, far beyond the bounds that hold us, there are people who want to help. There are always people who want to help, but they are too far away, and we are too silent. Though we have control of our own body, can animate our limbs to touch the boundaries of our reality, we are powerless to break through our reality, powerless to go out into the light, where the masters live. (...)

There is no future and no past.

We are in the darkness.

We are one (Lake 2012: 326–7).

The incantatory tone of the passage creates an uncanny presence that lends it a sense of urgency with the short, repeated sentences imbuing the narrative with a measured cadence. Similarly, the corporeal imagery, along with the repeated use of the possessive pronoun 'our,' creates an evocative link between the bodily powerlessness of the collective 'we' and that of the maimed Haitian state. At the same time, the sudden change of narrative voice has a defamiliarising effect on the reader, while still allowing the narrative to offer empowering definitions of collective agency in the aftermath of the earthquake: the concluding 'we are one' echoes the motto from Haiti's 1807 coats of arms 'l'union fait la force'—unity makes strength. The country's revolutionary legacy invoked in this section suggests the possibility of a collective coming together in the wake of the disaster: together we are strong. Two are becoming one, heralding, it seems, the coming of the powerful *dosou/dosa*.

However, the initial promise of a coming together of a united 'we' is suspended and unfulfilled as the section draws to a close. The affirmative, united call, which echoes Shorty's opening invocation to an unnamed narratee, remains unanswered; 'there is no one to listen' (Lake 2012: 326). Moreover, the imagery of light and darkness, which is used to emphasise Shorty's transformation earlier in the book, here, to the contrary, suggests the impossibility of the collective, of the 'we' to break through the all-encompassing darkness. The impasse is clear, with the language of the passage evoking the master-slave dialectic as well as, problematically so, the language of colonial discourses on race. The only solution to escape this ghostly predicament, the novel seems to suggest, is to accept external aid. Liberation, if it exists, can only come from the outside. Suggesting collective powerlessness and the inability to break through obscurity, the passage risks implying that it is up to those trapped in this physical and metaphorical darkness to 'make themselves be heard' and 'let themselves be helped.'

Seeing this image as the novel's definite vision of possible post-earthquake future, for both individual and collective, Katie Orenstein laments the hopelessness of this metaphor. For her: '[i]t's a beautifully complex metaphor, but a disturbing way to bind a novel — that is, if you want to leave a young reader with hope' (2012). In Orenstein's view, this is a bleak vision and one that will leave the reader with little if any faith in Haiti's future, a major limitation, according to her, of a young adult book. Where she sees the 'hopelessness' of the ending as a key limitation to the novel's vision, and what it can offer to readers, I'd argue that, rather, it is the sense of disempowerment of the collective 'we' that is more politically problematic. It is in direct tension, for example, with the novel's more nuanced and openly critical representation of the aid industry, its relationship with military intervention, and the ways in which, under the guise of assistance, development initiatives often mask exploitative rather than empowering politics. This contextual

¹⁹ Onomatopoeia for the earthquake.

commentary is developed throughout the text in its portrayal of a relationship between one of Cité Soleil's informal leaders (Dread Wilmé) and a white female UN worker, Stéphanie, her involvement in the neighbourhood dynamics (e.g. through food donations). The tension visible in this additional plot line, and the whole section and the twinned narratives more broadly, is, in simple terms, one between individual agency, and external and systemic circumstances. On the one hand, the reader is presented with Stéphanie's efforts or Shorty's resolution to turn away from violence, and, on the other, the reality of collective and structural changes necessary, if at all possible, to alter the vulnerable present. As such, the novel's less hopeful scenario for the collective points to the difficulty, or even the impossibility, of charting, in the romantic vein, any teleological designs towards a utopian collective horizon. In other words, where the narrative of individual rescue transitions through stages of recognition and regret towards a *dénouement* in the form of a firm resolve, the vision of post-disaster futures and recovery, whether for an individual or a community, does not follow such linear designs.

Rescue, then— the fact of being saved paired, in Shorty's case, with a decision to start afresh—is only the beginning of recovery. Or, better, of recovering: that is, in the present continuous mode, an open-ended, hinged and multi-scalar process, unfolding at multiple, non-synchronous speeds (Mika and Kelman, forthcoming). Similarly to the '*process of postcolonializing*' (Quayson 2000: 9)—an anticipatory discourse, a future-oriented critical approach, that seeks to 'relate modern-day phenomena to their explicit, implicit or even potential relations to this fraught heritage' (Quayson 2000: 11) of the colonial aftermath—the process of recovering encompasses redressing the past structures of vulnerability that transformed the 2010 earthquake into a disaster of such scale. If unchanged, and unchallenged, these violent constructs directly hinder the formation of a different present and future, otherwise than as a continuation of the everyday wounding structures of oppression and marginalization.

Even if, following Orenstein's reading, a plaintive close of the 'Always' chapter is the novel's limitation, in its 'failure' the section productively points to the need for non-epic, non-romantic ideas of the futures-to-come. Orenstein's analysis seems to see lack of a hopeful end as synonymous with a dystopian horizon with 'no end in sight', without engaging with, as *In Darkness* does extensively, the meaning of the revolutionary past, alongside long-term vulnerabilities, for the post-disaster present. Hoping for a simple extension of the teleological trajectory of the revolutionary epic—its generic 'grandness of scale' (Buchanan 2010) and its ideological assumption that it speaks on behalf of and charts a clear destiny (Sampietro 1992) for a community—Orenstein's call for a collective closure full of 'hope' effectively forecloses future recovery. In other words, it suggests and earns for a confirmation that the disaster and the post-disaster present can be 'resolved'. Yet this movement of overcoming that is evoked here, no longer has the same salience in the post-disaster present which is the starting point, not the end, of a long-term and ongoing recovering.

To sum up, the twinning of the two narrative strands in Lake's *In Darkness* works across multiple levels. First, it effectively popularises the knowledge of a key historical event, the Haitian Revolution, and Haiti's more recent history, pointing to their relevance in the context of contemporary challenges of post-disaster recovery. Second, it presents the reader with a range of subject positions, formed around individual responses to violence, that invite nuanced conceptualisations of selfhood and intersubjectivity. This also raises further questions on one's agency and ability to alter the surrounding reality of systemic violence and marginalization. Thirdly, the coming together of the two threads exposes the tensions within the teleological trajectory of rescue and recovery: escaping such linear designs, the collective work of recovering is an open-ended and asynchronous process. Finally, in its turn to the Revolutionary history, the novel points to the ways in which Haiti's radical past provokes new visions of collective futures, ones that take up the task of recovering, and working towards the realization, of the guiding ideals of the Haitian Revolution. Although there is no one hero in sight to lead towards a horizon of a fully 'recovered' future, the 'non-epic' present is still the bold time of one's diurnal efforts to make anew, recover, a meaningful life. If there is 'a glimpse of radiance' (McSweeney 2005), 'a way out' for the 'we' as one, it has to be forged on the renewed understanding of what the Revolution might mean today and the 'new questions and new demands' (Scott 2004: 7) that it calls forth. The narrative voice of the section, hints, indeed at such a possibility: 'We understand what Boukman said in Bois Caiman; we understand it for the first time' (Lake 2012: 326). Yet, how this understanding might be realised remains open, and so is the task to think through 'the simplest and most obvious implications of the universal truth that *Tous les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits*' (Nesbitt 2013: 30).²⁰ Away from the trajectory of a hopeful individual rescue, this collective recovering and reclaiming of the Haitian Revolution and its 'radical horizons' (Kaisary 2014), however slow and difficult, might be the only way for the third, *dousu/dosa*, the justice-restoring third twin.

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²⁰ From *Declaration of the Rights of Man – 1789*: 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights'.

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