

Henriette de la Tour du Pin and Slavery

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Mikhail Bakhtin has said that “behind the narrator’s story, we read a second story, the author’s story.” (314) Bakhtin’s comment helps in unraveling attitudes toward slavery held by French women who lived and wrote in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The example considered here is Henriette de la Tour du Pin, the author of *Mémoires d’une femme de cinquante ans*.¹ Her story displays revealing patterns from the colonial period: chaotic political conditions, economic crises, voyages to and contacts with the Americas, bonds formed between white and black women. One should not expect to discover simple ideological dichotomies in her story, along the lines of good blacks versus cruel whites, or oppressive men versus victimized women. What one finds, instead, are the complexities of how identities were constructed across race, class, and gender lines: how white women and black women shared in the construction of feminine identities; how men and women variously assumed roles of domination and empowerment; how identities often arose from crossing class lines; how networks based on family ties, religion, social connections, or politics impacted the growth of antislavery activity. If matters are far from clear-cut, it is important to remember that the post-revolutionary period marks the beginning of a trajectory that took a half a century to reach its end point in the French emancipation decree of 1848. Society was not ready to free slaves yet, either in France or elsewhere in the transatlantic world. This was a transitional period, during which liberal ideas about abolition entered into protracted dialogues with opposing, conservative ideas of tradition, religion, family, and the like. Such dialogues occurred not only between individuals or among groups but within the hearts and minds of individuals themselves, who were torn between their allegiances to the old worlds that they knew and their commitment to the new worlds that they sought to create. At their worst, writers from the colonial period appear, at least to modern eyes, to be complicitous with the very racist, sexist, hierarchized forces they claim to combat. At their best, they formulate ways to resist those forces.

The social mobility and disorder of the time similarly affected the political sphere as well as individual lives. It is not enough simply to observe that the La Tour du Pins were committed royalists, as one would expect for families in the upper social ranks. Monarchism was a fluid concept that not only changed from one stage of the revolution to the next but continued to be modified continually during the three decades of the Napoleonic and Restoration eras. To equate monarchism with conservatism, or with an unambiguous proslavery position, is to disregard the many liberals and abolitionists who supported the legitimate royalty in France from the late eighteenth century until 1830. Monarchism was in no way incompatible with antislavery. Neither the abolitionist and feminist Olympe de Gouges nor the black revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture rejected a monarchical political system. This said, however, we also have to remember that the particulars of monarchist allegiances are complex, and thus that there are no easy answers to where a woman such as La Tour du Pin stood politically. What are we to make of La Tour du Pin’s self-representation as a benevolent emancipator of slaves in light of her enthusiastic support for Napoleon, who reinstated slavery in the French colonies in 1802?

Although definitive answers to such a question are impossible to come by, the fact that they arise is itself significant. They point to the instability of a period in which what we know as firm political affiliations on the left or right did not yet exist. And they remind us that women such as La Tour du Pin strove to build identities of class, race, and gender on the shifting sands of political forces that no one at the time could truly control or comprehend.

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In 1820, at the age of 50, Henriette Lucy de La Tour du Pin set out to tell the story of her dramatic life as an aristocrat who narrowly escaped death during the French Revolution. The portion of that story recounted in *Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans* spans the years from her birth in 1770 to the beginning of the Restoration in 1815. It includes two episodes in which blacks play a role. The first concerns the harrowing moments of the La Tour du Pins' escape during the French Revolution in 1792 and the assistance afforded to them by their black servant Zamore. The second centers on the two years the family spent in the United States, near Albany, New York, where she and her husband owned a farm and a number of slaves, whose acquisition, performance, and eventual emancipation are described in the text. Although these episodes involving black figures are only small parts of La Tour du Pin's *Journal*, they have considerable relevance as examples of an elite French woman's construction of her identity in relation to slavery. The example of La Tour du Pin helps answer questions about why and how privileged women chose to depict persons of color. It provides a point of reference for comparing the circumstances and lives of various women writers. It illustrates specific forms of female agency and empowerment for both black and white women. It constitutes a primary source of a woman's life and the extent to which colonial contacts affected metropolitan French women. And although limited knowledge about blacks emerges from its pages, it does describe black individuals who came in actual contact with the author and who bear names, albeit Europeanized ones. Zamore may have been a salon ornament like Claire de Duras's Ourika; and the American slaves may be seen through the prism of the author's aristocratic French identity. But the discursive construction of these black figures helped shape La Tour du Pin's identity in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods in ways that the following analysis will attempt to describe.

La Tour du Pin's story unfolds against a backdrop of France's intense involvement with slavery and colonial affairs.² Her father, Arthur Dillon, was governor of Saint-Christophe for two years, until that island was handed over to the English in 1784. He was a deputy from Martinique where he met and married La Tour du Pin's stepmother, Mme la comtesse de La Touche. Although he had expected to be named governor of either Saint-Domingue or Martinique, he was appointed to govern the small island of Tobago in 1786. From there he was named deputy of Martinique to the Estates General. His colonial experiences shaped his opposition to the immediate abolition that the revolutionary government decreed in 1794 and prompted his resignation when a delegation of blacks was allowed to appear in Paris. It is not clear that her father's convictions were proslavery, however. More probably he was a gradualist, favoring the slow path toward freedom for blacks that La Tour du Pin evokes in the *Journal* and that tended to prevail among liberal monarchists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Her father-in-law, a representative from Santonge, was part of the nobility that thought the revolutionary crisis was salutary. Monarchists of his stripe denounced abuses and favored a

constitution, but wanted slow reforms. During the revolutionary period, La Tour du Pin and her husband were friends of Germaine de Staël and shared the liberal views of the Staël and Necker families, La Fayette, Beauvau, and other enlightened members of the French social and political elite. Although unquestionably a product of her time in her Eurocentric perspective on blacks, La Tour du Pin was neither ignorant regarding issues of race and slavery nor rigidly positioned on the political right. Instead, she appears to have worked consistently at fashioning herself as a benevolent, tolerant “ami des noirs”, “friend of blacks,” to cite the name of the late eighteenth-century French antislavery society to which many liberal aristocrats in her milieu belonged.³

Although not overtly supportive of abolition in the French colonies, La Tour du Pin presents herself as having the close and sentimental relations with blacks maintained by other members of the privileged world that she inhabited in the closing years of the ancien regime. One component of that world was the presence of favored black protégés or servants who, as paintings from the time routinely show, provided a display of wealth and exotic touch in all-white, socially homogeneous aristocratic salons. It was in the salon of Mme de Beauvau that La Tour du Pin met the real-life Senegalese girl, Ourika. In keeping with salon practices, even the antislavery advocate Germaine de Staël had an African “pet,” who had presumably been rescued from slavery and given to her as a gift. He was baptized as Robert Jean Marie Chaumont. (Kadish 35) Liberal sentiments similar to Staël’s undoubtedly marked La Tour du Pin’s relationship with her black servant named Zamore, although his role in her life was clearly more that of a servant than the kind of pet or protégé associated with Beauvau or Staël. At times he wears an elegant costume that displays his affiliation with an aristocratic family; but he also performs the functions of a courier at the height of the Terror when La Tour du Pin and her husband are in hiding. The person referred to in the *Journal* as “mon nègre Zamore”, “my Negro Zamore,” occupies an ambiguous status within the family and society. His ability to accomplish sensitive tasks in a time of crisis attests to the family’s trust in him and his comprehension of the political stakes involved in his duties. Indeed, in preparing for their flight to America, La Tour du Pin entrusts Zamore alone with the arrangements, fearing that her maid may betray her to the revolutionary authorities. Not surprisingly, she reports, “he performed the whole operation with his customary intelligence.”⁴ At the same time, however, La Tour du Pin considers Zamore to be “mon nègre”: when she states that he “passed for a free black awaiting the moment of rejoining the army,” it is clear that she does not view him as enjoying such a status. Although blacks living in France were legally free,⁵ La Tour du Pin’s comment about Zamore’s passing as a free black suggests that servants in his capacity did not possess a clear-cut independent legal or economic identity. Although her feelings of respect and sympathy toward Zamore may not be synonymous with a desire for his emancipation, her emphasis on his loyalty and intelligence, as well as her awareness that some blacks were free, reflect both a progressive awareness of the facts surrounding their enslavement.

One manifestation of La Tour du Pin’s progressive response to blacks is that the *Journal* is presented as if the white woman story teller endured an experience similar to that of slaves. Her life and theirs thus form the basis of what can be read as an imagined slave narrative. By relating her own life to that of the slave or other less fortunate members of society, La Tour du Pin constructs an imagined hybrid identity of class and race to negotiate the complex social, political, and personal conditions of her time. Not only can the slave narrative provide a metaphor for her life. It also brings out the parallels between the experiences of white and black

women: persecution or capture, displacement to a new land, hard labor, etc. And even if the author of the *Journal* did not consciously set out to draw out those parallels, there are reasons why the slave narrative may well have been a convenient narrative form to adopt. For one thing, tales about slaves and colonial adventures were widely available at the time. For another thing, such narratives were considered an appropriate, humanitarian subject for women, provided, of course, that no incitement to violence or sweepingly defamatory depiction of whites was involved. Not only were slave stories gender appropriate. They were ostensibly politically neutral when transposed to the United States, as is the case in *Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans*. La Tour du Pin's adoption of the narrative form of the slave story conforms to Karen Sánchez-Eppler's notion of intersections, "thematic and imagistic coincidences that textual analysis reveals." Such "unintentional connections" are indicative "not only of individual patterns of influence but of more pervasive cultural concerns." (9) Although the horrific conditions of slave women's capture, torture, and enslavement far exceeded the circumstances that white women such as La Tour du Pin encountered, a common ground exists for women's lives in contact zones such as the transatlantic voyage. It was upon that ground that discursive constructions of feminine experiences were built.

La Tour du Pin's slave story begins with her persecution as an aristocrat and the prospect of capture that poses an imminent threat to her and her family. In April 1794, her father and father-in-law, both loyal supporters of the monarchy, are brought to the scaffold. And although she is not captured herself, she is forced to flee and arguably feels something analogous to the slave's panic and horror at being wrested from her habitual life and forced to set off on the dangerous journey by sea to a new land. Interestingly, in recounting the story of her flight, La Tour du Pin often chooses to relate her experience to that of persons of an inferior social standing. In addition to Zamore, her beloved maid and companion Marguerite emerges as a heroic figure in her story. From the very start, she calls attention to the injustice committed when her family separates her from Marguerite, the woman who represents the most useful and wholesome influence in her young life: "One person alone . . . formed my ideas, helped me to recognize what was evil, showed my heart the path to virtue . . . ; and this person . . . could neither read nor write! What she had received from heaven, however, was good judgment, a sense of justice, and a strong spirit." (37) Interjecting an opinion from her position as writer later in life, La Tour du Pin comments that, at the age of fifty-five, she is still indignant at the thought of the injustice that was committed toward Marguerite, even though the family presumably retained her as a servant (43). That the author of the *Journal* continued to feel a commonality between her fate as a young woman and that of Marguerite is evident later in the story when La Tour du Pin finally succeeds in finding places on board the ship *Diane* to take her and her family to American shores. She thinks of Marguerite's life as so closely linked to her own that she feels the need to justify having left her behind: "how would she, an old woman, and accustomed, more than I myself, to all the comforts of life, manage in this country in which she would not even know the language!" (162) Although La Tour du Pin's comment suggests a lack of real understanding of the lives of servant women, it does indicate the extent to which she saw her own identity mirrored in persons of a lower social rank who surrounded her in France, as she will with the women of color she encounters during the American episode.

The second stage of La Tour du Pin's slave story consists of the passage from Europe to the United States. Various components of the recounting of the long and arduous journey evoke

parallels with the story of slave women transported to the New World. La Tour du Pin describes herself, a nursing mother, as “deprived of everything, without a minute of leisure,” malnourished and fearing “that I would see my children die of hunger.” (184-85) She thus experiences some of the same physical deprivation and maternal anxiety that slave women endured. It was not out of the question, in point of fact, that she could herself have been enslaved. La Tour du Pin recounts how, when she and her family were leaving France, the captain and her husband feared the capture of their small ship by Algerians who would have sold them into slavery (182-83). A certain unconscious identification with the enslaved Africans may explain a small detail from the crossing that has a particularly strong resonance with slavery. Having determined that her long blond hair has impeded her activities on the ship, she describes how she “took the scissors and cut them very short, which infuriated my husband. Then I threw them over board, and with them all the frivolous ideas that my beautiful blond curls could have encouraged me to have.” In place of her shorn curls, La Tour du Pin describes herself, donned in a “Madras kerchief,” which brings to mind the characteristic dress of a slave (184). Shedding the white identity emblemized by blond hair and replacing it with a black one represented by the madras, and mimicking the practice of throwing the remains of the sick or unwanted over board: these features of the story recounted in the *Journal* function metonymically and symbolically in La Tour du Pin’s creation of a new, hybrid identity.

Another detail from the description of the crossing that has strong links with slavery and that recurs consistently in literary representations of slaves in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century literature is the metaphorical presence of a dog, whose loyalty and devotion to its master parallels the traits that Europeans imaginatively projected onto enslaved Africans. Both Victor Hugo’s *Bug Jargal* and George Sand’s *Indiana* open with canine figures begging for kindness and attention from a master. In both cases, the responses to the animal function as a metaphor for the treatment of slaves. The affectionate reaction to Rask in Hugo’s novel reflects his master’s respect for the animal’s former owner, Bug Jargal, a stand-in for the hero of the Haitian revolution, Toussaint Louverture. Conversely, the cruelty and insensitivity shown to Ophelia in Sand’s novel represents the cruel husband’s disregard for his wife, whom he treats like a slave. Perhaps the most well-known example of the dog/slave metaphor, and one with which readers of La Tour du Pin’s time would certainly have been familiar, is Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s Fidèle in *Paul et Virginie*. The first mention of this dog occurs, revealingly, in a context in which the woman slave Marie is described as “fidèle”, “faithful.” Later in the novel, Fidèle is the one who rescues the two white children when they come to the assistance of a runaway slave. That it is Fidèle’s “voice,” not his bark, that Paul recognizes, is a clear case of personification. So too is the dog’s death of grief at the end of the novel, shortly after that of his master.⁶ An avatar of Fidèle in La Tour du Pin’s account is the captain’s emblematically named dog Black, who forms bonds of affection with Henriette and her children. The parallel between Black and Fidèle is particularly evident in the similar movements of the two dogs. After having helped rescue Paul and Virginie, Fidèle runs to their feet, “barking, howling, moaning, and loading them with caresses.” In La Tour du Pin’s account, we see Black’s attachment to the benevolent white mistress and her children described in similar terms. As the ship approached land, she recounts, “the poor animal went toward the front of the boat, barked, came back toward me, licked the hands and face of my son, and then started the same routine all over again.” (186) Black’s affection for her and his devotion to her family mirrors that which La Tour du Pin will

then claim to have inspired among blacks in the United States.

Hard labor on American soil constitutes the third stage of La Tour du Pin's slave narrative. But the obligation to work is not the occasion for complaint. Despite the difficult circumstances of life in the New World—adjusting to a new culture, finding the means to support the family, illness, the death of children—the author of the *Journal* consistently asserts the positive value of manual labor for whites and blacks alike. Through constant activity and cheerful industriousness, we are encouraged to believe, it is possible to maintain an orderly household, run a viable farm, produce butter for sale, and engage in a variety of other such productive agricultural and domestic activities. The author of the *Journal* seems especially concerned to set a standard for how privileged whites should respond to a new environment and the deprivations of exile. In contrast with her own successful response, she describes the indolence and incompetence of two Haitian refugees: “Knowing little English, and unable to apply any of the agricultural practices of Saint-Domingue, they had almost died of cold and boredom during the winter. From the fire in Le Cap they had managed to salvage all kinds of little unnecessary things which contrasted with the poverty and disorder of their household.” (225) Revealingly, by noting that their only black servant or slave was “an old negress,” La Tour du Pin implies that the lives of whites and blacks in the household of these exiles from Saint-Domingue were similarly unproductive. The message seems clear: whites must acquire the knowledge to work and to abandon the luxurious habits of an earlier time of privilege. Only in that way can they set an example of industriousness for their blacks workers. As La Tour du Pin explicitly states, “our blacks, stimulated by our example, were happy to work.” (226)

The cooperative labor of whites and blacks that characterizes the third stage of La Tour du Pin's slave story is not proposed, however, as the only solution to the problem of slavery. The author of the *Journal* is eager to emphasize, and indeed embellish, the record of positive steps that were being taken in the north of the United States toward the eventual emancipation of slaves. One of these steps is introduced in chapter 17 through the narration of how, two years before the author's arrival, disgruntled slaves set a fire that almost destroyed the entire city of Albany. La Tour du Pin acknowledges the misconduct of the rebels, who were subsequently caught and executed. But she dismisses them as “bad subjects,” and even seems sympathetic toward the “little black girl of twelve” who was drawn into the act of setting a fire and subsequently revealed the identities of the wrongdoers.⁷ More important to her than their negative act of rebellion, which she attributes to an imprudent impatience to be free, is the positive policy known at the time as *post nati* with which she associates it:

Slavery had only been abolished in the state of New York for those children born in 1794 and after when they would reach the age of twenty. This very wise measure which obligated slave owners to raise black children also gave the slaves the time to compensate their masters, through their work, for the costs of their upbringing. (193)

In point of fact, La Tour du Pin's account of practices in New York is in error. Historians affirm that the policy of *post nati* was only instituted in the state of New York in 1799 and that the only states where it was practiced at the time of her stay in America were Rhode Island and Connecticut. (McMannis 174-75; Melish 1) La Tour du Pin must have known that New York

was, according to the duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, in his widely-read *Voyage dans les Etats-Unis d'Amérique fait en 1795, 1796 et 1797*, “one of those [states] which appear to have the most illiberal ideas as to slavery.” In contrast with neighboring states, he claims, New York “seems to approve of the permanence of slavery.” He goes on to state that “by the silence or the refusal of its legislature, it leaves its constitution and its laws stained with a blot which, without exaggeration, may be called dishonourable, as it cannot be excused, or even palliated, by any circumstances existing in that state.” (449, 451) La Tour du Pin was certainly not unaware of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt’s account. He visited her in 1795 and mentioned her in his account, as she observes in the *Journal* (217).

How then can one explain the mistaken description of the laws affecting slaves in the state of New York? Since the La Tour du Pins owed much of their success in exile to the kindness shown to them as displaced aristocrats by the well-placed Schuyler and Renslaër families, who owned most of the property in the area where they settled, she may well have wished to paint a rosy picture of the condition of blacks in New York so as not to offend her American benefactors.⁸ She may also have wished to embellish her account and present the United States in contrast to the French colonies, where no such positive, practical steps toward ending slavery were taking place. The idea of juxtaposing the two colonial settings may have been triggered by reports of the fire that destroyed Albany, which reminded her of similar events in Le Cap in Saint-Domingue around the same time. One recalls her disapproval of the indolent Saint-Domingue refugees. Perhaps she wanted to provide a reminder that what she considered to be “the vices of the upper classes and the madness of the middle class” (195) that caused the French Revolution were also behind the slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue; and that such uprisings could be prevented in the future if measures such as those which were being introduced gradually in the United States were similarly implemented in the French colonies.

When La Tour du Pin presents how she came to acquire slaves in chapter 18, she also paints a positive picture of shared industriousness between black and white workers. Reaching back intertextually to the model of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s hard-working slaves Domingue and Marie, and repeating her own refashioning of that model in the description of Zamore, La Tour du Pin constructs the identity of blacks who are endowed with the same positive attributes as whites: agency, intelligence, good conduct, and devotion to family. It is in this way that La Tour du Pin describes the acquisition of her first slave, a young man named Mink, whose purchase was followed by that of his father Prime, Judith, her husband, and their three-month old daughter (202-205). Talented, resourceful, and intelligent, these slaves are presented as deserving the respect and dignity of fellow workers. When a tailor comes to make clothes for them, La Tour du Pin observes, “This man ate with us because he was white. He would certainly have refused to eat with slaves if he had been asked to do so, even though they were incomparably better dressed and had better manners than he did.” (228) It is because blacks have fundamental rights that La Tour du Pin chooses to purchase members of the same family. She thereby performs an act that fulfilled one of the chief goals of the antislavery movement, preserving the integrity of the black family. The success of her action suggests that other slave owners would do well to pursue that same goal: “And that is how our black household was formed. We were indeed extremely fortunate. The woman and her husband were both excellent servants: active, hard-working and intelligent. They were passionately devoted to us, because when blacks are good it is not by halves. You can count on their devotion to death itself.” (205)

But La Tour du Pin's version of the slave story is not only one in which whites and blacks work happily and productively together. It is also one in which blacks are moving toward eventual emancipation. Again, the emphasis is placed on American policies for ending slavery. In addition to *post nati*, she observes,

a practice had been established that all masters felt obliged to respect for fear of incurring public blame. When blacks were unhappy with their situation, they went to a justice of the peace and addressed a formal request to be sold to their master who, according to the custom at the time, was expected to allow them to look for an owner that would pay a specified amount. (202)

According to the *Journal*, it is in such a manner that Mink, Prime, and Judith, having heard of her kind treatment of workers, came to request that she purchase them as slaves. In this case, the account that La Tour du Pin provides appears to be grounded in reality. McManus reports that a great deal of collaboration existed between masters and slaves in New York because slaves were often skilled and their cooperation was required. "And the privilege of approving prospective buyers was extended to include virtually all the slaves. This in turn enabled slaves to demand guarantees of eventual freedom before consenting to work for a new master." As a result, McManus contends, slaves in that place and time were more like indentured servants. (61-62, 153)

Such historical specifics help to put the sentimental tropes about slavery that derive from the literary conventions of La Tour du Pin's time in perspective. Consider the story of the neighbor's dog Trim who, treated brutally by his master, keeps running away to be with La Tour du Pin. Like the runaway slave in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, Trim has been mistreated. So too, we learn in the *Journal*, had Judith been abused by her former owner: "he had beaten her almost to death and she was still sick from the effects of the beating." (205) What matters to La Tour du Pin, I would argue, is that Judith is able to avail herself of the practice of requesting a new master. She is not like Trim, the dog, who knows no better than to return when his brutal owner beckons him: "Poor Trim . . . went to be patted and followed him out of the courtyard. Within minutes horrible howls were heard. Judith and I went out in haste, and we saw with horror that this cruel man had attached the unfortunate dog by his four paws to the hook of a rudder bar, and he went off at a gallop dragging the poor beast on the rocky road." (219) Trim's fate recalls that of the female slave that Virginie tries ineffectually to rescue in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel. That slave too is completely at the mercy of her master who, after he regains control of her, resumes his abusive ways. Although La Tour du Pin may not have set out to place Judith and Trim as contrasting human and animal victims, or to contrast the agency that Judith is able to exercise with that which is denied to Bernardin's runaway slave, such differences undoubtedly affected the discursive construction of the lives of her slaves. At some level, the author of the *Journal* recognized the power of black agency and knew the difference between real and sentimental solutions to the problem of slavery.

In the first three parts of the slave story that I have been attempting to tell, La Tour du Pin suffered persecution, endured hardships crossing the Atlantic slaves, and performed physical labor on foreign soil. The final phase of the story occurs in 1796, when the prescription against émigrés is finally lifted, and when the La Tour du Pins return to France to reclaim property that

would otherwise have been confiscated. In this case, the author of the *Journal* constructs a scene in which her liberation from exile in America parallels that of her black workers. In a touching tableau straight out of a drama by Diderot or a painting by Greuze, La Tour du Pin depicts the slaves' reaction at the thought of losing their kindly mistress:

They were worried, alarmed. Thus trembling, all four of them entered the living room where I had asked them to assemble, with Judith holding her three-year-old Maria in her arms and about to give birth to another child. They found me alone. I said to them, with emotion: "My friends, we are about to return to Europe. What will become of you?" The poor folks were dumbstruck. Judith fell onto a chair, sobbing; the three men hid their faces in their hands and remained motionless. (232)

The emotion experienced by the slaves intensifies when La Tour du Pin informs them that they are to receive their freedom.

I continued: "We have been so happy with you that it is only fair that you be compensated. My husband has authorized me to say to you that he grants you your freedom." Hearing these words, our worthy servants were so stupefied that they remained speechless for several moments. Then, all four knelt at my feet, crying: "Is it possible? Do you mean that we are free?" I answered: "Yes, upon my honor, from this moment, as free as I am myself." (232)

The edifying spirit of this scene is striking. La Tour du Pin acknowledges how much whites owe to blacks for their labor and recognizes their identity as real persons, not just slaves. Their actual words are provided in the *Journal* in English, a language that their mistress also employs in responding to them. It is thus apparent that actual communication exists between the black and white actors in this scene. The phrase "as free as I am" indicates the common condition of the black slave and white woman, who must receive authorization from her husband to dispose of his property. Like the slave, she exists within a patriarchal system in which freedom is relative, not absolute.

How seriously should we take La Tour du Pin's presentation of the emancipation of her slaves? As noted above, sentimental convention and historical fact are intertwined in La Tour du Pin's depiction of slavery in the United States. Thus on the one hand the emancipation scene recalls conventional literary depictions of the grateful negro:

Who could depict the poignant emotion that such a moment provoked! Never in my life have I experienced anything as tender. Those who I had just liberated surrounded me in tears; they kissed my hands, my feet, my dress; and then suddenly their joy came to an abrupt end and they declared, "We would rather remain as slaves for our whole lives and have you stay here." (233)

The slaves thus place themselves in a situation, common in French slave stories, in which slaves seem to welcome their own enslavement.⁹ Like Black, whose attachment to the benevolent white

mistress was noted earlier, La Tour du Pin's slaves are models of devotion, untainted by the rebellious impulses that resulted in the burning of Albany or Le Cap.

On the other hand, however, the scene of emancipation is more than just a sentimental narrative that embellishes the reputation of benevolent French aristocrats in exile. It also contains details that show specific measures to end slavery taking place in the United States. Thus La Tour du Pin describes an official manumission ceremony that presumably occurred in public the day after the scene in her home and that "all the blacks of the city assembled to attend." (233) Initially the justice of the peace objects that since Prime is above the age of 50 he cannot be freed unless a pension of one hundred dollars is paid to him. But black ingenuity saves the day: "Prime, had anticipated this situation, and produced a certificate of his baptism which attested to the fact that he was only forty nine." (233) Thus the actual manumission was able to take place: "They had them kneel before my husband, and placed his hand on their heads to sanction the liberation, just as in ancient Rome." (233)¹⁰ Prime's intervention, which makes the manumission possible, is an expression of the same agency exercised by the slaves when they chose a new master. Their freedom is not only granted to them; it is also earned and obtained through their efforts.

At this point it is perhaps time to stand back and ask two questions that underlie the above analysis of Henriette La Tour du Pin's *Journal*: first, why, in the early years of the Restoration, did she make the decision to revisit and give discursive expression to her encounters with blacks several decades earlier? and second, was she truly a "friend of blacks"? Regarding her decision to write, one could say that at one level at least she was not unlike the numerous other eighteenth-century aristocrats, both women and men, who poured forth thousands of pages recounting their harrowing experiences of revolution and exile. Notable examples of women memorialists of the time are Félicité de Genlis and Isabelle de la Charrière. Although La Tour du Pin did not publish her account during the revolutionary period, as some others were obliged to do simply to survive, she was associated with those published memorialists because of the considerable popularity she gained in Parisian salons through Jacques Delille's *Malheur et pitié*. That poem, published in 1803, painted a bucolic picture of charming French aristocratic exiles laboring in a distant land. In the preface to Chant IV, the poet states,

This Chant contains an interesting and novel episode. It is the story of a young couple who, wanting to flee far from the painful spectacle of their bloodied and oppressed country, established themselves on the banks of the Amazon, brought there the arts and industry of their country, became builders, agriculturalists, and farmers. The Author, after having given this imaginary episode to one of his friends to read . . . learned with pleasure that this was not a mere fiction, but the real story of two young spouses from a distinguished family. The place is different: the Poet placed in South America an event that happened in the northern part of the New World. (x)

In recounting this episode Delille curiously amplifies the male agency of La Tour du Pin's husband Frédéric.¹¹ The *Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans* corrects this perspective, pointing out, for example, that Frédéric was too seasick to be of any use during the transatlantic

voyage, and that his inability to speak English limited his effectiveness in the United States. But such differences of opinion regarding Frédéric notwithstanding, Delille did also emphasize La Tour du Pin's exceptional ingenuity and strength during the family's exile. Here is how, using Frédéric's voice, Delille presents her: "We are laborers. My wife is a farmer. The milk we drink evening and morning seems sweeter when presented by her hand." (16) That picture became an emblem of the courage displayed by aristocratic women during the French Revolution and their devotion to royalty and family.¹² La Tour du Pin seems to have been eager to add another element to the myth of the happy French woman in exile: the further component of the white woman laboring side by side with her happy slaves. By painting such a picture, the author of the *Journal* could sustain an identity in which benevolence was the defining trait of her own character and of what French colonizing activities could and should become.

La Tour du Pin's identity as a woman was not just that of an eighteenth-century aristocrat, however. The *Journal* differs substantially from other attempts to recapture the past by women who lived through revolution and exile and whose writings are impregnated with sentiments of nostalgia.¹³ Rather, for La Tour du Pin, looking back seems to constitute a form of resistance against the identities that were imposed on her gender and class in the past. Chabot-Rohan, her biographer, considers that exile in America was a kind of emancipation for her. (113) One can speculate that it was a woman thus "emancipated" from the prejudices of her class who sat down to write the *Journal* at the propitious time when the restored Bourbon regime alleviated some of her economic and political anxieties by naming Frédéric a peer of France and ambassador to Turin. Perhaps she saw this as the time for women of her social class to fashion new identities and come to grips with the legitimacy of the restored aristocracy. From the start, she asserts that she and her husband judged the nobility harshly: "The older I grow, however, the more sure I become that the Revolution of 1789 was only the inevitable consequence and, I might also say, the just punishment of the vices of the upper classes, vices carried to such excess that if people had not been stricken with a fatal blindness, they must have seen that they would inevitably be consumed by the very fire they themselves were lighting." (46) To think or write about the subject of blacks became possible during the Restoration and the July Monarchy once Napoleon's prescriptions against considering that subject had been lifted. To revisit the subject of slavery would have enabled the author to refashion the often maligned identity of the aristocratic woman and to construct herself as a new, more compassionate and forward-thinking woman. Unlike those who clung to an out-dated ancien regime world view, La Tour du Pin had the will to formulate a hybrid identity as a woman of the past and the future, an aristocrat and a humanitarian. She was part English and part French.¹⁴ In the post-revolutionary period she supported Napoleon's imperial regime only to later assume a modified aristocratic identity under the Restoration. Why not also present herself as symbolically hybrid with respect to race, as herself both slave owner and slave? Producing a new identity was a way for her to engage in a leveling discourse that strengthened her moral legitimacy and mitigated the negative image of the spoiled, parasitic aristocratic woman of the ancien regime.

Personal considerations are also relevant for understanding the feminine identity that La Tour du Pin constructed in the *Journal*. She had no intention of publishing her memoirs, which only appeared in print in 1906. The intended reader of the text ostensibly was her only surviving child, her son Aymar. It is to him that she comments at one point in the text, "Your father was not at that time, my dear son, the way you remember him." (159) The idea of addressing Aymar

in the years following 1820 may have seemed especially significant to La Tour du Pin, although apparently upon listening to the part of the work that she read to him in 1849 he pronounced it boring.¹⁵ Painting a broad picture of her past life from the ancien regime through the Restoration might have seemed to her to be a way to warn him against following the destructive, reactionary ancien regime practices that had taken the life of her son Humbert a few years before she began to write her memoirs. In 1816, Humbert died in a duel with a career officer who owed his rank to his military service. Humbert, in contrast, had received an appointment based on his aristocratic name. It is undoubtedly relevant to remember, as Steven Kale says regarding salons, that the Restoration regime sought to reconcile “the old nobility, the imperial aristocracy, and liberal *doctrinaires*” as a key to stabilizing the constitutional monarchy. Such a goal required the continuation of Napoleon’s policy of “amalgamating elites.” (111) As a descendant of the old nobility, Humbert needed “to be all the more careful of his good reputation since he did not earn his rank with his blood.” (Rohan-Chabot 197)

Such were the treacherous waters that Henriette de la Tour du Pin had to tread, in which the line between the personal and the political was difficult to draw. Herself a political moderate, she was forced to confront in her own immediate family the consequence of adhering to retrograde ancien regime practices such as the duel. Matters were exacerbated by Aymar’s involvement with a woman whom La Tour du Pin considered an adopted daughter of sorts: Félicie de Durfort de Duras, the estranged daughter of Claire de Duras. Félicie was the wife of Auguste Verger Comte de La Rochejaquelin, whose family was devoted throughout the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods to the Vendean cause of restoring legitimate monarchy in France. Félicie brought Aymar, a young man of 25, into an ill-fated plot to overthrow Louis Philippe in 1832. Condemned to death as a repeat offender for his involvement in that plot, Aymar was forced into exile in Italy, where his mother joined him and remained until the end of her life. One of La Tour du Pin’s goals in writing the *Journal* may have been the maternal one of providing lessons in tolerance and moderation to Félicie and to Aymar, whom she called a “valiant knight of the olden days.” (411) Inasmuch as they had not had to live through the persecutions and travails of revolution and exile, she may have felt that they lacked her first-hand contact with the forces of oppression and its victims and needed to learn the lessons that she could teach. Offering herself, the strong aristocratic woman of old, as a model of compassion for the downtrodden would be one such lesson. Just as working hard and setting a model for her slaves improved them and prepared them for eventual freedom, so too setting a model for the younger generation would prepare them for the uncertainties of their future lives, in which the continuation of old-style monarchical life was doomed.

Was La Tour du Pin truly the “friend of blacks” that she presents herself to be in the *Journal*? At times it would appear that she was not. Consider her physical depiction of her female slave: “Judith was thirty-four and very ugly, but that did not prevent her husband being madly attached to her.” (205) One might dismiss this comment or take it at face value (perhaps the black woman was ugly) were it not for a related remark in the author’s correspondence concerning the African girl who served as the model for Claire de Duras’s fictional character Ourika. La Tour du Pin reveals that when she was in the salon of Mme de Beauvau, who raised the real-life Ourika, that woman “could not get enough of seeing the black arms of this child wrapped around my neck, which bore me to tears.” (387) Did the physical look or touch of black women repulse Henriette de la Tour du Pin, her self-portrait as the benevolent slave liberator

notwithstanding? Was she not only a slave owner but, at least by today's standards, a racist as well? There is not sufficient evidence in the author's writings about blacks to make such accusations. What one can safely say is that she was unwilling to transform real black women into romanticized, fictional models. Although she found Duras's novel pleasing and well written, she disapproved of its "mixture of truth and invention," stating that "the real Ourika was more interesting." (387)

It is enlightening, in closing, to try to formulate a comparison between Henriette de La Tour du Pin and Claire de Duras, two women aristocrats whose interest lies in their acquaintance with and discursive constructions of black figures. Politically the two women were quite similar: "They shared a marked predilection for liberalism and an intelligence that made them suspicious of all forms of dogmatism. They had the unusual ability to admit all opinions and to never judge them from some lofty partisan point of view." (Rohan-Chabot 198) There is a sense in which both the *Journal* and Duras's salon functioned similarly as mediating grounds between the political right and left. But La Tour du Pin and Duras were also very different in ways that affect how they viewed their black characters. Louis XVIII famously called *Ourika* an "Atala of the salon." (Lescure) Although Duras's work has considerable liberal significance when considered in relation to other literary works of its time, Louis XVIII was right in considering that *Ourika* shows its colors as the product of the salon culture in which it was first read aloud and the ancien regime world in which it is set. The difference between Duras's *Ourika* and La Tour du Pin's *Journal*, which is intensely critical of the old nobility and its way of life, perhaps sheds light on the rift that occurred at a certain point between La Tour du Pin and Duras and that neither the *Journal* or La Tour du Pin's correspondence explain. I would speculate that their split, which was only repaired in the days preceding Duras's death, was related to their far different attitudes toward the past. La Tour du Pin respected the high-minded nobility which had once existed; but she recognized it as a thing of the past. As for the restored monarchy, she had so little respect for it that she seems to have preferred living in exile in Italy, or in America, to being complicit with the new regime. Duras appears to have been more accommodating and pragmatic. La Tour du Pin complains that, at the end of the Napoleonic regime, when Duras's husband received a prominent political appointment, the author of *Ourika* could think only of the honor of being the wife of the king's "first gentleman"; and that she cared nothing for the "fall of the great man, the invasion of the country, or the humiliation of being host to conquerors." (346) Moreover, La Tour du Pin was appalled by Duras's relationship with Chateaubriand, whose opportunistic political aspirations and negative statements about blacks are well known.¹⁶ In short, for Duras, depicting a black woman was essentially a sympathetic response to Africans rescued from slavery and brought to live in France. It was a response that was literary and conformed to the liberal values of her social group. In contrast, La Tour du Pin did not see black subjects with the eyes of a literary writer, despite the intertextual surfacing from time to time of such literary motifs as the runaway slave, the grateful negro, or the personified figure of the dog. She thus had no reason to paint blacks as better or more beautiful than she found them to be. But La Tour du Pin was a "friend of blacks" in ways that go beyond the salon culture in which Duras constructed *Ourika*, perhaps because she knew blacks better than did Duras or other members of her social class. That knowledge, combined with La Tour du Pin's more contestatory attitude toward aristocratic French society, gave rise to the noteworthy features of her depiction of slavery that have been examined above: her recognition of the integrity of the black family, her approval of slaves' ability to determine

their own fate, her respect for their hard work, and her commitment to their desire to obtain freedom. Blacks were not only the Other for La Tour du Pin. Reaching across race, class, and gender lines, she forged her own precarious elite self writing through and with theirs.

NOTES

¹ La marquise de La Tour du Pin was born Lucy-Henriette Dillon in Paris on February 25, 1770. She died on April 2, 1853 at Pisa, Italy. On May 21, 1787 she married Frédéric-Séraphin de La Tour du Pin de Gouvernet and became comtesse de Gouvernet. Upon the death of her father-in-law, Jean-Frédéric de La Tour du Pin, she assumed the title of comtesse de La Tour du Pin de Gouvernet. She later became marquise de la Tour du Pin when Louis XVIII granted the title of marquis to her husband.

² Information about her life is found in the text, *Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans, 1778-1815: suivis d'extraits inédits de sa correspondance, 1815-1846*. Other information is provided by Alix de Rohan-Chabot in *Madame de la Tour du Pin: le talent du bonheur*.

³ As far as I know, neither she nor members of her family were members of the Amis des Noirs.

⁴ La Tour du Pin, *Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans*, 137, 140, 162, 171. Subsequent references to *Journal* appear in parentheses in this text.

⁵ See Peabody.

⁶ Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* 117, 133. For a comparison of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's and La Tour du Pin's treatments of slavery, including their related uses of the dog motif, see Lisa Van Zwoll's dissertation *A La Recherche d'une histoire perdue: The Fictionalization of Personal History in Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans* (University of Georgia, 2005), 117-25.

⁷ Two white men, quarreling over a woman, accused the male slave Pomp of setting the fire; he in turn implicated two slave girls, Bet and Dinah. The three slaves were hanged. The two white men were not punished since the only evidence against them, by Pomp, was deemed inadmissible: Munsell, 378-81.

⁸ In the eighteenth century, there was a feudal system in which certain Dutch families owned manors and leased out the land to tenant farmers. Legislature in 1787 formally ended feudal obligations and banned all feudal tenures but the holdings of the Van Rensselaers and others were untouched. See Ellis (11).

⁹ See for example Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's *Sarah*. For a twentieth-century neo-slave narrative that refers to the topos of self-enslavement, see Maryse Condé's *I Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*.

¹⁰ There are no historical records available in the state of New York that substantiate La Tour du Pin's claim to have set her slaves free in 1796.

¹¹ In a poem entitled "Monsieur le marquis de La Tour du Pin, who wished to place the bust of M. Delille in his garden," Delille wrote: "Let flighty members of the human race/Search in foreign lands for a corner of the earth./If my place is in your garden,/It is the fairest in the world./I end my vagabond career there;/Travels become superfluous to me./My exile has reached its term, and I shall emigrate no longer." (*Delille est-il mort?*).

¹² In a similar vein, a journal published in the United States, *Le Journal des dames*, includes the

following address to French exiles in 1810: “Fair ladies, it is incumbent upon someone who has known the bitterness of the dark days, who has been wounded by man and fate alike, and who was only rescued and protected thanks to you, to make it known that the honors for sublime virtue are due, and especially in our times, to the sex that is the weakest by nature but the most energetic and generous through the force of sentiment.”

¹³ For a comprehensive view of other accounts by women, see Rossi, *Mémoires aristocratiques féminins, 1789-1848*.

¹⁴ Rohan Chabot, states that “she bragged that she had not a single drop of French blood in her veins” (11).

¹⁵ According to La Tour du Pin’s descendant, Christian de Liedekerke Beaufort, that comment appears in a note in the margin of the manuscript: see *Journal d’une femme de cinquante ans*, 447.

¹⁶ Chateaubriand famously declared, “who would still dare to plead the cause of blacks after the crimes they have committed?” Although generally considered a reflection of his proslavery outlook, this comment can be viewed more sympathetically as symptomatic merely of the decline of overt opposition to slavery after 1802: Kadish and Massardier-Kenney, *Translating Slavery*, 35-36.

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