

Fathers, Daughters, and Slaves : Women Writers and French Colonial Slavery. By DORIS Y. KADISH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, October 2012. 186 pp. Hb £65. ISBN: 9781846318467

In *Fathers, Daughters, and Slaves: Women Writers and French Colonial Slavery*, Doris Y. Kadish sought [seeks?] to accomplish a number of valuable scholarly tasks, including presenting some relatively unknown French authors to an English-speaking readership. This volume draws from a substantial body of work previously published by Kadish on the theme of French slavery and women writers, including an edition of Sophie Doin's *La Famille noire suivie de trois Nouvelles blanches et noires* and Charlotte Dard's *La Chaumière africaine* published with Harmattan in 2002 and 2005 respectively, a translation of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's *Sarah* in 2008, and the two co-edited volumes *Translating Slavery Volume 1: Gender and Race in French Abolitionist Writing, 1780-1830* and *Translating Slavery Volume 2 : Ourika and Its Progeny* in 2009 and 2010. In *Fathers, Daughters, and Slaves*, Kadish brings together the works of five French women writing on slavery during the last decades before legal abolition of slavery [its legal abolition?] in the French empire.

The book draws our attention back to the long-established argument that slavery and abolition are historical constructs whose time-frames have been poorly represented in thought and practice. As abolition has come and gone, legalised slaveries have disappeared only to return in different guises, and with work towards eradicating the latter still in progress, the subjects alluded to in this volume remain contemporary, relevant and far from exhausted in academic scholarship. Furthermore, as Kadish observes in her introductory chapter, the attitudes, norms and conventions that framed educated white women's literary lives in the early 19th century, positioned their writings on the margins of French anti-slavery writing, where, until very recently, some have remained. She argues convincingly for including abolitionist writing hitherto excluded from the anti-slavery literature because it fell short of standards set by the literary canon, on the grounds that these writings can make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the social history of French slavery.

Two of the writers, Claire de Duras and Germaine de Stael, are already well known. Kadish adds to the literature in English on European abolitionist writing by drawing our attention to three relatively unknown writers: Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Charlotte Dard and Sophie Doin. The presence of all these women together is explained by the book's title: they are all daughters, located within this text in relation to fathers, and they write about enslaved Africans. Fathers operate in this book, as in the societies that created them, at the apex of a patriarchal triangle. The identities of the other protagonists in this social hierarchy, the enslaved (Africans) and the free (Frenchwomen), are defined in relation to the patriarchal figure (Frenchmen) as subject[ed?] populations. At several points in the discussion the reader's attention is ~~drawn~~ directed to the parallels drawn by the French women writers between the condition of women and that of enslaved Africans. The question of what commonality of experience existed between a *salonnière* of the status of Germaine de Stael or Claire de Duras, and unfree women working on the slave plantations raises one of many

interesting questions for further discussion. [Furthermore?] Given what we know of the physical and psychological methods that made up slave management culture in European plantation colonies in the pre-1848 era, many if not most of which would today classify as torture, an exploration of the sources and research methods these white women writers were using in compiling their slave narratives would add a valuable dimension to the study of abolitionist writing. We learn something of how Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, another early 19th-century *salonnière*, first encountered slavery in Guadeloupe, and we know that Claire de Duras' maternal family ran a plantation estate in Martinique. Discussing the writings of the latter, Kadish argues that Duras, through *Ourika*, enables the slave to speak: 'What Ourika does succeed in doing is presenting issues of oppression from the perspective of daughters and slave women' (113). There is a substantial body of literature, from Fanon to Spivak and beyond, that suggests further examination of the writings looked at here from a postcolonial perspective would be fruitful. While Kadish concedes at the outset that in the absence of slave narratives in French the writings of these women provide useful insights into attitudes towards slavery, this in itself does not render the issues of voice and agency of the enslaved irrelevant. Indeed the question of what constitutes a commonality of perspective and positioning between writers, 'the women considered here made unique contributions through their empathetic impulses and strategies' (26), raises a number of issues that invite deconstruction and reflection. By defining the writers in relation to a concept, and in a wider sense an ideology, of femaleness, the approach adopted here by definition does not invite an exploration of diversity. We are left wanting to know more about the differences that will have separated Charlotte Dard from Claire de Duras or Germaine de Staël, and the impact of these on their lives as writers of slavery.

Readers interested in continuing this reading of abolitionist texts by French writers, including women writers, may wish to explore the *Europe-Esclavages* website (www.eurescl.eu) which references authors such as Anne Bignan, and Clarisse Coignet, representative of *L'association des Dames françaises en faveur des esclaves affranchis*, and of interest also are the full text versions in English and French by Staël. Duras, Doin, *et al.*, that have been assembled and uploaded by Doris Kadish and colleagues on the University of Georgia's Francophone slavery website: slavery.uga.edu/.

In conclusion, the volume presents material of considerable interest to scholars of patriarchy and of slavery in 19th-century France and the colonies, and helpfully opens up numerous avenues for further theoretical reflection and primary research.

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