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Race, Slavery, and Sensibility: The Socially Engaged Sentimental Fiction of Claire de Duras, Gabrielle de Paban and Sophie Doin

Issues of race and slavery figure prominently in Enlightenment discussions of humanity and sensibility. Especially after the publication of *Les Droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789), authors inherited and intensified earlier discourses related to race and slavery. During the Restoration period, women writers were especially eager to contribute to the growing body of anti-slavery and abolitionist literature, often by writing sentimental fiction. This paper examines several fictional works by women that deal explicitly with slavery and race: Claire de Duras's *Ourika* (1823), Gabrielle de Paban's *Le Nègre et la Créole, ou Mémoires d'Eulalie D**** (1825), and Sophie Doin's *La Famille Noire* (1825) and *Nouvelles blanches et noires* (1828).[1]

These nineteenth-century writers use sentimental fictional narrative, with its emphasis on sensibility and shared human feeling, to examine the issues of race and slavery and make a case for humanizing individuals of African origin. Duras, Paban, and Doin, like all writers whose works are broadly described as "sentimental," sought to appeal to the refined moral sensibilities of French readers of their time. In their novels and short stories, they present the suffering of racially-marked characters in order to highlight these individuals' capacity for feeling and thereby portray them as sensitive souls. To what end did they do so? How are Restoration-era representations of race different from their eighteenth-century predecessors? What effect did the inclusion of the issues of race and slavery have on sentimental narrative?

[1] Not all of the *nouvelles* will feature in this discussion as not all of them deal explicitly with the issue of race as it is connected to slavery. The three *nouvelles* dealt with here are *Le Negrier*, *Blanche et noir,* and *Noire et blanc*. They have been most recently republished alongside Doin's *La Famille Noire* in Doris Kadish's Autrement Même edition (2002).

Abolitionist and Literary Context

Before delving into the literary works of Duras, Paban, and Doin, it would be useful to consider the context out of which they arose. By the eighteenth century, slavery was already an integral part of French economic expansion and growth. However, it became increasingly difficult to justify the institution of colonial slavery as its abuses came to light and its conflict with the growing cult of liberty in France became apparent.[2] Abolitionist movements in modern France arose in three consecutive waves to combat these abuses and reconcile issues of race with the Revolutionary value of liberty.[3] The first took place near the end of the eighteenth century but was quieted by Napoleon's rise to power; the second arrived in the 1810s and 20s and was punctuated by the repeated abolition of the slave trade in 1818, 1827, and 1831; the third and final push took place in the 1840s and culminated in the abolition of slavery in both France and the French colonies in 1848. The third of these waves falls outside the purview of this paper; however, the first two are of great import.

One of the first concrete achievements of the abolitionist movement in France was the establishment of the Société des amis des noirs in Paris in 1788.[4] With the end of the First Republic and the installation of Napoleon's regime, abolitionist efforts were temporarily

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[2] See Sue Peabody, *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) p. 71

[3] I refer to the abolitionist movements in modern (as compared to pre-modern) France because, for the purposes of this paper, I must distinguish them from the initial abolition of slavery in 1315 by Louis X who established the rule that no person in France could be a slave. In this early context, the movement had nothing to do with slaves of African origin, whereas the later movement referred almost exclusively to the necessity of ending enslavement of non-white individuals, primarily of African origin. See Sue Peabody's introduction to *"There Are No Slaves in France."*

[4] The French abolitionist movement started later and was more disorganized than its British and American counterparts. See Lamin Sanneh's "Christianity in Africa," *The Cambridge History of Christianity* Vol. VII, 2006 (pp. 411-432) and Michael Heffernan's "France and the wider world," *Revolutionary France: 1788-1880*, Malcolm Crook, ed. Oxford UP (pp. 178-197). The Société des amis des noirs aimed to abolish the slave trade with the eventual goal of gradually ending the institution of slavery as a result. Its efforts, though relatively conservative, were countered by a rival society, the Club Massiac, whose interests were tied to those of plantation owners. See Robert Forster "The French Revolution, People of Color, and Slavery" in *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*. Joseph Klaits and Michael H. Haltzel, eds. Cambridge : Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1994 (pp. 89-104).

silenced. However, after Napoleon's rule, French abolitionists again sought to draw public attention to the lot of people of color in France and especially in French colonies. Many events led to increasing public interest in the movement: in 1814, the Congress of Vienna abolished the slave trade; in 1816, the *Méduse* sunk and caused a scandal, renewing public attention on the dangers of the slave trade; in 1821, the Société de la morale chrétienne formed to advocate abolition; in 1823, the Académie française proposed abolition of the slave trade as a subject for one of its writing competitions; and in 1825, Charles X officially recognized Haiti as an independent nation.[5] The progress of abolitionist groups was largely dependent upon print media, and the sentimental novel was increasingly used as a tool for circulating the abolitionist message as broadly as possible, reaching not just learned elites but also members of other classes.

<u>Philosophical and Literary Context: *Sensibility, Abolitionism, and Sentimental Narrative*</u>

Each wave of the abolitionist movement in France was accompanied by an increase in print efforts to denounce colonial slavery by appealing to readerly sensibility in sentimental narrative forms. Sensibility is a hard term to pin down. Some eighteenth-century theorists defined it as an essential characteristic of humanity, a higher faculty held to differentiate the human race from animals. In the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751-1772), Jaucourt defines "sensibilité" as the "disposition tendre et délicate de l'âme, qui la rend facile à être émue, à être touchée."[6] This, however, is just the *moral* definition of the term: Jaucourt's entry is preceded by a medical article that grounds the property in the

[5] See Doris Kadish, "Haiti and Abolitionism in 1825: The Example of Sophie Doin." *Yale French Studies*. No. 107. The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies, 2005: 108.
[6] See ARTFL Project "SENSIBILITÉ."

physical body.[7] It is “an organic sensitivity dependent on brain and nerves and underlying a) a delicate moral and aesthetic perception; b) acuteness of feeling, both emotional and physical; and c) susceptibility to delicate passional arousal.”[8] Thus, sensibility is based in the physical body and has physical, moral, ethical, and emotional effects. On the one hand, it is “natural” or innate: an individual is born with a certain physical capacity for or predisposition toward sensibility. On the other hand, sensibility can also be acquired socially: the society in which an individual lives can develop or restrict development of an individual’s sensible faculties.

Extraordinary sensibility is praiseworthy, so long as it is controlled or stabilized. If taken too far or left unfettered, sensibility ceases to be a refined value and becomes a danger, causing mental illness (like melancholia) and leading to serious physical side effects, even death. Controlled sensibility, on the other hand, leads to a healthy ability to sympathize with others and is, therefore, associated with moral, virtuous, or humane values. Descriptions of sensibility served to underscore a person’s understanding of human nature and behavior, suggested disorder or danger, or provided a vehicle for the pursuit of virtue and improvement of society.[9]

Enlightenment thinkers hypothesized that sensibility determined physical and moral character in terms that were distinct for each sex. It also varied according to class and was especially prominent as a factor held to unite members of the refined upper classes. Thus, sensibility could divide and separate human beings from one another, but it could also unite them

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[7] See Fouquet’s article “SENSIBILITÉ, SENTIMENT,” also available via ARTFL. Anne Vila discusses both the moral and physical properties of sensibility in her book *Enlightenment and Pathology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. See in particular the Introduction (pp. 1-3) and Chapter 3 (pp. 49-50).

[8] This definition of “sensibility” as expressed by Ann Jessie Van Sant is quoted in Jane Rendall’s “Feminizing the Enlightenment: The Problem of Sensibility,” *The Enlightenment World*, Martin Fitzpatrick, Peter Jones, Christa Knellwolf and Iain Mccalman, eds., New York: Routledge, 2004. (p. 253).

[9] See, for example, Fouquet’s argument attributing melancholia and other disorders to insensibility.

as beings whose faculties surpassed those of any other member of the animal kingdom.[10] By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the issue of race or cultural origin began to erupt into conversations regarding sensibility.[11] Possession of sensibility was thereafter used by humanitarian groups to call for a united concept of humanity, regardless of skin color or class. Abolitionist groups, in particular, used sensibility to combat the institution of slavery and achieve humanitarian reform. Such efforts took off first in Great Britain and quickly spread across the Channel to France, where the language of sensibility was employed from the 1780s onward in philosophical and literary campaigns against slavery and the slave trade.

Calls for equality among men required "a certain widely shard 'interior feeling,'" a community of like-minded or like-feeling individuals.[12] To rid the world of slavery, many people had to be persuaded to feel the injustice of the practice. In order to inspire such feelings, abolitionists drew readily upon the notion of *sensibilité.* They appealed to readers' sensibility in order to establish a sympathetic link between otherwise very different individuals.[13] Consequently, sentimental narrative fit the needs of abolitionists to a tee. Characterized by repeated representations of sensibility and almost constant use of language replete with sentiment or emotion, sentimental writing depicts characters as naturally drawn to others by virtue of some feeling, most often sympathy or pity.[14]

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[10] See Anne Vila "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's Système physique et moral de la femme." *Representations*. No. 52., Autumn, 1995 (p. 80). She further develops the idea in her chapter on "Moral Anthropology" in *Enlightenment and Pathology* (pp. 225-257).

11 For more information of "sensibility," Lynn Festa's *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-century Britain and France*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006 or Jane Rendall's afforementioned"Feminizing the Enlightenment: The Problem of Sensibility."

[12] Lynn Hunt. *Inventing Human Rights: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007.

[13] See Lynn Hunt's discussion of empathy and autonomy in *Inventing Human Rights, A History*, p. 29.

[14] See Anne Vila's description of sympathy and sentimental literature in "Beyond Sympathy." *Yale French Studies*. No. 92. *Exploring the Conversible World: Text and Sociability from the Classical Age to the Enlightenment,* 1997 (p. 88). See also David Denby's *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760-1820.* Cambridge University Press, 1994. Although later viewed with distaste, sentimental literature was well-respected at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Drawing upon eighteenth-century opinions on sentiment and sensibility, an appreciation of "sentimental literature" was a good thing as it demonstrated an individual's refinement. Later,

The act of reading sentimental fiction was one way to cultivate one's sensibility and moral goodness.[15] Furthermore, by reading about black characters' suffering through their contact with various forms of enslavement and slave trade practices, readers' expanded their perceptions of their own shared humanity were expanded to include individuals of different races. Thus, as Lynn Hunt argues, sentimental fiction helped shape the minds and opinions of readers, convincing them that humanity was not dependent upon race, and slavery was in no way justifiable.[16] Whereas earlier sentimental texts encouraged readers to empathize across social boundaries related to class, these later works sought to persuade the reader to identify with individuals of a different race, thereby creating a sense of racial equality and necessitating an emotional and intellectual transition toward abolitionism. They instructed readers in new ways of empathizing, in order make them more willing to consider granting equal rights to marginal or disenfranchised groups like blacks.[17]

During the mid-to-late eighteenth century, abolitionist discourses became prominent in French print culture.[18] The *Encyclopédie,* for example, contains several articles in which thinkers like Jaucourt, Boucher d'Argis, and Diderot express unmistakably critical views of the institution of slavery and its negative impact on individuals and societies.[19] Sensibility occupies

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however, the term depreciated, and anything "sentimental" was eventually stigmatized, viewed as suspect, unauthentic, or contrived.

[15] See June Howard "What is Sentimentality?" *American Literary History.* 11:1. Spring, 1999 (pp. 63-81).

[16] See Lynn Hunt Hunt even goes so far as to hypothesize that the act of reading rewired French readers's brains. See her introduction to *Inventing Human Rights* (pp. 15-34).

[17] In "'Sarah' and Antislavery" (*L'Esprit Créateur*. 47.4 (2007): 93-104) Doris Kadish explains the connection between abolitionism and sentimentalism in the following way: "By propelling the formerly excluded to center stage, sentimental narratives celebrate the humanity of the excluded. Sentimentalism also foregrounds the importance of the voice of the heart and nature, illustrating how essential humanity transcends social hierarchies" (95).

[18] French critics of slavery were particularly active in the 1770s and 1780s. See Madeleine Dobie's *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture* for a discussion of the lack of philosophical interest in the subject prior to this period.

[19] Such discussions of slavery are found, for example, in the articles "Humanité" and "Humaine espèce," by Diderot; "Esclavage," and "Traite des nègres" by Jaucourt, and "Esclave" by Boucher d'Argis. Not all entries discussing race, slavery, or the slave trade are openly abolitionist. Some, like the article "Noirs" by Mallet, treat such subjects

an important place in these discussions. In these texts, various authors insist that black individuals possess "sentiment" and "sensibilité" and are therefore members of the human race and above being forced into slavery and treated as beasts of burden. Similarly, Montesquieu's "Livre XV" in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) disparages the institution of slavery and the practice of the slave trade.[20] Montesquieu's irony effectively drives home the point that even the most seemingly reasonable arguments in favor of slavery destroy themselves. He also appeals to the readers' emotions, hoping to inspire mercy and pity for slaves.[21]

Many French writers of the eighteenth century appeal to the sensibility of their readers in order to argue against the institution of slavery and perpetuation of the slave trade.[22] They also make a limited case for the emotional capacity of black subjects, but they rarely go so far as to truly privilege the *affective* experiences of slaves or people of color. Rather, they tend to focus on the *physical* suffering of black individuals, usually slaves, in order to elicit a sympathetic response in French readers. Given this limitation, it is fortunate that philosophers were not alone in speaking out against slavery and the slave trade: writers of fiction also joined in the discussion.   Fictional portrayals of race were far more apt to demonstrate the sentiments and sensibility of black characters while also eliciting the readers' sympathy for their suffering.

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rather impersonally or as a matter of fact, leaving the discussion of the morality or ethics of the existing institutions of slavery and the slave trade to other authors.

[20] I accessed the ARTFL on-line version of this source.

[21] Many other philosophical works could be discussed here. For example, Condorcet, under the meaningful nom de plume "Schwartz," attempted to sway French public opinion in opposition to slavery and the slave trade by publishing his "Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres" (1784). He addresses slaves themselves and describes his heart as "déchiré par le spectacle de vos maux." Like the other philosophers discussed here, Condorcet appeals to his readers' sensibilities but does little to insist upon or demonstrate the feeling capacity of the slaves to whom and for whom he speaks.

[22] Among other works condemning slavery and/or advocating equal rights for men of all races, see : Abbé Raynal, *Histoire Philosophique et politique, des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Amsterdam, 1773) ; Abbé Grégoire, *L'Esclavage des nègres aboli ou moyens d'améliorer leur sort* (Paris: Chez Froullé, 1789) ; Abbé Grégoire, *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur ou sang-mêlés de St.-Dominge, et des autres Iles françoises de l'Amérique, adressé à l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris : Chez Bellin, 1789). Lynn Hunt provides translations of excerpts of these and other Revolutionary-era texts (by individuals and groups like Vincent Ogé and the Société des amis des noirs) relating to the status of free blacks and slaves in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996. pp. 101-118).

One of the earliest abolitionist texts in France was the translation of an imported British text by Aphra Behn, *Oronoko***.**[23] Although originally written and published in the seventeenth-century, it did not cross the Channel until 1745, when a French translator adapted it for a French audience.[24] The translation is a distinctly sentimental text. Behn's story does not offer a comprehensive critique of slavery or the slave trade. Nonetheless, Behn's characters are individuals of feeling and her text is one of the first to treat blacks in a positive light, making it part of the avant-garde of the antislavery movement in both the British and the French contexts.

Through the 1760s, the abolitionist movement continued to gain strength. Authors like Jean-François de Saint-Lambert published short stories like *Ziméo* (1769) aimed at bringing the cause to the attention of French readers.[25] This text advocates reform of the institution of slavery rather than immediate abolition. It shows slavery to manifest in two ways, one extremely profitable but abusive (slaves are overworked and treated as animals), the other economically viable and humanely justifiable (slaves work reasonable hours and, after ten years of diligent labor and good behavior, are granted freedom). Ziméo, a runaway slave, is shown to be a man of feeling whose unjust suffering pushed him to seek vengeance on the race that took from him his tutor and his wife. Once he has again found these two beloved individuals, his lust for vengeance subsides. Although it lacks a comprehensive critique of slavery, this tale takes great

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[23] For more information on Aphra Behn, see for example the Janet Todd biography, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*, Pandora Press, 2000.

[24] In a preface, the anonymous translator explains : "Mon intention n'a pas été, d'entreprendre une Traduction littérale, ni de m'astreindre scrupuleusement au texte de mon Auteur. Oronoko a plû à Londres, habillé à l'Anglaise: Pour plaire à Paris, j'ai crû qu'il lui fallait un habit Français" (viii). *Oronoko*'s arrival heralded the first of the modern French abolitionist movements and spurred the publication and representation of many theatrical adaptations of Oronoko's story. It was broadly read, and many of its traits appear in later sentimental texts with an abolitionist aim.

[25] See Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008; Andrew Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011; Madeleine Dobie, *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

care to establish the fundamental humanity of black individuals based on their *sensibilité* or capacity for feeling.

In 1788, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre published his best-known novel, *Paul et Virginie.* Several slaves appear in the novel, most notably Marie, Domingue, and an unnamed pitiful runaway. Although these slaves are portrayed positively, the institution of slavery is not actively denounced: Virginie returns the runaway to her abusive master, and Marie and Domingue remain dutiful slaves to their mistresses until their deaths. Nor are the slaves portrayed as capable of complex independent thought and feeling: most often they appear to imitate the emotional reactions of the novel's white characters. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre also published a less famous play *Empsaël et Zoraïde, ou les Blancs esclaves des Noirs à Maroc* in which he makes a clearer argument against slavery. Whereas the play's French characters, especially the female protagonist Zoraïde, demonstrate great sensibility from the beginning, the titular character, Empsaël, a former slave, is relatively brutal, unsophisticated, and unfeeling at the outset. However, his sensibility is shaped and developed as the play unfolds, with the help of civilizing Frenchness: his French wife Zoraïde helps him learn to control his feelings and cultivate his sympathy. As a complex, evolving character, neither wholly evil nor good, Empsaël represents a step toward effective literary humanization of black characters.[26]

In 1788, Olympe de Gouges published *Zamore et Mirza ou l'heureux naufrage.* Its postscript, "Réflexions sur les hommes nègres," leaves little doubt as to Gouges's opposition to slavery. However, the play lends itself to ambiguous interpretations: the play takes place in "les Indes," and the slaves are "indiens" not explicitly *noir* or part of the atlantic slave trade system;

[26] In his discussion of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's obscure play, Roger Little points out that many other works were published during this time period that featured black characters. Some were even daring, libertine texts that have as yet received little critical notice. See for example, *Le Diable au corps* (1786) and *Hortense ou la jolie courtisane* (1796) by Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur.

furthermore, although offered freedom, both Zamore and Mirza willingly choose to remain slaves at the end of the play which calls into doubt the supposedly comprehensive evil of the institution of slavery. In 1792, Gouges reworked the play giving it a new subtitle, *ou L'Esclavage des noirs,* and thereby endowing it with clearer abolitionist intent.[27] Gouges certainly meant to inspire French readers to feel pity for the plight of the enslaved characters she depicted, but more importantly, she also demonstrates these characters' ability to *feel*. By endowing them with *sensibilité* that is akin to that which is demonstrated by the enlightened French characters they encounter, Gouges strengthens her argument against slavery.

Later, during the Restoration period, anti-slavery texts again proliferated, most likely due to the reduction in censorship following the end of Napoleonic policies that had repressed abolitionist literature. The 1820s, in particular, were a fruitful period for writers opposed to slavery.[28] The then young Victor Hugo, published the first version of his short story *Bug Jargal*, inspired by the events of the slave revolts in the colonies, in 1820. This initial edition clearly demonstrates the author's opposition to slavery and the slave trade. However, as republished in 1826, it is considerably modified and obviously less expressive of Hugo's personal political views. In this later less sentimental version, slavery is not necessarily questioned within the colonial context. Furthermore, although the titular character, a black slave, is shown to be a man of feeling, he is also depicted as inferior to the French character d'Auverney and not necessarily

[27] The second version is set more ambiguously and the characters are describes as being of African origin, although still labeled initially as "indien." Still, the anti-slavery message is not as clear as it could be as Gouges indefinitely delays freeing her fictional slaves.

[28] In 1823, for example, the Académie française recognized the public's growing interest in matters related to slavery and proposed the abolition of the slave trade as a subject for its competition. The prize was won by Victor Chauvet for a poem entitled "Néali, histoire africaine."

representative of other members of his race who are at times just as villainized as Bug Jargal is exalted.[29]

Bug Jargal is quite different from the works of the three Restoration-era women writers I examine below. Perhaps authorial gender has something to do with the difference. It is possible that, as a male author, Hugo focused more on depicting the perpetration of violence and gruesome acts than would have been seemly for a women author. It is also possible that nineteenth-century norms allowed male authors to write more freely, with or without a moral or political agenda, whereas women authors were forced to take a moral, and sometimes political, stand on issues like slavery in order to justify their boldness in transgressing gender norms by taking up the pen. As Christine Planté puts it, "writing about moral and social issues was acceptable for women at the time. Such writing deflected attention away from the act of writing itself and enabled women to exercise moral agency in ways that were not threatening to the hegemonic control that male writers possessed."[30] For whatever reason, women authors were active participants in the debates on race and slavery that raged during the 1810s and 20s. They were especially vocal through literary print media, most notably perhaps as authors of sentimental novels and short stories.

Claire de Duras, *Ourika* (1823)*[31]*

When compared to Sophie Doin (1800-1846) and Gabrielle de Paban (1793-?), Claire de Duras (1779-1828) is undoubtedly more familiar, whether to the nineteenth-century or modern reader.[32]

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[29] See Timothy Raser's "Victor Hugo's Politics and Aesthetics of Race in *Bug Jargal*" in the *Romanic Review*, May 1998, Vol. 89, No. 3 (PP. 307-320).
[30] Christine Planté cited in Doris Kadish, "'Sarah' and Antislavery," p. 95.
[31] All citations from the text of *Ourika* are drawn from the MLA version *Ourika: The Original French Text,* edited by Joan DeJean (New York: MLA, 1994).
[32] Just as she is the most well-know today, she would also have been better known during her own lifetime. This is evidenced by the appearance of these women authors in biographical or bibliographical reviews of the early

Her political attitudes toward slavery and the slave trade, although articulated more eloquently, are decidedly more conservative than those of Doin and Paban.[33] Doin's novella *Ourika* is a case in point. Though initially framed by the narration of a white male figure, Ourika's story is recounted in her own voice. She is one of the first black female narrators in French literature.[34] She focuses on explaining her own mental, emotional, or psychological state and possesses great emotional and psychological depth. Her first-person narrative requires the reader, presumably white, to place him- or herself in the position of a character that is not just marginalized in society, but completely without an ascribed place. Such proximity between narrator and reader can only serve to ease the establishment of an affective rapport between the two. As Ourika feels, so does the reader; her existence as a sympathetic being is incontestable.[35]

Ourika is not an abolitionist text to the same degree as the novels of Doin and Paban. When read alongside those authors, Duras proves to be rather conservative. Little in Ourika's story points directly to a call for abolition, and there are very few statements that even go so far as to paint the institution in a negative light.[36] Although there may be some resonance between Ourika's bond with Mme de B. and the relationship between a mistress and slave, Ourika is not a

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nineteenth century. For example, whereas Sophie Doin does not even feature in Eusèbe Girault de Saint-Fargeau's *Revue des Romans* (1839), and only one of Gabrielle de Paban's works is only mentioned (*La Famille noire* receiving only a footnote), Duras's *Ourika* and *Eduouard* (1825) both receive considerable attention. For further biographical/bibliographical information on Duras see the articles on Duras: « Duras (la duchesse de), née de Kersaint » in Eusèbe Girault de Saint-Forgeau's *Revue des romans*, Volume 1, Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1839 (pp. 201-204) or « Claire de Coëtnempren de Kersaint » in René Kerviler's *Répertoire général de bio-bibliographie bretonne*, Volume 10, Rennes: Librairie générale de J. Plihon et L. Hervé, 1808 (pp. 10-12).

[33] For example, in her review of *Le Nègre et la Créole*, Doris Kadish points out that there are "significant differences between the relatively conservative attitudes toward slavery held by Victor Hugo and Claire de Duras on the one hand and the more radical view expressed in this novel on the other." She goes on to place Paban in the same overtly abolitionist category as Sophie Doin. Reviewed in *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Volume 38, Number 1 & 2, Fall-Winter 2009 (pp. 123-125).

[34] Aphra Behn's Imoinda tells part of the story of *Oronoko*, but her narration is nothing like Ourika's. Imoinda focuses on relating a series of actions whereas Ourika is more insistent on providing a description of her own emotional and psychological state.

[35] I envision Ourika's relationship with the reader in much the same way as Hunt explains Pamela's relationship with the reader: "No narrator, indeed no quotation marks, stand between us and Pamela herself. We cannot help but identify with Pamela" (*Inventing Human Rights,* 43).

[36] Ourika often says she was "saved" from slavery, but only once does qualify the institution as negative by saying that God "me déroba aux vices de l'esclavage" (44).

slave; she does not even occupy the place of a servant. In fact, once she becomes bitterly conscious of the fact that Charles is oblivious to her affections and will marry another woman, Ourika envisions the life of a slave in an almost glorified way: at least, as a slave, she would have been able to find love, marry, have children, and feel like part of a community (38). This happy day dream is contradicted by other descriptions of colonial slaves as “une race proscrite” or “une race de barbares et d’assassins” (20). That they are rebelling against the injustices of enslavement is never made clear, and the system of slavery is not excessively questioned. Thus, *Ourika* turns out to be complicit with French colonial insistence that slavery was unquestionably necessary to the economic functioning of the system. This stance is perhaps not all that surprising given Duras’s own colonial background and Creole inheritance.[37]

Nonetheless, *Ourika* is not lacking in humanitarian aims. By endowing a racially marked individual like Ourika with reason and emotion and demonstrating the presence of both through the characters’ own words, Duras humanizes black people in ways that had not yet been adopted by most abolitionist writers at the time. *Ourika* intensifies the effort evident in Gouges’s and Hugo’s works to demonstrate the capacity for feeling in their black characters. In fact, Ourika’s sensibility goes beyond extraordinary and becomes excessive and therefore dangerous. Her feelings must be managed, but because they are treated too late, they lead to Ourika’s tragic death. As her own doctor explains: “Je la rassurai, je lui donnai des espérances de guérison prochaine, mais en pronançant ces paroles consolantes, en lui promettant la vie, je ne sais quel triste pressentiment m’avertissait qu’il était trop tard et que la mort avait marqué sa victime” (5).

Though it can be interpreted as demonstrating a certain degree of complicity with colonial values, *Ourika* also calls into question the unseen repercussions of the colonial slave

[37] See Heather Brady. “Recovering Claire de Duras’s Creole Inheritance: Race and Gender in the Exile Correspondence of Her Saint-Domingue Family,” *L’Esprit Créateur*, 47.4, 2007 (pp. 44-56). Brady’s discussion of the “Bonds of Affection between Mistress and Slave” is especially pertinent to the discussion of *Ourika* here.

system. Because of French involvement in slavery and the slave trade, a small number of black individuals had entered and made lives for themselves in France; no declaration was able to effectively restrict their entry into the country.[38] Duras forces her French readership to think about the real existence of a black person in France or French society: though it is impossible to know for certain how many blacks (free or enslaved) lived in France at the time, census record attest to the existence of at least several thousand.[39] Duras points out the problematic realities of life in France for such individuals. This, in turn, throws the success of the Revolutionary project (co-opted first by the leaders of the Terror, then by Napoleon) into question. *Ourika* offers no easy answers but certainly provides ample food for thought. [40]

GABRIELLE DE PABAN, *Le Nègre et la Créole, ou Mémoires d'Eulalie D** (1825)**

Recently, scholars like Doris Kadish and Roger Little have condemned the tendency to look to a few, famous or canonical writers, like Duras or Hugo, to describe nineteenth-century perspectives on race. They encourage us instead to seek out minor authors so as to reconstruct the broadest possible range of attitudes toward slavery, race, and colonialism.[41] Gabrielle de Paban (1793- ?) is a minor writer credited with about a dozen works.[42] Her literary contributions had almost completely disappeared into literary oblivion when *Le Nègre et la Créole* was

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[38] In *"There Are No Slaves in France,"* Sue Peabody cites several decrees, issued in 1716, 1738, and 1777 (pp 6-7).
[39] In her Introduction to *"There Are No Slaves in France,"* Peabody estimates a maximum of 4,000 to 5,000 by the late eighteenth century. She is, however, tentative in this estimation. She points out that France's black population is far below that of neighboring England which is generally agreed to have been around 10,000. This could account for England's earlier establishment of abolitionist movements and for the later strength and effectiveness of abolitionist activities on the island (p. 4).
[40]Linda Marie Rouillard arrives at a similar interpretation in "The Black Galatea: Claire de Duras's *Ourika*." *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 32.3 & 4, 2004 (pp. 207-222).
[41] See Doris Kadish. "Haiti and Abolitionism in 1825: The Example of Sophie Doin," *Yale French Studies*, 107 *The Haiti Issue*, 2005 (pp. 108-130). See also Roger Little. "From Taboo to Totem," *Modern Language Review*, Oct. 1998, Vol. 93, No. 4 (pp. 949).
[42] Several of Paban's publications have also been attributed to Collin de Plancy who edited and published certain works published under the name Gabrielle de P*****. It has been suggested that Paban never truly existed as an author and the name Gabrielle de P***** was simply one of several pseudonyms used by Plancy.

republished in 2008 as part of the Autrement Mêmes collection, a series designed to offer readers texts that represent neglected post-colonial discourses concerning people of color or individuals otherwise labeled as "other."[43]

In her introduction, Paban refers directly to Duras's *Ourika* and offers her readers an equally "true" story that contrasts with and yet complements Ourika's tragedy. In fact, Paban constructs her story as an inversion of Ourika's touching account. The text is a first-person narrative, but the narrator is a young white woman.[44] Paban completes her inversion of *Ourika* by making the secondary characters, Maky and Zambo (equivalents to Duras's Mme de B. and Charles) Africans who were once slaves to Eulalie's father. As a "family" these three individuals present the reader with a model of slavery as a three-part circuit connecting Africa to Europe to the Caribbean.

The novel begins on Saint-Domingue at the moment of the massive slave revolts that eventually ended in the liberation of the island. Amidst the violence, Eulalie is saved by her nanny, Maky. This sympathetic slave subsequently ensures that the little girl (whose family has fled back to France without her, thinking her dead as a result of the rebellion) is not abandoned or killed. She secures passage to Africa for herself, her son Zambo, and Eulalie. There, Eulalie is recognized as racially different but eventually finds a degree of acceptance as part of Maky's family. She becomes a participant-observer of African culture. Once she leaves Africa and begins to write her memoirs, she speaks almost as an early anthropologist, documenting in a not-quite unbiased manner: no matter how hard she tries to recognize the equality of the black people with whom she was raised she consistently returns to the idea that she is French and therefore innately more *sensible* and civilized. Regardless of her inability to escape western bias, she is

[43] Sophie Doin's work was published in 2002 as part of the same collection.
[44] Paradoxically, Eulalie is less educated than Ourika and therefore writes with a more "natural" style.

careful to establish the fundamental humanity of the Africans with whom she lives. She does this largely by portraying their culture as legitimate, if somewhat uncivilized in comparison to European models of civilization. These Africans do not lead an animal existence: rather, they are socially organized and demonstrate a wide range of complex emotional reactions.

The depiction of family structures also plays an important role in Paban's literary project. Unlike Ourika's benefactress who thinks of the child she was given as "like" a daughter, Maky adopts Eulalie. The two woman and Zambo consider themselves to be part of the same family, not just like a family. Thus, the love of Maky and Zambo for Eulalie, which crosses racial lines, is of the utmost importance: it demonstrates their mutual equality and underscores their shared sensibilities and basic humanity. Zambo and Eulalie develop an especially close relationship based on shared feelings (41). Eulalie, while comfortable with a close familial relationship to Zambo, refuses to acknowledge the possibility that her feelings for him, or any member of his race, could evolve into something more than fraternal love. Like Ourika, though for different reasons, Eulalie views such feelings as blameworthy and struggles against them. Zambo, on the other hand, does not understand Eulalie's attempts to suppress amorous feelings for him. Nonetheless, he is aware of Eulalie's feelings and does his best to respect them. Thus, he and his mother prove to possess an equal or greater capacity for sympathy than Ourika's French benefactors.

Eulalie's inability to understand or control her own emotions leads her to follow a path much like Ourika's which leads first to a convent, and then to solitary death. Although she cannot completely deny what she feels for Zambo, she doesn't understand it and, in the end, simply cannot accept the legitimacy of intimate or amorous feelings across racial lines. She slowly wastes away in solitude, obsessed with her own suffering. Zambo's free expression of his

love for Eulalie and disregard for the need to regulate that passion results in similarly unhappy consequences. When abducted and sold as a slave for the second time, Zambo is separated from Eulalie and, like Lambert's Ziméo, his emotions in light of such events push him to seek vengeance as the leader of a slave revolution. He is eventually captured and executed for his crimes. It is witnessing his death that seals Eulalie's sad fate. Such an ending, may be designed to underscore the culpability of Eulalie's deep feelings for Zambo, or perhaps it represents a call for change in French perceptions of racial difference and miscegenation. It could also be read as a critique of the system of slavery which is responsible for perverting Zambo's sensibility and driving him to violence. The very ambiguity of the ending, however, makes Paban's text a more conservative political effort than that put forth by Sophie Doin, especially in her *Nouvelles blanches et noires*. Thus, Eulalie's story occupies a middle ground somewhere between Duras's conservatism and Doin's liberalism.[45]

SOPHIE DOIN, *La Famille noire* (1825) ; *Le Négrier, Blanche et Noir, Noire et Blanc* (1826)

Sophie Mamy Doin (1800-1846), the youngest of the authors in this study, was born to a wealthy, bourgeois family and was early drawn to the charitable message of protestant Christianity. Her experiences in a post-revolutionary world combined with factors linked to her religion and social class to make her a writer distinctly different from the examples offered by Claire de Duras and Gabrielle de Paban. Unlike Duras, Doin was not terribly well-known during her own lifetime. Like Paban, she was neither a terribly accomplished writer nor a prominent

[45] Paban's unwillingness to articulate extreme political views can be explained by analyzing the kind of author she seems to have been. Based on her publications, it is obvious that Paban wrote mostly to earn money by speaking to fad issues that interested readers. If this was in fact the case, it would explain why she did not take a more militant ground like Doin. Rather, she seems to have been profiting off the success of *Ourika* much like many other French authors, artists, and actors of her time. She is not the only opportunitstic author of apparently abolitionist fiction. See Christopher L. Miller's discussion of Olympe de Gouges in *The French Atlantic Triangle* (p. 111-112).

figure in the abolitionist movement. Recently, however, she has begun to gain a certain amount of recognition among critics as an example of a woman writer who did not hesitate to express what may be some of the most extreme views on abolition and race articulated in fiction in the nineteenth century. Her political views were more extreme than those of Duras and Paban, and therefore novellas contrast greatly with the models provided by *Ourika* and *Le Nègre et la Créole*.

Race was central to the plot of several of Doin's short stories. Her early works place particular emphasis on critiquing slavery and calling for recognition of the equality of individuals regardless of race feature prominently. In her first publication, *La Famille noire, ou la Traite et l'esclavage* (1825) as well as in three of the six short stories included in *Cornélie, nouvelle grecque, suivie de six nouvelles* (1826), Doin offers her readers an example of some of the most strongly abolitionist views circulating in France in the early nineteenth century.[46]

As Doris Kadish observes, Doin seeks to instill in her readers "a feeling of horror for the slave trade" by presenting them with the suffering and misfortunes of African characters who are presented as "feeling, thinking human beings endowed with the same moral and intellectual capacities as whites."[47] Doin is specific about the breadth of her desired audience. She seeks to reach all classes and extend the reach of the abolitionist movement from an essentially elitist base to include all common people of both sexes.

In these literary works, Doin is not concerned with the status of black people in France or even in Africa, but rather focuses on their exploitation and future existence in New World colonial contexts. She views Haiti as a beacon of hope for the creation of a new, completely egalitarian society or a utopian culture in which miscegenation is commonplace and everyone

[46] Although not well-know today, Doin published at least 14 texts between 1825 and 1845.
[47] Kadish, Doris. "Haiti and Abolitionism in 1825: The Example of Sophie Doin." *Yale French Studies*. No. 107, The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies, 2005 (pp. 108-130).

lives happily ever after. Doin's message is not always consistent. For example, in *La Famille noire* she advocates French withdrawal from the colonies and unconditional abolition of slavery. The paternal French figure Merville leaves Haiti so that the nameless black hero can assume his responsibilities as an independent leader and set about forging a future for the small country.[48] In the *Nouvelles noires et blanches,* however, Doin seems to advocate not only abolition but also a revolutionary and utopian blending of French, African and Creole cultures through the interracial marriages of her protagonists. Marriages of this sort were relatively rare in literature of the period. Doin, however, depicts both types of interracial marriage in her fictional pleas for racial equality: in "Noire et Blanc," Nelzi marries Charles, and in "Blanche et noir," Pauline marries Domingo. The latter pairing was viewed at the time as especially dangerous and was forcefully discouraged by both law and tradition in the colonies.[49] Other writers, especially men, write distinctly less positive portrayals of interracial marriage especially between black men and white women.[50]

Despite the multiplicity of interpretations for Doin's short stories, one aspect is constant throughout: her protagonists are always, regardless of race, extremely *sensible* and capable of managing this *sensibilité* so as to become ideal examples of humanity: The black slave Nelzi feels just as deeply as her once-wealthy white husband Charles; similarly Domingo and Pauline find themselves also on equal sentimental ground. Thus, Doin uses sentimental narrative to level artificial social hierarchies based on class and race and firmly establish the shared humanity of all these individuals.

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[48] Cora Monroe views Doin as advocating that indentured servitude replace slavery in the colonies. It is true that the characters argue for such change, but the ending of the short story suggests a different, perhaps more extreme, message. See "Authorized Autonomy: The Black Subject of *La Famille noire*," *L'Esprit Créateur*, 47.4, 2007 (pp. 105-117). Monroe reads Doin much more conservatively than I do.

[49] See Roger Little "From Taboo to Totem, " (p. 948).

[50] See, for example, the almost unthinkably impossible relationship between Hugo's Bug Jargal and French Marie or the violent death of the escaped slave who tries to George and his mistress in Balzac's *Le Nègre* (1822).

Conclusions

Clearly, Duras, Paban, and Doin build on the works of earlier abolitionist writers. Like their eighteenth-century predecessors, they appeal to the sensibilities of their readers in order to draw attention to the basic humanity of slaves and free blacks. However, they also go beyond the examples of their predecessors and take even greater pains to demonstrate that racially-marked characters possess a complex capacity for feeling that equals or surpasses that of other characters. Duras, Paban, and Doin used sentimental narrative as a vehicle for denouncing the atrocities perpetuated by slavery and for advocating various types and degrees of social and political change. By placing characters like Ourika, Zambo, Nelzi, and Domingo at the center of sentimental plots, they aspired to create a broad community of sympathetic beings, united by a shared sense of humanity that disregards race. In this sense, these sentimental authors contributed to the larger political movement that strove to ensure that the cherished principles of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* applied to all.