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## THE BLACK TERROR: WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO SLAVE REVOLTS IN HAITI

Doris Y. Kadish

Violent slave revolts that were to change the course of Caribbean and even European history began in Haiti, then named Saint Domingue, on August 22, 1791, almost two years before the violent events in France known as the Reign of Terror. (1) As the Trinidadian writer C.L.R. James reports in his 1938 work entitled *The Black Jacobins*, bands of rebelling slaves from the port of Le Cap and the Northern Province systematically murdered their masters, committed other atrocities, and burnt plantations to the ground. The number of insurgents quickly grew to 100,000, and the revolution spread to Port-au-Prince and the Western Province, where Mulattoes joined the struggle. (2) James summarizes what happened in the twelve years the revolution lasted:

The slaves defeated in turn the local whites and the soldiers of the French monarchy, a Spanish invasion, a British expedition of some 60,000 men, and a French expedition of similar size under Bonaparte's brother-in-law. The defeat of Bonaparte's expedition in 1803 resulted in the establishment of the Negro state of Haiti which has lasted to this day. The revolt is the only successful slave revolt in history. . . (James ix)

There are clear analogies between the violent phase of the French Revolution called the Terror and the violent phase of revolution in the colonies: hence, James's use of "Black" in conjunction with "Jacobin" and the juxtaposition of "Black" and "Terror" in my title, which echoes James's. (3) In both cases an initially moderate revolutionary movement took a violent turn at the hands of radical, Jacobin-style leaders, who appealed to the masses. As James explains, "[i]t was the quarrel between bourgeoisie and monarchy that brought the Paris masses on the political stage. It was the quarrel between whites and Mulattoes that woke the sleeping slaves." (73) Aimé Césaire elaborates, stressing a common pattern of three stages: "En France, Constitutionnels, Girondins, Jacobins . . . dans la révolution de Saint-Domingue; blancs, puis mulâtres, puis nègres, les uns poussant les autres et incarnant les différents `moments' de plus en plus intenses de la révolution anti-colonialiste." (Césaire 25)

Throughout the nineteenth century, the memory of the violence that occurred in France and the colonies in the 1790s produced a deep-seated fear of further uprisings by workers or slaves, two groups who became inextricably linked in the European political unconscious on the basis of what was perceived as their common propensity to rebellion and destruction. The memory of violence also produced a profound mistrust of anti-slavery writing and abolitionism, which arose in France during the eighteenth century and flourished in the years prior to 1791. (4) Little was said about the plight of slaves until the 1820s, when a modest renewal of abolitionism coincided with a considerable development of covert racism. After the abolition of slavery in the French colonies declared by the Convention in 1794, and revoked by Napoleon in 1802, slavery was only abolished definitively in the French colonies in 1848.

I want to show in this study that from the first years of anti-abolitionism in the 1790s through the 1820s, French women writers played a special role in the literary arena, as opposed to the philosophical arena in which much of the influential anti-slavery writings produced by men at that time occurred. Those French women writers put the black revolution in the context of slavery, and, by thus contextualizing it, had interesting things to say about revolution which have typically been overlooked in stressing the non-political, domestic nature of women's writing. Not only in France but in England and America as well, the scores of works that women writers produced about the topic of slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries tend generally to be contextual and relational, differences in the social class of the women writers notwithstanding. (5) The responses by women writers that I will consider here consist, first, of a number of statements and literary themes produced by Germaine de Staël and Olympe de Gouges: in Staël's case, in letters and in the preface to the short story *Mirza* written around the time of the French Revolution, and later, toward the end of her life in 1817, in the posthumously published "*Considérations sur la révolution française*"; in Gouges's case, in her *Déclaration des droits de la femme* and the preface to *L'Esclavage des noirs*, both of which date from the period between 1791 and 1793. Because abolitionism virtually disappeared in France in the early years of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to skip to the early 1820s to locate the further examples that I will examine: Claire de Duras's *Ourika* and Sophie Doin's *La Famille noire*.

What is distinctive about these writings is not only that they eschew the demonizing of the Terror in the colonies and in France that was commonplace in their time if not still today. Their writings are also importantly abolitionist in the sense that women writers contextualized violence in the larger picture of the horrors of slavery. It is of course true that during the revolutionary period, women advocated violence in literary texts and even practiced it in the political and military domains. But it is also true that both the women who adopted a militant stance and the many others who advocated a more moderate approach tended to call attention to the social conditions and the causes of violence. (6) To highlight the contribution of these women writers and their relatively enlightened and tolerant responses to violence is also to highlight an important and indeed an important feminine contribution to political and cultural thinking.

Women's writings such as those that will be examined here place violence in a context that encompasses not only military and political events but family life, psychology, education, religion, and a broad range of other social and cultural phenomena. When viewed thus, the violence that occurred in the French colonies ceases to assume only the form of a bloodthirsty, horrific story of savagery and terror and also becomes, as these women writers all suggest that it truly was, an unfortunate episode in a much larger tale of injustice and inequality. Moreover, the writings examined here go against the grain of the anti-abolitionist and covert racist tendencies that, as noted earlier, first developed in response to the violence in France and the colonies at the time of the revolution. Significantly, women's writings about slavery tend to contain less of the covert racist stereotyping evident in other texts at the time. In addition, these writings are distinctive in providing women with an occasion to give voice to feminine political and personal concerns: their own as women writers as well those of the women of color whose plight they tend to emphasize. It was widely perceived that the issue of slavery was a woman's issue, on the basis of women's humanitarian interests, their capacity for emotional response, their special concern for women and children, their ties with religion, and the like. Whether rooted in reality

or myth, such factors resulted in women's acquiring a voice in the public sphere that they would undoubtedly not otherwise have had.

It is time now to look at the specifics of how women writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries responded to slave revolts and how their responses contributed to a tradition of resistance against the racial oppression of slaves and their own sexual oppression as women. Admittedly, it is a mistake to glorify early anti-slavery writers by overestimating their contributions and failing to acknowledge that their writings were motivated by a variety of economic, religious, and other considerations, not all of which were noble and disinterested. (David Brion Davis 11-16) Angela Davis emphasizes moreover that while white women at the time "made inestimable contributions to the anti-slavery campaign, they often failed to grasp the complexity of the slave woman's condition." (Angela Davis 27) Although she is right in emphasizing the limitations in women writers' ability to understand fully the otherness that they tried to describe, it is also important to stress those women's partial successes. As the examples that follow show, French women writers were surprisingly modern in their ability to situate the Black Terror in a broad spectrum of the social, political, and cultural factors affecting class, race, and gender in their times.

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It can be illuminating to contrast the responses of women writers with those of certain of their male contemporaries. For the period around the time of the French Revolution, Chateaubriand can serve as a convenient point of contrast: not only because he is undoubtedly the best known writer of that period, but also because his condemnation of the Black Terror in *Le Génie du christianisme*--"Qui oserait encore plaider la cause des Noirs après les crimes qu'ils ont commis?" (Chateaubriand 149-150)--is often taken as the definitive statement of the general opinion that was held about those events at the time. (7) It is significant then to note in contrast how Staël compared the slaves and the Jacobins: "Si les nègres de Saint-Domingue ont commis bien plus d'atrocités encore, c'est qu'ils avaient été plus opprimés. Les fureurs des révoltes donnent la mesure des vices des institutions." ("*Considérations*" 178). Interestingly, James echoed Staël's sentiments almost word for word when he observed about the slaves that "if they destroyed much it was because they had suffered much." (James 88) By contextualizing the "atrocités" and "fureurs" as a response to the "vices" of the institutions that produced and legitimized slavery, Staël demonstrated what we today are likely to consider a far more tolerant and progressive reaction than Chateaubriand's. Instead of focusing only on the slaves' violent acts, she foregrounded the causes of those acts and viewed the slaves as victims in the larger picture of historical events as well as victimizers in the immediate situation of the revolts.

It is apparent from other comments that Staël made that she consistently sought to situate acts of violence in a political and historical context rather than simply denouncing the perpetrators. An example is provided in a letter she wrote to her father about the ferocious reprisals against the French that occurred in 1802 when Napoleon, having refused to recognize the Constitution proposed by the rebels in Saint Domingue on the grounds that it granted them too much autonomy, sent his brother-in-law, General Leclerc, and 35,000 soldiers, in an ill-fated attempt to reconquer the colony. Staël acknowledges the violence committed by the rebels, but she also emphasizes the context in which that violence arose: "Ce qui s'est passé à Saint-Domingue est

horrible et le tout pour complaire au général Leclerc; car on aurait fait avec Toussaint Ier le traité qu'on aurait voulu et un beaucoup plus avantageux que celui auquel on est obligé de se soumettre aujourd'hui." (Page 435) Staël goes on to describe the abuses on the part of the French, including throwing 1800 blacks into the ocean with no trial; and she concludes: "tout ce que la violence et le mépris de l'homme peuvent faire inventer de cruel a été prodigué contre ces infortunés." (Page 436) (8) One finds a similar contextualizing of violence in her remarks about the Terror. On one occasion she states, "Des massacres, non moins affreux que ceux de la terreur, ont été commis au nom de la religion" ("Considérations" 177); on another, in words that strongly echo her remarks about the slave revolts, "Les fureurs des révoltes donnent la mesure des vices des institutions . . . On dit aujourd'hui que les Français sont pervertis par la révolution. Et d'où venaient donc les penchants désordonnés qui se sont si violemment développés dans les premières années de la révolution, si ce n'est de cent ans de superstition et d'arbitraire?" ("Considérations" 179)

Staël also chose on many occasions to dwell on the larger picture or more positive side of historical events and accordingly to contextualize violence by diverting attention away from it. The result is to displace political, military deeds enacted by men and to create a place for cultural, social values articulated by women. Thus in *Delphine* and other works, for example, she makes little of the Terror by highlighting the quest for liberty in the earlier, more moderate phase of the revolution and by empowering women within the novel to address the human issues that underlie and give rise to social upheaval.

A similar approach occurred when Staël turned her attention to slavery in the short story *Mirza*, which she wrote in 1786 but which she published and wrote a preface for in 1795, after the Black Terror had occurred. The work avoids the tendency common at the time in stories about slaves--those by Jean-François Saint-Lambert or Joseph La Vallée, for example--to dwell on such themes as African practices of enslaving enemy tribes, or their supposed proclivities to violence, ignorance, drunkenness, or sexuality. Instead, Staël puts the spotlight on *Mirza*, a black woman and a poetess, who is betrayed by Ximéo. In speaking out against slavery and for freedom within the story, *Mirza's* feminine voice echoes Staël's voice, which functions in the preface to acknowledge and attempt to ward off any anti-abolitionist sentiments that readers may have acquired in response to the Terror in France and in the colonies. She begins in the preface by stating that she was only twenty years old when she wrote *Mirza* and the two other stories published with it, and that "la révolution de France n'existait point encore." ("*Mirza*" 72) She then goes on to state,

La grandeur des événements qui nous entourent fait si bien sentir le néant des pensées générales, l'impuissance des sentiments individuels, que, perdu dans la vie, on ne sait plus quelle route doit suivre l'espérance, quel mobile doit exciter les efforts, quel principe guidera désormais l'opinion publique à travers les erreurs de l'esprit de parti, et marquera de nouveau, dans toutes les carrières, le but éclatant de la gloire. ("*Mirza*" 72)

At the same time that Staël appears to want to distance herself here from the "erreurs" that have led to violence, she also acknowledges the "grandeur des événements" of her time and holds open the door to hope and "la véritable gloire" in the future. By choosing to introduce her tale about slavery with such words, which can be taken as allusions to the Terror and the events in

Saint Domingue, Staël seems to want to encourage her readers to receive her African characters in the positive, hopeful manner that she herself adopted in the face of violent social upheaval.

Olympe de Gouges stands out as another French woman writer from the period of the French Revolution who, like Staël, consistently strove to place slavery in a social and political context; and who, even in the face of the slave revolts, saw the necessity of considering the violence that they produced in relation to the injustice from which they arose. She also opened up a feminine perspective which broadened the issue of the slave revolts to include familial issues. Writing in the same year as the events in Saint Domingue, she closed her *Déclaration des droits de la femme* by calling attention to the unwillingness of fathers to acknowledge their offspring of color as one of the conditions most likely to produce violence in the colonies:

Ces Colons inhumains disent: notre sang circule dans leurs veines, mais nous le répandrons tout, s'il le faut, pour assouvir notre cupidité ou notre aveugle ambition. C'est dans ces lieux, les plus près de la Nature, que le père méconnaît le fils. . . Que peut-on espérer de la résistance qu'on lui oppose? la contraindre avec violence, c'est la rendre terrible, la laisser encore dans les fers, c'est acheminer toutes les calamités vers l'Amérique. Une main divine semble répandre partout l'apanage de l'homme, la liberté; la loi seule a le droit de réprimer cette liberté, si elle dégenère en licence; mais elle doit être égale pour tous. (Oeuvres 112)

While acknowledging that the slaves' responses would lead to resistance that would be "terrible," and that would produce "calamités" and "licence" of all sorts, Gouges also indicted the colonists openly as "inhumains" and guilty of "cupidité" and "ambition." Gouges's commitment to contextualizing slavery and the slave revolts inevitably involved issues of gender: hence, for example, her choice to conclude her remarks about freedom for women in *Déclaration* with these remarks about freedom for slaves. (9)

Slavery and gender are similarly intertwined considerations in her 1789 play *L'Esclavage des noirs*, the preface to which was written in 1792, a year before Gouges was sent to the guillotine during the Terror as a Girondin counterrevolutionary. In the play, as in the numerous essays and other works that Gouges produced on race and gender both before and after 1791, she deals with the issues of the sexual exploitation of women of color and the inhumanity of colonists to slaves. That both of those issues can lead to violent acts for which slaves are not singlehandedly to blame is dramatized in her play, in which the slave hero's efforts to defend the honor of his beloved unintentionally lead to the death of the white man who made unwanted advances toward her, a crime for which the slave is ultimately exonerated. In the preface, Gouges asserts her authority as a woman to speak out about slavery, claiming that she did so before male abolitionists such as Brissot. She also seeks to defend herself against the charge by those on the far right that she is one of the rabble-rousers responsible for the violence in Saint Domingue: "comme témoin auriculaire des récits désastreux des maux de l'Amérique, j'abhorrais mon Ouvrage, si une main invisible n'eût opéré cette révolution à laquelle je n'ai participé en rien que par la prophétie que j'en ai faite." (*L'Esclavage* 1-2) Rejecting claims that her work is incendiary and encourages insurrection, she dismisses the colonists with condescension: "Mais ils sont malheureux, je les plains, et je respecterai leur déplorable sort; je ne me permettrai pas même de leur rappeler leur inhumanité." (4) Even in addressing the slaves and strongly condemning their acts of violence, she continues to place that violence in a context that includes the conditions that

provoked it: "cruels, en imitant les tyrans, vous les justifiez" (4); "j'abhorre vos Tyrans, vos cruautés me font horreur." (5)

It is important to add that both Gouges and Staël succeeded in enhancing women's authority to speak out for slaves and for themselves as writers. Gouges was one of the seventy French writers and political figures that the abolitionist leader Abbé Grégoire named in his 1808 *De La Littérature des nègres*, dedicated to those who devoted their lives to pleading the cause of persons of color and slaves. Staël for her part maintained close ties with abolitionist movements in England and France, ties that had been established by her parents in the 1780s and were maintained by her children after her death in 1817, most notably by her son Auguste, a leader in the movement to abolish the slave trade in the 1820s, and by her son-in-law the duc de Broglie, a leader in the movement that led to the emancipation of slaves in the French colonies in 1848. She was also well known for her tenacious opposition to Napoleon, who reinstated slavery in 1802, after its brief abolition during the revolutionary period, and for her active involvement in support of ending the slave trade. (10) Edith Lucas even goes so far as to maintain that Staël's return to Paris in 1815 actually brought about the rebirth of negrophile literature during the Restoration (15), to which we now turn.

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Prosper Mérimée's 1829 *Tamango*, typically cited along with Victor Hugo's 1826 *Bug Jargal* as representative of the flourishing literature devoted to the topic of slavery in the 1820s, supplies an illustrative contrast with two short novels produced between 1823 and 1825: Duras's *Ourika* and Doin's *La Famille noire*. All of these works bespeak the deep-seated, lingering fears of uprisings by the lower classes and slaves which, as noted earlier, had been fueled by the Terrors in France and Saint Domingue and which persisted well into the nineteenth century. *Tamango* stands in sharp contrast to Duras's and Doin's novels from the same period, however. The story of an uprising of Africans aboard a ship transporting them into slavery, *Tamango* highlights the mass destruction of property and human life in a way that strongly but only covertly echoes the Black Terror: "chaque matelot de garde est assailli, désarmé et aussitôt égorgé"; [d]ès ce moment, l'équipage européen fut perdu"; "tous . . . furent impitoyablement massacrés." (Mérimée 222-224) By refusing to acknowledge Saint Domingue as an historical subtext and eschewing any direct mention of the Black Terror, Mérimée's story tends to build a myth around the violence that occurred in the colonies rather than dealing with the social conditions from which it arose or the effects it produced. *Tamango* also goes a great deal farther than writings by women of the time in developing the kinds of racial stereotypes that are commonplace in works about racial subjects in the nineteenth century. Mérimée exaggerates the involvement of Africans in the practice of slavery and their susceptibility to the trickery of their white captors, even to the point of holding them responsible for their own enslavement: in *Tamango*'s case, because he succumbs to inebriation. There is also a clearly racist emphasis on such presumed characteristics as ignorance and animality. In addition, Mérimée's perspective is distinctly militaristic in highlighting the contest between *Tamango* and his evil captor, ironically named captain Ledoux. Moreover, the only role assigned to women or mention made of their fate under slavery is as sexual objects exchanged by the black and white rivals.

In sharp contrast to *Mérimée*, both Duras and Doin address the Black Terror directly, albeit differently. Duras entrusts her judgment on the events in Saint Domingue to a woman and former slave, her black heroine Ourika. She is also careful to qualify the otherwise sympathetic attitude toward slaves that is evident throughout the rest of the novel. Thus Ourika acknowledges the woeful conditions of slavery that prevailed in the colonies while at the same time decrying the violence that occurred there:

On commençoit à parler de la liberté des nègres: il étoit impossible que cette question ne me touchât pas vivement; c'étoit une illusion que j'aimois encore à me faire, qu'ailleurs, du moins, j'avois des semblables: comme ils étoient malheureux, je les croyois bons, et je m'intéressois à leur sort. Hélas! je fus promptement détrompée! Les massacres de Saint-Domingue me causèrent une douleur nouvelle et déchirante: jusqu'ici je m'étois affligée d'appartenir à une race proscrite; maintenant j'avois honte d'appartenir à une race de barbares et d'assassins. (Duras 43)

It is noteworthy that the reference here to "une race de barbares et d'assassins," which might suggest to readers today that the author espoused a pro-slavery position, coexists in this passage with other statements that indicate sympathy for the slaves' fate: that they were "malheureux," and that they were treated as belonging to "une race proscrite." In fact Duras did not support slave owners, and the historical record shows that she consistently sought to mediate between extreme positions on the left and right. That Ourika was not viewed as sympathetic to the slave owners in its time is evidenced by the fact that Duras was excoriated by the colonists, as Gouges had been several decades earlier. Ourika was received very negatively in Martinique where, according to a French naval officer,

Les colons regardent chaque Français récemment arrivé comme un négrophile et le spirituel et généreux auteur d'Ourika est accusé à chaque instant ici d'avoir rendu intéressant dans son détestable roman une négresse qui n'avait pas même l'avantage d'être une négresse créole. (Duras 21)

Similarly direct in addressing the issue of the Black Terror, Doin's work differs from Duras's and others by actually condoning the slave revolts, claiming that they were justified by the horrors that slaves endured and that they produced the positive result of obtaining freedom for slaves in the independent state of Haiti. In a lengthy expository introduction, the woman writer states:

Les blancs se sont plaints amèrement des horribles représailles commises par les noirs, lors des massacres de Saint-Domingue. J'ai vu des témoins de ces désastres sanglants; j'ai lu des plaintes non moins amères des noirs insurgés. Oui, des horreurs furent commises par eux, leurs vengeances furent souvent atroces; mais qui leur donna l'exemple de ces cruautés qui font frémir la nature? Qui leur enseigna ces traitements barbares qui révoltent les coeurs les plus indifférents au spectacle des souffrances humaines? Qui, pendant quatre siècles, essaya tour à tour sur eux des supplices variés avec un génie infernal avec une inconcevable férocité? Qui? Les blancs. (Doin 24)

Later, the white male philanthropist Merveille, who comes to the assistance of the slave hero Phénor, echoes those sentiments:

Phénor, les nègres accablés sous le poids d'horribles chaînes, de chaînes que plusieurs siècles avaient appesanties, et dont la rigueur s'augmentait chaque jour, trouvèrent des héros au sein de leur ignomie. Ces héros leur rendirent la force, les menèrent à la gloire et brisèrent leur liens. Le bonheur de la réussite les plongea dans une ivresse qui devint bientôt de la férocité. Rien ne put arrêter le torrent de leurs vengeances. Bien des crimes furent alors commis par eux. Ce Dieu que j'adore, ce Dieu plein de clémence, et de justice, fit grâce à leurs égarements, parce que sans doute il pensa que les blancs seuls devaient être responsables d'une fureur que leurs cruautés avaient si longtemps nourrie. Les noirs se déclarèrent indépendants, et d'une île, séjour de misère et de désespoir, ils se formèrent une patrie. (123-125)

In addition to addressing violence directly, Duras and Doin share the tendency to contextualize violence observed earlier in the writings of Staël and Gouges. Both *Ourika* and *La Famille noire* view the Black Terror as a human problem rather than strictly as a political or military occurrence. Duras's work explores the psychology of a young woman rescued from slavery and tormented by her exclusion from both black and white societies. *Ourika*'s response to the Black Terror thus does not derive from abstract principles of political theory but from her lived experience in concrete social and cultural situations. Doin's work similarly approaches violence in relation to the lives of slaves, notably their familial lives: as she states in the preface, "J'ai fait peser sur une seule famille de nègres une faible partie des maux qui accablent les nègres en général depuis l'horrible invention de la traite." (vii-viii) By dramatizing the heartbreaking succession of deaths and separations endured by the members of this family because of slavery, and by repeatedly stressing that slaves have the same emotional responses to familial loss as whites, Doin seeks to argue that in the face of the inhuman actions of Europeans any loving family member would respond as the slaves did. When at the end of the novel a brutal colonist causes the deaths of Phénor and his wife, Merveille gives him a dire warning: "Vos colonies, ensanglantées par vous, s'élèveront contre vous . . . Alors les enfans de vos esclaves vous poursuivront sans relâche, vous égorgeront sans pitié." (131) After the treatment that Phénor has received, the violent response that Merveille predicts seems not only predictable but fully warranted.

Duras and Doin both responded to the Black Terror moreover in a woman's voice that enabled them to recast resistance in a feminine mould. *Ourika* neither runs off to join the rebelling slaves in Saint Domingue nor endorses their military cause. In other ways, however, she and her woman creator are participants in a struggle against the oppression of slaves and women. The very fact that Duras created an articulate and educated black woman narrator was a significant step toward empowering the oppressed groups of both slaves and women, and toward imagining the conditions under which they could fight back against their oppressors. By focusing on *Ourika*'s voice and her intellectual accomplishments, Duras used the novel to make much the same argument in the realm of fiction about the intelligence of black individuals that Grégoire made in essay form and that Phillis Wheatley and other eighteenth and nineteenth-century black writers made through poetry and personal testimony.

*La Famille noire* similarly creates a resistant feminine voice that addresses the issue of the Black Terror. A female authorial voice controls the first quarter of the novel, often adopting a traditionally male discursive style to inform, enlighten, influence, in short to claim the authority of one who commands historical facts and understands political theory; as she states later in the

novel, "Cet ouvrage est une histoire impartiale bien plutôt qu'un roman." (141) At the same time, however, the woman writer lays claim to women's greater sensitivity and summons her "plume tremblante" (19) to make readers truly feel what the suffering slaves have endured. And in the major part of the work she has recourse to the acceptably female discourse of fiction. By combining masculine and feminine discourses, Doin asserts a dual authority to speak for women and slaves. The result is the strongly activist, almost militant voice of resistance evident throughout *La Famille noire* but especially in statements such as "Que nos voix, embrassant une sainte cause, deviennent, pour tant de milliers de victimes, comme la voix des archanges, formant de mélodieux concerts!" (23); "faisons retentir leurs cris dans toute l'Europe." (29)

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As feminist critics and historians have argued for several decades now, and as I believe that the above consideration of women's responses to the Black Terror has shown, historical and literary accounts that leave out women's contributions inevitably deform the reality of the past. To consider only how canonical authors such as Chateaubriand, Hugo, and Mérimée responded to the complex issues of slavery and race, as critics frequently do, is to fail to tell the full story. (11) A narrow perspective limited to male writers may have the merit of calling important attention to the ways in which Europeans of the time created racist stereotypes, but it also has the drawback of failing to show that other, less racist attitudes and practices can also be found in texts of the period. (12) Without a full appreciation of those often progressive, enlightened attitudes and practices, one cannot understand the full importance and complexity of anti-slavery sentiment in France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Focusing on texts by women writers also casts light on the important connections between abolitionism and women's acquisition of a voice as writers. Because women writers had a personal stake in resisting their own oppression as women, as well as a political and humanitarian stake in resisting the oppression of slaves, there arose a feminine intertextual tradition of abolitionist writing, which began with the British writer Aphra Behn's seminal work *Oroonoko* in the seventeenth century, and which a century and a half later included the American writer Harriet Beecher Stowe's celebrated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. Although critics have begun to explore that feminine intertextual tradition systematically, and to show the importance of understanding abolitionist works by women in relation to each other, very little has yet been said about the role of French women writers in that tradition. (13) This study is one step in the full-scale assessment that needs to be made of abolitionist French women writers. (14) Only when they are understood in relation to each other, and to the feminine intertextual tradition to which they belong, can the works of little-known writers such as Gouges and Doin, or even works of better-known writers such as Staël and Duras, be restored to their full literary and historical value.

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## NOTES

1. A version of this article was presented at the University of Kansas in 1993 at the Nineteenth Century French Studies Colloquium, which was devoted to the topic of Terror and Terrorism.
2. For other, more recent accounts of these events, see Fick, *The Making of Haiti* and Benot, *La Révolution française et la fin des colonies*.
3. In a twentieth-century context, the term "black terror" also evokes the terror practiced by the gestapo, who dressed in black. I am grateful to Henri Mitterand for answering my question about the use that he made of this term in the plenary lecture he delivered at the 1993 Nineteenth Century French Colloquium.
4. A number of French eighteenth-century essays and philosophical works were especially influential in expressing anti-slavery ideas: Montesquieu's 1748 *L'Esprit des lois*; the Abbé Raynal's 1770 *Histoire des deux Indes*, which was directly influenced by Diderot's progressive ideas on the subject of slavery; *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres*, which Condorcet published in Switzerland 1781 under the name of Joachim Schwarz. Other anti-slavery works and activities originated in the abolitionist *Société des Amis des Noirs*, which was founded in 1788 by Brissot de Warville and whose other leaders included Condorcet and the Abbé Grégoire.
5. An extensive literary and historical panorama of French literary works about slaves is provided in Hoffman's invaluable *Le Nègre romantique*. That panorama includes but does not focus specifically on works by women.
6. For women's revolutionary activities in France see Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship* and Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses*. For their revolutionary activities in Haiti, see Gautier, "Le Rôle des femmes dans l'abolition de l'esclavage" and Goutalier, "Les Révoltes dans les antilles françaises."
7. Seeber maintains, however, that this statement should not be read as an expression of anti-slavery sentiment on Chateaubriand's part. According to Seeber, it "by no means belies his sympathy for the negro so clearly expressed in this work and in *Les Natchez*. It is symptomatic, rather, of the decline of overt opposition to slavery during the decade and a half following 1802, when slavery was reinstated by Bonaparte as a supposedly necessary adjunct to his vigorous colonial program." (Seeber 194)
8. Interesting echoes of *Staël* can again be heard in *The Black Jacobins*: "And yet they were surprisingly moderate, then and afterwards, far more humane than their masters had been or would ever be to them. . . in all the records of that time there is no single instance of such fiendish tortures as burying white men up to the neck and smearing the holes in their faces to attract insects, or blowing them up with gun-powder, or any of the thousand and one bestialities to which they had been subjected." (James 88-89)
9. Similarly, having included an anti-slavery message in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in 1790, Mary Wollstonecraft went on to compare the position of women to that of slaves in *A*

Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1792. It appears, however, that Wollstonecraft and Gouges were unaware of each other's works.

10. See in this regard her "Préface pour la traduction d'un ouvrage de M. Wilberforce sur la traite des nègres" and "Appel aux souverains réunis à Paris pour en obtenir l'abolition de la traite des nègres."

11. An example of an otherwise illuminating study which seriously underplays women's contributions is Mercier's *L'Afrique noire dans la littérature française*.

12. Miller has shed important light on the creation of a racist Africanist discourse in nineteenth-century France in *Blank Darkness*.

13. See for example Ferguson, *Subject to Others* and Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*.

14. The groundwork for that assessment has been painstakingly laid in Hoffman's *Le nègre romantique*.