H-France Review Vol. 23 (September 2025), No. 61

Jeffrey M. Leichman & Karine Bénac-Giroux eds., *Colonialism and Slavery in Performance: Theatre and the Eighteenth-Century French Caribbean.* Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021. xii + 391 pp. Figures, bibliography, and index. $99.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781800348042.

Review by Linsey Sainte-Claire, Rice University.

Colonialism and Slavery in Performance, co-edited by Jeffrey M. Leichman and Karine Bénac-Giroux, brings together theatrical and colonial history through an array of methodologies from emerging and established scholars based in Martinique, Guadeloupe, the United States, Scotland, Sweden, and continental France. Their impressive range of contributions interweaves diverse viewpoints on the presence and influence of theatrical spectacle in and/or about the Atlantic World. In their introduction, Leichman and Bénac-Giroux rightfully describe this collection as initiating "critical dialogues between eighteenth-century studies, performance, music, history, sociology and dramatic literature" (p.17). These dynamic fields of inquiry are reflected in essays that will be of interest to scholars in archival studies, contemporary pedagogies, and other new research areas.

Leichman and Bénac-Giroux's introduction states from the outset that the volume is one that addresses "entwined eighteen-century legacies of Enlightenment and slavery" which "remain unresolved even within the Fifth Republic" (p. 4). Rather than confine themselves to a single century, the co-editors state that "the choice to address these questions through the lens of theatre and performance allows the essays in this volume to explore how French Atlantic colonies were represented on stages in Europe and the Caribbean, as well as how contemporary performance practice in the Antilles continues to wrestle with this still-present eighteenth-century legacy" (p. 4). This innovative perspective is reflected both in the bibliography, which includes both modern and pre-1800 sources, and in the diachronic structure, which reveals how language has developed and evolved through time.

The volume is organized in three sections where questions of time and space are foregrounded, and where subsequent writers offer astute analyses of the socio-cultural, legal, and political context of continental France and its former colonies as it relates to theatre and slavery. Part one, "Performance cultures of Saint-Domingue," focuses on the colonial era and particularly on the presence of theatrical spectacles in the region of "the Pearl of the Antilles," known today as Haiti. In "The military-theatrical event in French Saint-Domingue," Logan J. Connors combines theory and history to explore how the military in Saint-Domingue shaped colonial theatres,

particularly in Cap Français, as well as the society's various responses to this strong military presence. With "The familiar other: blackface performance in Creole works from 1780s Saint-Domingue," Julia Prest examines the tradition of blackface performance in four locally composed works set in the colony of Saint-Domingue and astutely goes against the understanding of the practice in contemporary European works by demonstrating that alterity is "something *familiar*" in the former French colony (p.209). In "From the abbé Raynal to César Ribié: *L'Héroïne américaine on the stages of Saint-Domingue* (1787-1788)," Béatrice Ferrier analyzes the transformation of an anecdote from abbé Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* into pantomime and considers its significance in the Caribbean and Paris. In "*Jeannot et Thérèse* (Clément, Cap-Français, 1758): a question of Creole identity," Bernard Camier reflects on the meanings of French identity by teasing out a process of creolization for the population of European descent through a linguistic and musicological study of *Jeannot et Thérèse.* By focusing his study on ethnographic and legal texts, Sean Anderson delves into the construction of discourses of criminality and subversion around *calenda* by colonists, in "They 'rolled their eyes, swayed their heads': criminality, trance and embedded politics in the *calenda* performances of colonial Saint-Domingue." The article's strength lays in its excavation of the viewpoints of enslaved people on that same topic. The last essay, by Laurence Marie, "Writing about theatre in Saint-Domingue (1766-1791): a public voice on a public space?" investigates the *Affiches américaines*' advertisements and rhetoric, showcasing its possible link between colonial theatre and the Haitian Revolution, as well as its use by its editor, Charles Mozard, to try and cultivate a united community.

Part two, "Antillean slaves on European stages," focuses on the ways in which continental theatres were influenced by the representation of slavery in the eighteenth-century French Caribbean colonies. Catherine Ramond opens this section with "Slavery and the colonies on the French stage in the eighteenth century: the emergence of a critical gaze." Ramond's critical close reading of several plays demonstrates how slaves on stage were far removed from the contemporary reality of colonialism and mostly related to orientalism and *turqueries.* Jeffrey M. Leichman subsequently offers an insightful linguistic analysis of several plays in "On the gratitude of slaves in the theatre of the Revolution." Leichman explores the violence of what he calls "the impossible grammar of gratitude" and its significance for enslaved people, colonists, and contemporary Parisian audiences (p. 209). In "Finishing off the Revolution: *La liberté Générale* of Citoyen B.," Pierre Saint-Amand underscores the political dimension of his literary reading of François Marie Bottu's play where the denunciation of the system of slavery, among other important themes, plays a central role. Fredrik Thomasson immerses readers in Stockholm Swedish-language theatre from 1774 to 1816 with his preliminary study of plays set in the Atlantic world and the Ottoman empire in "Moors in the Caribbean, Sámi in the seraglio: Swedish theatre and slavery around 1800." Finally, Pascale Pellerin shows the implicit presence of the West Indian colonies in texts written by Louis Jean Népomucène Lemercier during the Egypt expedition and analyzes how these texts contribute more broadly to the question of Atlantic colonialism in "The image of slavery in the theatre during the Egypt expedition."

The third and final part of the volume, "Reperforming Caribbean histories," focuses on the contemporary French Antillean stage to highlight current "artistic practices and historiographic discourses" tied to colonial society of the eighteenth century (p. 8). Laurent Dubois and Kaiama L. Glover, in "Staging revolution: Jean Fouchard, Marie Vieux-Chauvet and writing the theatre

of eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue," offer a perceptive comparative analysis of Fouchard's historical account, *Le Théâtre à Saint-Domingue* (1954), and Chauvet's fiction, *Danse sur le volcan* (1957), which touches on issues of race, gender, and politics in the French Caribbean colonial theatre and culture, with particular attention to the mixed-race performer Minette. In "LénaBlou and Gilbert Laumord: reactivating history through contemporary Caribbean performance," Emily Sahakian considers choreographer-dancer LénaBlou and director-actor Gilbert Laumord's performance practices and pedagogies as an embodied history that reflects their enslaved ancestors embodied subjectivities in the present and future. In the next article, "Can one fully grasp history? Some reflections on *Histoires de valets*, a play performed on 31 May 2017, in Fort-de-France," Karine Bénac-Giroux examines the rewriting of Louis de Boissy's *La Surprise de la haine* into a university play performed by five actors-dancers-musicians. The author proposes a progressive pedagogy referred to as a "work of action-research-creation" developed by both students and the professor-stage director. This approach enables practitioners not only to tackle racial and gender discrimination and to question Boissy's supposed feminism, but also to enter into dialogue with Edouard Glissant's theory of history (p. 356). In the volume's last essay, "The experience of gender performativity in the staging of Daniely Francisque's *Ladjablès*," Nadia Chonville adopts a socio-historical perspective to examine the Martinican author-director's feminist and decolonial play while underlining its shortcomings.

Most articles in the collection are accompanied by figures, appendixes, inventories, and repertoires. The volume includes a significant and compelling visual dimension through its engravings, tableaux, portraits, staging designs, archival images, plays, and posters. The cover illustration of the volume itself shows the "Plan de la ville du Cap Français et de ses environs dans l'isle de Saint-Domingue," where one can easily identify the *Salle de Spectacle*, which echoes by the same token the importance given by Jeffrey M. Leichman and Karine Bénac-Giroux to the notions of space, time, and theatrical performances. Furthermore, the necessary critical and dynamic aspects of theatrical expression [1] are present in these "studies of early modern theatre, music and dance with transhistorical perspectives on the complex legacy of French colonisation in the Antilles," which appear to be more than merely academic studies (p. 1). These perspectives provide their scholarly readers with the opportunity to think beyond the page and potentially implement some of the proposed pedagogies inside their own classrooms to help students take ownership of their learning.

With its acute focus on theatre and slavery in the eighteenth century, *Colonialism and Slavery in Performance* is an essential contribution to the field of French Caribbean studies. In addition to citing, critiquing, correcting, and updating Jean Fouchard's foundational works on Saint-Domingue's socio-cultural, literary, and artistic scene, Leichman and Bénac-Giroux fill a gap by establishing a dialogue with earlier works published on the staging and/or representation of slavery in British and United-States theatre, thus placing their study in an international context. Although some topics could not be studied at length due to the methodological choices the co-editors made, the book remains an excellent entry point into theatrical spectacles in and/or about the Atlantic World. Julia Prest's recent publication, *Public Theatre and the Enslaved People of Colonial Saint-Domingue* (2023),[2] contributes to this expanding field which still has a great deal to offer.

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NOTES

[1] Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris : Gallimard, 1997).

[2] Julia Prest, *Public Theatre and the Enslaved People of Colonial Saint-Domingue* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

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ISSN 1553-9172