

Michèle Sarde. *Histoire d'Eurydice pendant la remontée*. Paris. Seuil. 1991. 336 pages. 120 F.

In a change of pace from her previous critical and sociological works, Michèle Sarde has written an important novel that raises questions about betrayal and responsibility and emphasizes the constant presence of memory. Moreover, to help her two middle-aged protagonists Sophie and Eric confront and assume their past, she reweaves the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus in a very innovative manner. The action takes place in 1979 and lasts only three days, but through a series of flashbacks and conversations, as well as authorial commentaries, Sophie's and Eric's entire lives are the subject of the novel.

Not the very Catholic bleached blonde, Aryan-looking Sophie Lambert, Sophie is actually Sarah Solal ("la fille des cendres"), the dark-haired youngest child of a deported and exterminated Jewish family. Her surprised reaction has been to hide her origins, as she undergoes a terrible identity crisis, torn between safe Catholics and scapegoated Jews in their striped garments, and she continues to suffer from the perfidy of alone having survived her fate. Eric's father, a collaborator and informer, had displayed utter cowardice when executed by the Resistance. To try to rehabilitate his father's final conduct, Eric has sought to act well, by joining first a band of nationalists and then the terrorist Organisation Armée Secrète.

The two young people met during a revivalist pilgrimage in Chartres and quickly fell in love. Given her despair and his virulent anti-Semitism, however, it was natural that they would soon part. For twenty years thereafter he has been looking for her to ask the reasons for the breakup and her subsequent disappearance. Upon finding her in Paris (appropriately, on the rue de l'Ancienne Comédie), he takes her to Rome, where they visit the sights, including the Jewish ghetto. As they wend their way through the Eternal City, slowly, painfully, she tells him everything, in spite of his increasing reluctance and anger: on 8 June 1959 he had said, "Mais à Auschwitz, on n'a exterminé que des poux!" Now forced to see her and not an idealized representation of womanhood, Eric runs away and, ironically, is possibly killed during a feminist march, while Sarah/Sophie comes out of her hell (this part is titled "La remontée"). Whereas Eric wanted to die in order to gain immortality, Sophie wants to live for all her dead, and courageously and with open eyes she will take the train back to Paris, under the watchful eye perhaps of one of her Sephardic ancestors.

Well written and highly nuanced, *Histoire d'Eurydice pendant la remontée* is the moving drama not only of a Jewish survivor barely able until the end to cope with her guilt (*histoire* as "story") but also of the Holocaust that befell the Jewish people (*histoire* as "history"). Michèle Sarde draws on symbols and images from antiquity and the Occupation years to analyze with empathy and understanding her characters and the upper-class, well-thinking milieu in which they lived.

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