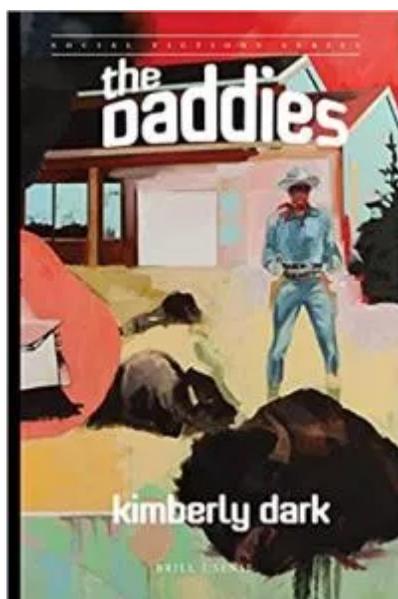


Out in Print: Queer Book

Reviews

JUNE 3, 2019 · 9:05 AM

The Daddies (Social Fiction Series 28) – Kimberly Dark (Brill)



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Who's your Daddy?

According to Wikipedia, the question dates to 1681, when sex workers would ask it of each other to determine who their procurers were. After three centuries, the same question finally entered the cultural mainstream: about twenty years ago, it became simultaneously a question, a challenge, a flirtation, a joke, an insult or a threat; as with any question, inflection and context determine the exact meaning. Seven years ago, it even inspired the title of a serious literary book: *Who's Yer Daddy?: Gay Writers Celebrate their Mentors and Forerunners*, edited by Jim Elledge and David Groff. More recently, Kimberly Dark has used it as the inspiration for her novel *The Daddies*. Although it is not a novel in the traditional sense: Dark, a performer and scholar as well as a writer, blurs the distinction between fiction and memoir by including news clips (written and spoken) and excerpts of scholarly articles with her personal narrative to create a biomythography, a term she borrows from Audre Lorde. Writing with academic precision (how many novels have you read where each chapter has been peer-reviewed?) and unflinching honesty, Dark shines the light of truth into dark corners that rarely encounter it, especially in academe: incest, human trafficking, and the power dynamics inherent in BDSM relationships.

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narrator's life, and she begins to see how patriarchy has influenced her decisions and relationships (even as a lesbian). Both narrators show how patriarchy infiltrates one's emotional and erotic lives, beginning with how we relate to our parents, and continuing to influence how we interact with our friends and lovers. Moreover, these relationship "scripts" teach us what to expect from and how to react to our leaders, popular culture figures, even our deities, most (if not all) of whom are male.

Dark further acknowledges Lorde's influence when citing her best known quote: "The master's tool will never demolish/dismantle the master's house." In other words, the underpinnings of the patriarchy cannot be used to end the patriarchy: what the patriarchy consumes only fuels it further. In Dark's own words, "*The Daddies* is an indictment of patriarchy and also a love letter to masculinity." So while there is much to be said against patriarchy, Dark clearly loves Daddy, and wants him to—in a word—grow up: "the Daddies must eat the solid food of self-awareness." Dark's progression of understanding of the patriarchy and how it permeates her own life leads her to stop reacting to it, and to demand that the Daddies change. But Dark is only cautiously optimistic that the Daddies can change: "The Daddies are suffering too. And they love us. That's why they *may* choose to change (emphasis mine)." As Dark rightly notes, changing herself is not enough to end the patriarchy: the Daddies also need to change, but they have to do that work on their own, without the help of mothers, wives, daughters, or lovers.

Reviewed by Keith John Glaeske

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