

Harkness on Nesci and Bara, eds. (2014)

Nesci, Catherine, and Olivier Bara, eds. *Écriture, performance et théâtralité dans l'œuvre de George Sand*. Grenoble: ELLUG, 2014. Pp. 526. ISBN: 9782843102691

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Recent Sand scholarship has engaged with the concepts of performance (particularly with respect to gender) and theatricality (notably by way of studies of masks and disguises, illusion and artifice, and representations of the artist), and has also begun to address the neglected area of Sand's writing for the theater. This timely volume is, nonetheless, the first to consider Sand's engagement with the theatrical throughout her writing career, and to bring together work on Sand's novels and plays. In their excellent introduction, Olivier Bara and Catherine Nesci address a wide range of issues relating to the "performative turn" in late twentieth-century work in the fields of drama, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, and gender studies. The editors insist, however, that their aim in this volume is not to superimpose (post-)modern concepts anachronistically onto the nineteenth-century aesthetic, political, and social context in which Sand was writing, and the twenty-six articles which follow do indeed strike an appropriate balance between the theoretical and the historical.

The volume is organized into five parts which examine the principal modes of performance and theatricality in Sand's work. The first, "La théâtralisation des écritures," explores exchanges between theater and the novel in relation to dialogue, narrative voice, dramatic space, and the influence of Shakespeare and Diderot, and situates Sand's engagement with the theatrical against her contemporaries, Balzac and Stendhal. Part two, "Performance et être social," examines performances of the self in relation to Sand as author, by way of representations of her hermaphroditism, and her correspondence with Flaubert, and also engages with the complexities of performance in three novels where it is either an enabling mechanism (Lélia's dramatization of her body, the performance of sincerity in *Isidora*) or something to be rejected (as in the conclusion of *Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*). Part three, "Pratiques théâtrales: la théâtralité en acte," examines Sand's theatrical practice, including her development as a dramatic writer, her engagement with the genres of the "comédie-proverbe" and the "opéra-comique," her focus on improvisation as a key element of the actor's art, and her difficult relationships with Parisian theaters. Part four, "Performances en abyme: les romans de l'artiste," reflects on Sand's representation of the artist figure and of lyric and dramatic performances in her novels, the influence of Staël and Hoffmann, and the musicality of her writing. Finally, part five, "Théâtres de l'Histoire," traces the function of the theatrical in Sand's representation of major political and social events as a means of engaging her readers and creating a space for reflection and debate about the relationship between the individual and the collective. Thus in *Horace*, Paris is transformed into a stage, and in *Nanon*, performances are linked to explorations of the concepts of the nation and fraternity. The section concludes by shifting the focus towards literary history, with a reflection on how Sand's public performance of authorship affected the representation of female writers more generally.

What emerges most strongly from the articles included in this volume is Sand's on-going dialogue with the theatrical from the very beginning of her writing career, long before she actually began to write her own plays. This volume's significance derives from its unveiling of the dramatic models underpinning Sand's work, and its multi-faceted examination of the political, social, and aesthetic resonance of the theatrical within the novels.

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