

Payne on Sand, trans. Blackmore, Blackmore, and Giguère (2003)

Sand, George. *Five Comedies*. Trans. E.H. and A.M. Blackmore, and Francine Giguère. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. Pp. 272. ISBN 0-7914-5712-5

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Fiction alone does not cover the full scope of George Sand's creative success. Sand wrote dozens of dramatic pieces, twenty-one of which were produced in Paris's major theatres like the Comédie Française, the Gymnase, and the Odéon. Moreover, Sand's theatre experience itself was diverse, as she actively engaged in myriad theatrical roles like directing, acting (in her own plays and other people's) designing stage sets, creating costumes, and setting particulars like lighting and scene changes. Translators E.H. and A.M. Blackmore and Francine Giguère have made an exceptional contribution to George Sand's English-speaking audience with their publication of George Sand's *Five Comedies* in which they credit Sand in their introduction with "a theatrical career without parallel either among [novelist-playwrights] or among playwriting women" (2).

Drawing largely on Sand's own letters, performance notes as well as Gay Manifold's influential publication *George Sand's Theatre Career* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985), the translators have chosen to include five comedies: *The Marquis de Villemer*, *Françoise*, *The Paving Stone*, *The Japanese Lily*, and *A Good Deed is Never Wasted*. The plays are organized chronologically according to dates of publication (as opposed to performance) with the exception of *The Marquis de Villemer* (1860) which inaugurates the edition as Sand's most successfully produced dramatic work. The translators have chosen to end the edition with Sand's penultimate dramatic work, the theatrical proverb, *A Good Deed is Never Wasted*, written and staged in 1872.

In their introduction, the translators explain that Sand's interest in drama began during her Parisian convent education between 1817 and 1820 where she "wrote and acted in plays based on her recollections of the Moliere comedies she had read" (2). After her education, Sand wrote drama with as much enthusiasm and craft as she did fiction, the translators contend. Evidence of this may be found in her first independent play, *Une Conspiration en 1537 (A Conspiracy in 1537)*, written in June 1831, which precedes *Indiana*, her first independently published novel. The translators also view Sand as a major influence on poet and French dramatist Alfred de Musset, whose 1834 drama *Lorenzaccio* made use of passages from Sand's *Une Conspiration en 1537*. At her provincial home of Nohant, Sand actively produced live theatre until 1863; "the puppet theatre was still operating less than a month before her death in 1876" (3). In addition to providing production history of Sand's dramatic works, the introduction argues that Sand was "inherently, and temperamentally, as much a dramatist as a novelist" and that her seemingly greater propensity toward novels may be attributed to a culture that preferred novels to dramatic works (5).

Like Sand's novels, the five comedies explore themes such as money and class, love and deception, desire and social mores, and the tension between Paris and the provinces. In *The Marquis de Villemer* (1864), for example, the Marquise de Villemer concocts a stratagem leading to the introduction of a beautiful and wealthy heiress for her youngest son, Urbain, against the social convention which privileged the first son. To the Marquise, however, her oldest son is unmarriageable because he consorts with prostitutes and gambles, two character flaws that delimit favorable matches (above all, favorable for the family's social class). In this drama, aristocratic conventions collide with sentimental considerations as both sons become infatuated with unlikely women. Adapted from Sand's 1860 novel of the same name, *The Marquis de Villemer* was originally performed at the Odéon theatre by a cast that included Charles-Emmanuel Ribes as Urbain, Francis Berton as the Duke and Edmée Ramelli as the Marquise.

Another dramatic success included in this edition, *Françoise*, was first performed at the Gymnase-Dramatique in 1856 with a notable cast including Rose Chéri as Françoise. *The Paving Stone* is the only example in the collection that was first performed at Nohant in 1861, and later revised for professional performance at the Gymnase-Dramatique in 1862. *The Japanese Lily* originated for the Vaudeville stage in 1866, and the proverb drama, *A Good Deed is Never Wasted*, was staged at the Théâtre de Cluny in 1872.

In addition to the introduction and the five comedies, this translation includes a helpful chronology of Sand's theatrical publications and performances. Of considerable use for students, scholars, and English-speaking readers of Sand as well as those generally interested in dramatic history, this edition offers outstanding and entertaining samples of Sand's dramatic works from four act plays to the "story in dialogue." The edition expands Sand's English-speaking canon, adding an integral dimension to an already prominent nineteenth-century author.

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