

# Nineteenth-Century French Studies

A scholarly journal devoted to the study of French literature and related fields

For articles: [ncfsarticles@gmail.com](mailto:ncfsarticles@gmail.com)

For reviews: [ncfsreviews@gmail.com](mailto:ncfsreviews@gmail.com)

[www.ncfs-journal.org](http://www.ncfs-journal.org)

Bara, Olivier and Christine Planté, eds. *George Sand critique: Une autorité paradoxale*. Le dix-neuvième siècle en représentation(s). Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'université de Saint-Étienne, 2011. Pp. 260. ISBN: 9782862725796

Rachel Corke, Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York

Author of some ninety novels, plays, dialogues, autobiographical writings, and correspondence, George Sand was also a prolific writer of literary criticism. *George Sand critique. Une autorité paradoxale* is a rich volume of sixteen essays that examine some of Sand's most notable critical texts. The preface by Olivier Bara and Christine Planté highlights the stakes of studying Sand's literary criticism: (1) Sand is not an object, but rather a producer, of critical discourse; (2) Sand's literary criticism elucidates a coherent Sandian vision of literature that is nonetheless not a systematic theory; (3) Sand's literary criticism collapses binary distinctions between literary and journalistic criticism and consequently demands that we complicate any simple definition of nineteenth-century *critique*; (4) Sand's literary criticism reveals her connectedness and her weight in the literary world of her time, her "autorité paradoxale."

While the heterogeneity of Planté's and Bara's collection mirrors the heterogeneity of Sand's works of criticism, there are two important lines of inquiry in the collection. The first sheds light on the form and style of Sand's criticism. Articles by Éric Bordas, Brigitte Diaz, Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, and Anna Szabó examine the poetics of Sand's critical rhetoric: from the journalistic to the dialogued and epistolary. They take stock of *what* Sand wrote about literature, but more interestingly they show *how* she wrote about literature. Éric Bordas frames Sand's literary criticism in the rhetorical tradition of the defense, while Anna Szabó situates Sand's prefaces in the (often fraught) relationships forged among journalism, criticism, and art. Brigitte Diaz studies Sand's tendency to address her criticism to a *destinataire* and brilliantly situates the letter at the heart of Sand's criticism, while Vincent-Munnia relates this "dialogue" with a *destinataire* to the rhetoric of the philosophical dialogue.

The other line of inquiry uses Sand's literary criticism to construct a Sandian literary history and examines who and what Sand includes in this canon, and who and what she excludes: from proletariat poets (see Vincent-Munnia) to women writers (see Damien Zanone), to early American writers (see Marie-Claude Schapira) to forms, such as the *drame fantastique* (see Jean Lacoste and Merete Stirstrup Jensen) and the novel (see Claire Barel-Moisan). For Lacoste, the *drame fantastique* is a romantic genre *par excellence* in this Sandian literary history. And yet, it is unstable, in a dialectic relationship with realism and with the novel. Sand's criticism of the "drame," argues Olivier Bara, reveals a Sandian interest in blurring generic lines. Barel-Moisan traces a Sandian history and poetics of the novel that is above all inclusive and values formal diversity.

Several authors examine specific moments of Sand's critical production. The historical perspective in these essays is less concerned with a Sandian vision of literary history, but rather with situating and historicizing Sand's criticism within a frame of nineteenth-century polemics and politics. José-Luis Diaz reads the young Sand as a *critique engagé* (in her criticism from 1833-41). Both Claudine Grossir and Pierre Laforgue look at the prolific year of 1845 when Sand's criticism, though focused on the individual character (Hamlet or Werther, for example), broke with certain Romantic notions of genius. Christine Planté looks at 1863 as a watershed year; Sand's *Mademoiselle la Quintinie* participates in religious debate that goes hand in hand with a Sandian political voice emerging in her writings on Rousseau, the only writer to whom Sand devoted several critical texts.

As we are told in the collection's first essay by Marie-Ève Thérénty, Sand's literary history is founded on filiation, and no literary ancestor is more important to George Sand than Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Éric Bordas reads Sand's rhetoric of defense in line with her Rousseauistic inheritance. Rousseau, notes Thérénty, is the first example of a writer of the *peuple*, and his voice permeates Sand's criticism. He is, according to Planté, *partout*.

It is, then, perhaps unfair to divide, as I have done, these essays into two lines of inquiry: one that concentrates on Sand's analysis of form, one on her construction of literary history. Sand's poetics of citation (as studied by Thérénty) and her manipulation of forms and of genres are part and parcel of her construction of and participation in literary history.

*George Sand critique: Une autorité paradoxale* is invaluable to the scholar seeking to navigate Sand's intimidating corpus of literary criticism, edited in Planté's monumental collection: *George Sand critique 1833-1876. Textes de George Sand sur la littérature* (2007). It is not only remarkably useful, but also coherent and insightful in sketching Sand's literary history (from Rousseau to Goethe to realism) and Sand's presence *in* literary history.