

Online Reviews

Planté, Christine. *George Sand. Fils de Jean-Jacques*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2012. Pp. 260. ISBN 978-2-72970-853-5

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Christine Planté's *George Sand: Fils de Jean-Jacques*, fittingly published in 2012, the tricentennial year of Rousseau's birth, offers readers a chance to experience George Sand's *Mémoires de Jean Paille*, an unfinished manuscript which has remained unpublished until now. For this 1863 project, Sand originally told Sainte-Beuve about her idea of following "un prétendu fils de Jean-J. Rousseau, perdu à l'hospice et perdu dans la foule, ignorant, cherchant, pressentant et ne retrouvant pas son père, ayant ses idées, ses défauts, ses croyances, son génie" (*Correspondance* XVII: 671). This initial idea was then transformed into the plan for a novel where Jean Paille, a grandson of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, lives through the revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848 and the elections of 1863. The project that had so enthused Sand stops, however, at 107 folio pages in mid-sentence, leaving us wondering why Sand so suddenly abandoned her novel. Planté's edition provides us with elements to understand this enigmatic text by compiling background information detailing the genesis of this text and situating it within Sand's philosophical, political, social, and literary preoccupations.

The title of Planté's edition, *George Sand: Fils de Jean-Jacques*, captures the approach of her examination of Sand's manuscript and the goal of her publication. "Fils de Jean-Jacques" refers to Sand's eponymous hero while also drawing attention to the notion of filiation and Planté's aim in exploring the question of Rousseau's heritage. The interest of Sand's unfinished text is precisely in the traces and clues it holds concerning her reflection on a writer whom she considers a spiritual father for both herself and the entire nineteenth century. To this effect, Planté, in her edition, assembles texts which draw attention to the conflicting thoughts Sand may have experienced in reflecting on the notion of filiation in regards to both Rousseau the man and his intellectual legacy.

At first glance, Sand's manuscript appears far from her initial plan of a "nouveau roman sur la république," as recorded under a June 5, 1863 entry in the *Agendas* detailing Sand's daily schedule from 1852 onwards. The fragment we have comprises three main sequences. The first stages Jean Paille in 1830 at age sixty-six, recounting his one encounter at age fourteen with Rousseau in the garden of Ermenonville, shortly before Rousseau's death. The young peasant boy recounts his discussion with the philosopher about the ideals of garden design and how this experience awakens him to new ways of perceiving and understanding art and artifice, nature, truth, and society. The next section discusses the family of Jean Paille and presents other important characters. It also stages a discussion about Rousseau and announces the news of Rousseau's suicide. The final sequence expresses the experience of Jean Paille's friend and mentor who had observed Rousseau meditating beside a lake very likely the night before the philosopher's rumored suicide. Planté's detailed notes situating the text in relation to Sand's other writings help us better contextualize the author's unfinished manuscript and see how the themes and discussions presented relate to her initial plan for a political and philosophical novel exploring Rousseau's legacy.

George Sand: Fils de Jean-Jacques has three main sections preceded by a detailed "Avant-propos." The first presents *Mémoires de Jean Paille*, along with a detailed introduction where Planté discusses its genesis and points out works where Sand may have incorporated elements from her

abandoned manuscript. Planté also reproduces a chapter from Adolphe Joanne's 1856 guide, *Les Environs de Paris illustrés: Itinéraire descriptif et historique* which she identifies as a likely source for Sand's text. The second section gives the text of Sand's 1863 article "À propos des Charmettes," published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on November 15, 1863. This text concurrent to the writing of the *Mémoires de Jean Paille* foregrounds the author's difficulty in resolving the moral dilemma posed by Rousseau's abandonment of his own children and rumors of the philosopher's suicide in 1778. Planté's edition concludes with two annexes. The first reproduces Sand's, "Quelques réflexions sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau," an article in the form of a letter published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on June 1, 1841, along with an introduction regarding this work. The second annex presents several passages from Sand's *Histoire de ma vie* with notes regarding Rousseau's influence on the author's autobiographical work. These texts shed light on the masterful questioning and manipulation to which Sand subjects his intellectual and spiritual heritage.

One might consider giving other examples aside from the ones Planté offers to explain Rousseau's presence throughout the Sand corpus, propose alternative interpretations in explaining Rousseau's influence at different periods of Sand's literary career, or question the prominence she gives to certain of Sand's works as opposed to others. These reservations are more a question of taste and opinion than an actual criticism of Christine Planté's very solid, well-documented edition. *Mémoires de Jean Paille* thus provides scholars of Sand, Rousseau, and the broader nineteenth century a window through which to examine Rousseau's legacy to the Romantic generation and beyond.