

George Sand Session at the MLA Convention, Boston Jan 3-6, 2013

Séance George Sand au Congrès de l'Association Modern Languages, Boston, Jan. 3-6, 2013

GSA Session : « Sensuous Sand / Sensualités sandiennes »

Organiser/Organisatrice: Aimée Boutin, Florida State U, aboutin@fsu.edu

Session Chair/Présidente de session: Arline Cravens, Saint Louis University, acravens@slu.edu

Three speakers will address a range of topics from figurations of feminine sensuality and sexuality, to Sand's appeal to all five senses in her writing. How does Sand represent female sensuality/sexuality in her treatment of the courtesan? Does Sand embrace sensual experience or is she wary of the illusions the senses seek to create? How does Sand figure the relations between the five senses in her writing; are some senses more privileged as compared to others? How does Sand's approach to the senses evolve over the span of her writing career? To what extent do the aesthetics and ethics of Sand's sensualities differ from those of her contemporaries?

Cette séance se propose d'examiner la sensualité dans l'œuvre de George Sand (romans, théâtre, essais, correspondance), des figurations de la sexualité et de la sensualité féminines à la mise en œuvre des cinq sens dans l'écriture. Comment Sand représente-t-elle la sensualité et la sexualité de la courtisane ? Son écriture embrasse-t-elle l'expérience sensorielle ou se garde-t-elle des illusions que peuvent susciter les sens ? Comment Sand figure-t-elle les relations entre les cinq sens ? Certains sens sont-ils davantage privilégiés que d'autres ? Son approche de l'expérience sensorielle change-t-elle pendant sa carrière ? Dans quelle mesure le traitement esthétique et la portée éthique de la sensualité chez Sand se distinguent-ils de ceux de ses contemporains ?

1. Elizabeth Erbezniak, Northern Illinois University, "Suicide and the Sensual Self in George Sand's *Indiana* and *Horace*"

Repeatedly staging reappearances of the dead, George Sand's *Indiana* (1832) and *Horace* (1841-42) both challenge the finality of suicide and notably disrupt expectations of narrative closure. While critics, such as Nancy Miller and Margaret Higonnet, have viewed the death pact at the end of *Indiana* as a gendered rewriting of traditional narratives of female suicide, the "resurrection" of Marthe, the *grisette* thought to have thrown herself into the Seine, in *Horace* is a greater upset to male authorship as it challenges the dandy Horace's successful literary formula of transforming the dead *grisette* into marketable goods. Sand's depictions of suicide thus constitute a rewriting on multiple levels: they are a reaction against generalized narratives of female helplessness and, as this paper argues, they also create space in the plots for revisions of gendered sensualities to occur.

Looking at the suicidal couples in these two novels – *Indiana*'s Ralph and Indiana and *Horace*'s Marthe and Paul Arsène – I consider how suicide figures as both a death and rebirth of sensual selves. Before their figurative deaths, Indiana and Marthe are controlled by their senses. Victims of their impulsive feelings, they are easily led astray by seductive men whose outpourings of emotion mask a lack of sincere affection. Their rebirth as balanced women relies, however, on the simultaneous rebirth of the heretofore "unfeeling" men who love them. With their attempts to die,

in other words, Ralph and Paul are reborn as new sensuous beings who are at last capable of giving voice to their impassioned feelings. This paper therefore looks at suicide in these two novels as a cathartic break in the normative distribution of feeling that restores unbalanced, gendered sensualities. Outlining the progress of this sensual equilibrium in both novels, I will be particularly attentive to how feelings evolve differently between the well-born, romanticized couple in *Indiana* and the modern, urban, working-class couple in *Horace*.

2. Claire White, Peterhouse, University of Cambridge, “Towards a Sensuous Consciousness: Sand’s Worker-Artist”

This paper reads Sand’s labour novel, *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), alongside Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (written during his formative stay in Paris). It will be argued that Sand and Marx elaborate in these works, albeit in conspicuously different ways, a vision of working-class freedom that depends, in both cases, on the development of the worker’s sensuous, and aesthetic, consciousness. For Marx, of course, future communist society would bring about, through the transcendence of private property, the ‘complete emancipation of all human senses and attributes’. Where capitalism establishes a struggle for material survival, which reduces the subject to a creature of what Marx calls ‘abstract need’, the goal of communism is to restore to the alienated body the full use of its senses, to awaken a ‘sensuous consciousness’. What Sand, in turn, this paper will argue, places at the heart of her vision of working-class emancipation in *Le Compagnon* is precisely a new sensual awareness, or what she terms a ‘sens du beau’ (here, not simply a matter of discernment but of an experiential consciousness of beauty). As it is, Sand suggests, aesthetic enjoyment responds to a prevailing division of labor which runs along class lines; the cultivation of taste and intellectual pursuits amongst the leisured classes sits starkly alongside the time-poverty of the Sandian labourer (‘si je perds une heure par jour à sentir vivre mon cœur et ma pensée, le pain manquera à ma vieillesse’). However, that the novel’s central protagonist, the carpenter Pierre Huguenin, is endowed with both an intellectual curiosity and an artistic sensibility (or ‘bon goût’), which appear to exceed the possibilities of his laborious condition, gestures towards, I shall suggest, the sensual and aesthetic trajectory of Sand’s working-class vision.

As such, this paper revisits the question of what Naomi Schor has called Sand’s ‘politics of Idealism’, but, in doing so, it argues that there are more connecting lines to be drawn between (the ‘early’) Marx and Sand than Schor suggests. For if Marx was critical, even suspicious, of ‘idealist’ aesthetics, we should not overlook the importance of aesthetics to his own political ‘idealism’ in these early manuscripts. Like Marx, who looks to artistic creativity as a way of imagining the ‘aesthetic’ character of ‘unalienated’ labor under communism, Sand’s novel contains a vision of the worker-artist whose artisanship combines utility with beauty, and in some sense dissolves those reified categories of mental work and physical labor. Ultimately, for Sand, it is argued, the potential transformation of the working-class condition depends on the development of a sensuous consciousness in the worker and, not least, of a newly sensuous experience of labor.

3. Pascale Auraix-Jonchière, Université Blaise-Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, « Végétaux et sensualité dans l’œuvre de George Sand »

Féru de botanique, G. Sand fait du motif floral ou du discours sur les végétaux un élément récurrent, présent tout aussi bien dans les fictions romanesques (*André*, *Antonia*) que dans les contes (« Histoire du véritable Gribouille », « Ce que disent les fleurs ») ou encore les essais de forme épistolaire que sont les *Nouvelles lettres d’un voyageur* (« Le pays des anémones »).

Or ces passages correspondent, selon des modalités différentes, à une irruption des sens dans le texte. Nous voudrions analyser la forme que prennent ces efflorescences qui vont souvent de pair avec une poétisation de la prose, mais aussi en évaluer la portée éventuellement didactique (enseigner en mobilisant la sensualité) et éthique.

GSA Session: « *Histoires de leurs vies: Women Writers' Biographies after Sand.* »

Organiser/Organisatrice: Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, University of Texas, Austin
akw@mail.utexas.edu

1. Mary Rice-DeFosse, Bates College, mricedef@bates.edu “Reimagining the Muse’s Life: Louise Colet as Writer”

Louise Colet is a poet best known, not for her own extensive literary corpus, but for her place in the life of author Gustave Flaubert, who was her lover, at least intermittently, from 1846 until their definitive break in 1854. She figures not only in biographies of Flaubert, but in a large body of Flaubertian literary criticism as well. She is often vilified in these works, beginning with Maxime DuCamp’s *Souvenirs littéraires*; she has been characterized as “Madame Bovary, née Colet” (Auriant, 1936); the very title of *Les Véhémences de Madame Colet* (Gérard-Gailly, 1934) speaks for itself. Joseph Jackson, with his focus on literary circles in Colet’s day in *Louise Colet et ses amis littéraires* (1937), largely refrains from these kinds of attack, but hardly gives Colet her literary due. More recent biographies of Louise Colet, including those by Jean-Paul Clébert (1986), Micheline Bood and Serge Grand (1986), and most notably Francine du Plessix Gray (1994), which are informed by more feminist sensibilities and approaches, present more balanced accounts of Colet’s story. Still, the life reads much like a novel, and a melodramatic one at that: there is her child of uncertain paternity; the affaire des *Guêpes* followed by her attempt on Alphonse Karr’s life; there are tempestuous affairs not only with Flaubert, but with Musset and with a young Polish patriot. Colet’s own autofictional novel, *Lui*, pales in comparison.

Ironically enough, the author who gives us the most serious portrait of Colet as a writer and literary influence is perhaps Pierre-Marc de Biasi in *Gustave Flaubert: Une manière spéciale de vivre* (2009), his new biography of the great master. Biasi gives us a fresh account of Flaubert’s life by situating it in the space between lived experience and the finished work, focusing especially on Flaubert’s research notes, outlines, drafts and the *Correspondance*. What then, would a writerly biography of Louise Colet look like? This paper attempts to imagine such a biography, one that would use Colet’s lyric works, travel journals and other life writing, as well as her remaining correspondence and the critical acclaim she received in her own lifetime, in order to reposition the Muse, insisting on her place as poet and writer.

2. Evlyn Gould, University of Oregon, evgould@uoregon.edu : “The Comtesse de Loynes and the Problem of Operatic Biography”

In the tumultuous years of the Dreyfus Affair, women’s salons provided for meaningful encounters among artists, thinkers, and luminaries of the Third Republic. Celebrated in particular as settings for what Lucia Re has called a “daring structure of reversals,” the salons provided for a “democratic” sharing of opinions and a mixing of social classes, genders and religions (“The

Salon and Literary Modernism,” 123). For women, salons were often the only way to be recognized for their intelligence and worldly savvy. One of the principle salons of the Dreyfus period was that of the Comtesse de Loynes, née Jeanne de Tourbey, a courtesan turned woman of the world. Her salon, known as one of the principle literary salons of Paris, began in 1859. As of the 1880s, however, it became the main foyer for the development of a fundamentalist nationalism that would divide the French imaginary into rival enemies while desperately seeking to forge a stable French republic.

Arthur Meyer, one of very few Jewish nationalist anti-Dreyfusards who attended the Loynes salon penned a dramatic biography of the Comtesse de Loynes in 1912. Titled *Ce que je peux dire. La Dame aux violettes. Salons d’hier et d’aujourd’hui. La Comtesse de Loynes*, the multiplicity of titles for this biography captures the varied identities of the celebrated courtesan and the theatrical nature of her life. Beginning with a description of the courtesan entering the stage as Manon in the opera of the same name, this biography goes on to describe Jeanne as a bottle washer in a grotto, orphaned at age 12, who rose far above the “Cora Pearl, Anna Deslious, et autres Mogador” of her time (24). Recounting her life as an actress, trained by Saint-Beuve and then as an infamous mistress, her illegitimate birth is finally quieted as some of the most celebrated Dreyfusards of the times, Maupassant, the Goncourts, Barrès and especially Meyer come to enjoy her charms. This essay will undertake to discover the ways Meyer’s biography of the Comtesse de Loynes mimics the operatic thrills and chills of *Manon* in its telling of a life story. In so doing it will emphasize the very problematic tendency of women’s biographies to emerge as operatic tales.

3. **Laure Katsaros, Amherst College “The Poet’s Sister: The Legacy of Isabelle Rimbaud”**

In this paper, I would like to examine the difficulties inherent in the biographical project I am currently engaged in. I have been working on a cultural biography of the younger sister of Arthur Rimbaud, Isabelle Rimbaud. The sole witness of Rimbaud’s last days in the “Hôpital de la Charité” in Marseilles, a devoted nurse, friend, and companion, she claimed that Rimbaud had returned to Catholicism on his deathbed. Her testimony has been called into question by Rimbaud’s biographers in the light of her controversial work as Rimbaud’s literary executrix. Isabelle Rimbaud, who romanticized her dead brother to the point of canonization, used her legal right on his works and letters to try and control his posthumous image. Instead of staying in the background as the saintly sister, she took an active part in Rimbaud’s posthumous life, turning herself into one of his earliest biographers. By so doing, Isabelle Rimbaud created her own dark legend. From the Surrealists to the contemporary Rimbaud scholar Jean-Jacques Lefrère, many French Rimbaudians have reviled her as a prudish censor and a religious fanatic waging a Quixotic war against reality. As a rule, only female critics and biographers of Rimbaud, such as Marguerite-Yveta Méléra, have defended Isabelle Rimbaud and attempted to elucidate her motives.

My objective is not to engage in a moral debate about the angelic or demonic qualities of Isabelle Rimbaud. I want to show instead that there has been very little effort to view her in her cultural and historical context. This, I believe, comes from the fact that she does not easily fit into pre-established categories of social class and gender norms. When Rimbaud died, she was an unmarried, fervently religious woman in her thirties, with more experience in farm work than in literary studies. Her transgression was double: she defied a certain kind of male-identified French rationalism and conventional views of female subordination. On the one hand, she was accused of indulging in a stereotypically female mysticism; on the other hand, she was denounced for her boldness in challenging the male literary establishment.

For similarly ideological reasons, Isabelle Rimbaud has been largely ignored as a writer. In my biography, I wish to address this glaring omission, which, I believe, has offered critics another way to shunt her aside. Her writings have merely been read as eyewitness accounts instead of literary productions. I have had the opportunity to consult her unpublished manuscripts, which include a fictionalized version of her brother's rebellious years and a fascinating discussion of Madame Rimbaud's daily ledgers. Isabelle Rimbaud published wrenching accounts of Rimbaud's last days, an important essay on the *Illuminations*, and a richly detailed narrative of the German invasion of Northern France in the summer of 1914. The complex portrait of Isabelle Rimbaud that emerges from her writings does not match the one-dimensional caricature that generations of predominantly male biographers and scholars have perpetuated. By showing Isabelle Rimbaud's profound engagement with literature, I hope to rescue her from the biographers' hell to which she has been unfairly sentenced.

4. Rachel Mesch, Yeshiva University, mesch@yu.edu **“From George Sand's Soup to Colette's Carpet: The Woman Writer Feature Story in the Belle Epoque Women's Press”**

“Ce qu'on n'a pas assez dit, c'est que George Sand savait être adroite ménagère, faisait souvent des petits plats pour ses hôtes, excellait aux confitures et à la soupe aux choux,” wrote Marie d'Ourlac in a 1901 *Femina* article devoted to the celebrated authoress. The article ends with the obligatory recognition of Sand's artistic prowess as the reason for her assured immortality, but not before devoting the bulk of its text to her unparalleled skills as a homemaker, devoted mother (“elle avait elle-même coupé et cousu les layettes de ses bébés”) and grandmother.

Femina's eulogy to George Sand as domestic and literary heroine was part of the Belle Epoque women's press's broader efforts to decouple the woman writer from her tainted past, as they promoted the once denigrated *bas-bleu* as a veritable media icon. Amidst images of women achieving in all sorts of new ways, both *Femina* and its rival *La Vie Heureuse* celebrated women writers as the very model of modern femininity, in their balance of traditional values with new roles. In feature after feature, women writers were depicted as the image of bourgeois perfection, perfect wives and adoring mothers. This newly imagined woman writer was thus conceived not only in opposition to nineteenth-century misogynist views of female intellect, but also in opposition to the most prominent fin-de-siècle images of female emancipation.

My paper will demonstrate how the George Sand article included in one of the first issues of *Femina* became a model for the woman writer feature story of the Belle Epoque women's press. This new biographical genre exploited visual culture to the fullest to render the contemporary woman writer a new female role model, in part by recuperating the legacy of the seemingly misunderstood Sand, to whom, unfortunately, “on a fait un affreux grief de son costume d'homme.” Photograph after photograph (the Sand article contained no less than nine) depicted women authors and their lush domestic interiors, framed by the hyper-feminized pen and ink swirls of art nouveau. By considering features on the authoress-media darlings of *Femina* and *La Vie Heureuse*—including, possibly, Anna De Noailles, Marcelle Tinayre, Daniel Lesueur and Gérard d'Houville (as well as some unexpected references to Colette and her decorating choices), my paper will examine how image and text worked together to rewrite feminist history—“comme en marge des notices de dictionnaires,” in d'Ourlac's terms—consciously offering modern women readers new (and old) figures with whom to identify.

As for the contribution to Sand scholarship...how else would we know that “ses sauces étaient délicieuses”...?