

## George Sand and the Lure of the Heights: *Indiana* and *Jacques*

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Current scholarship on George Sand has managed to get beyond the exteriors of her biography and has reached into the complex and troubled inner world of her psyche.<sup>1</sup> There remains, however, a general tendency among the reading public, and even among some critics of nineteenth-century French literature, that most of her novels are easy to grasp, that they are more obvious than problematic, or in Roland Barthes' terminology, more *lisibles* than *scriptibles*. From *Indiana*, which protests loudly against any oppressive marriage bond to, say, *Mlle la Quintinie*, with its open anti-clericalism, the general opinion continues to be that, except perhaps for *Lélia* and *Consuelo* and its sequel, most of her fiction is easily assimilated.

Sand's supposedly obvious fictions are not all that obvious, and it has been easy for critics to miss some important insights. To illustrate, I would like to reexamine two of her earliest efforts. One, *Indiana* (1832), is well known; the other, *Jacques* (1834) is less so. I will approach these two works by focusing on a motif that has not attracted systematic attention: the flight from the corrupt lowlands and their so-called civilization up into the solitude and purity of the mountain heights.

The *topos* is hardly new, of course. Sand naturally shared in the universal tradition, one reemphasized by the entire Romantic generation, that "up there" one finds God, the sublime, and the pure, whereas "down here" life is compromise at best and often an outright mess. But Sand was also influenced by a personal experience. In 1825 she had visited the Pyrenees. Overwhelmed by the glorious spectacle, she wrote to a friend that she regretted having to come down from the snow-capped mountains, where she had climbed higher, she claimed, than any woman ever had before. As she retreated to the lowlands, she explained, she felt that she abandoned "un lieu enchanté, pour retrouver . . . toutes [les] tristes réalités de la vie".<sup>2</sup> Her intensity of feeling becomes clear when we consider what she wrote to her platonic lover, Aurélien de Sèze. Speaking of love, she described it as "un sentier dans la montagne; dangereux et pénible, mais qui mène à des hauteurs sublimes et qui domine toujours le monde plat et monotone ou végètent les hommes sans énergie. [...] Tu n'es pas destiné à ramper sur la boue de la réalité. Tu es fait pour créer ta réalité toi-même, dans un monde plus élevé," and she concluded that she was sure that he would become perfect "sans tâche"<sup>3</sup> (*sic*) as a result of rising to a higher plane. Once we understand Sand's association of the mountains with the potential for soaring love and for sublime human achievement, we are not surprised that in later years she continued to seek out the heights in a desire for purity, sublimity, and ideal love. In 1834, she was drawn to the foothills of the Italian Alps, and in 1838 moved up into the highlands of Majorca in the company of Chopin. If the values that she associated with mountainous regions were quite traditional, she nonetheless made them very much her own. To summarize: they were isolation from the sordid life of ordinary society, a concomitant feeling of superiority, the splendor of ideal love, and the purity of one's own being.

As we turn now to her early novels, we need not fear making the transition from biography

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most important works that initiated that trend is probably Isabelle Hoog Naginski's *George Sand: Writing for Her Life*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> George Sand. *Correspondance*. Vol. 1. (Paris: Garnier, 1964) 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Corr.*, Vol. 2, 625.

to fiction, all the more so as we know that Sand herself confessed that she worked the patterns of her imagination into her novels. As she wrote to Alfred Tattet, “je tâche de dépenser et de soulager mon cœur dans les fictions de mes roman”.<sup>4</sup> The first of these early fictions, the first signed with her now famous pseudonym, was *Indiana*. In essence, it tells the story of a young woman living in the Brie region of France, who flees a bad marriage and the corrupt and frivolous society of Paris, and after one false start with an unworthy man, followed by a near suicide, finds true love and lives out her life in happy isolation with the man she loves high up on a mountainside of the Île Bourbon in the Indian Ocean. This shift in locale from the lowlands of the Brie region to the heights of a tropical island reflects an inner journey on the heroine’s part. It is a metaphor that represents the effort of the feminine psyche to escape from the stagnation imposed by an oppressive patriarchal society, located “down here,” in the hope of growing “up there” to a state of greater wholeness and dynamism of personality.<sup>5</sup>

To help the reader understand the difficult situation in which the heroine finds herself at the beginning of the story, Sand takes us back to Indiana’s childhood. Although these years are not described in detail, we do learn one essential fact: she was brought up by “un père bizarre et violent” (*Indiana*, 88)<sup>6</sup> and had suffered cruelly at his hands. To survive, we are told, she had to develop a fierce will to resist — passively — all oppression, but by that irony of human existence that often makes abused girls, who marry to escape an ugly past, end up by marrying a wife-beater, Indiana married a much older, rigid, and somewhat brutal man, apparently much like her father. As a result, “elle ne fit que de changer de maître” (88).

While Indiana’s marriage to Colonel Delmare offers Sand the opportunity to castigate the institution of marriage as it was practiced in the first half of the nineteenth century, there is something deeper at work. Because the heroine’s father failed to provide a positive role model, and because her husband is a tyrant who has imprisoned his wife behind the bars of discriminatory social codes and thus blocked her personal growth, she will have difficulty in relating properly to the world of the masculine. Yet, this is precisely what she needs to do, and it is this effort that will organize the sequence of events that constitute the plot, framed by the shift in topography from low to high.

To understand what underlies this process, it is helpful to take advantage of the insights of the Jungian school of psychology, with its idea that each person has a contrasexual side to which one needs to relate if one is to achieve wholeness of being. This process can start because the psyche seems to sense any incompleteness and provokes a person into making contact with any part of one’s being that has remained unrecognized and undeveloped. In the case of one’s contrasexual side, it is usually encountered through the mechanism of projection out onto an appropriate, in Indiana’s case, male human being. This projection constitutes what is called “falling in love.” For the purpose of developing wholeness, however, one must come to realize that the contrasexual qualities in the other person that provided a “hook” which made the projection possible actually reflect one’s own inner attributes, and so sooner or later the projection needs to be withdrawn and those qualities better developed in and for oneself.

The male contrasexual element in a woman, the animus in Jungian terminology, has four different levels, ranging from the earthy to the spiritual. Marie-Louise von Franz, one of Jung’s

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<sup>4</sup> *Corr.* Vol. 2, 546-7.

<sup>5</sup> It is of course too naïve to think of Indiana, or any other character, as a “real person”, but we can postulate that Sand has concretized a human problem in a fictional character. Therefore, we proceed on that basis with the help of psychology.

<sup>6</sup> George Sand. *Indiana*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984. All further references will be taken from this edition, page numbers in parentheses.

closest disciples, explains, the first level “appears as a personification of mere physical power — for instance as an athletic champion. [...] In the next stage he possesses initiative and the capacity for planned action. In the third phase, the animus becomes ‘the word,’ often appearing as a professor,” or — my addition — an orator or politician. To return to von Franz: “In his fourth manifestation — on this highest level — he becomes a mediator of the religious experience whereby life acquires new meaning. He gives the woman spiritual firmness, an invisible inner support that compensates for outer softness. The animus in his most developed form sometimes connects the woman’s mind with the spiritual evolution of her age, and can thereby make her even more receptive than a man to new creative ideas.”<sup>7</sup>

Indiana’s inner masculine is much undeveloped at the beginning of the narrative. She is physically rather frail, quite inarticulate, and she never undertakes any action that is rationally planned. So when Raymon de Ramière bursts into her life, her psyche sees its opportunity, so to speak. The process of relating to the inner masculine through projection can now begin. Indiana immediately falls under Raymon’s spell, and in the light of von Franz’ observations, it is easy to see why. Raymon is handsome and physically active (stage 1), and he possesses initiative and the capacity for planned action, arranging to be alone with Indiana despite obstacles placed in his way (stage 2). He also possesses the power of the word. He is a persuasive talker and writer on the political scene of the Bourbon Restoration (stage 3). He is, apparently, the ideal man onto whom a woman like Indiana might project her animus.

However, the text makes it clear that even as a representative of the second and third stages Raymon is a poor choice. In the first edition of the novel, Sand explicitly equated Raymon with Parisian society (“c’est l’homme de la société o actuelle”<sup>8</sup>), and that society is status-conscious, pleasure-seeking, and completely lacking in moral fiber. So if Raymon possesses initiative, he uses this gift only for base motives, seducing the heroine’s maid and driving her to suicide, and even trying to seduce the heroine herself. As speaker and writer of the word, the best he can do is to champion the bankrupt policies of the Restoration in an eclectic sort of way in an unconscious effort to protect the privileged position of his own social class, the aristocracy. And of course Raymon is totally unworthy to receive the highest, spiritual stage of Indiana’s inner masculine. Eventually the heroine does see him for what he really is, and her animus projection is finally dissolved.

The man who does truly merit Indiana’s love is her cousin, Sir Ralph Brown. For most of the story he appears phlegmatic and inarticulate, his only merit being, as we learn later, that secretly in love with the heroine, he has been trying to protect her from her husband’s brutality, Raymon’s treachery, and her own naiveté. But by the end of the story he is transformed. Already handsome and physically strong, he reveals that he can act decisively, acquires the power of the word, and reaches heights of spiritual intensity. When Indiana senses unconsciously that for her he incarnates all four stages of the animus, she falls truly in love. The two cross the ocean in order to escape the disapproval of French society and climb up onto the heights of their tropical island, where they plan a spiritual marriage in death, firm in their religious faith and sure that they will be joyfully united in the hereafter.

They do not die, however, because Sand redid her ending, and so they continue to live, married before God although not before the Church, upon the mountainside, a topographical symbol of their spiritual elevation.

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<sup>7</sup> Carl Jung. “The Process of Individuation”. In *Man and His Symbols*. Ed. Marie-Louise von Franz. (New York: Doubleday, 1964) 194.

<sup>8</sup> Variant cited by Béatrice Didier in *Indiana*, n.4, (387).

There is a hint that thanks to her recent experiences and her new life, Indiana is starting to live on a fuller basis. The text alludes in passing to the fact that she is beginning to learn “ce que les préoccupations de sa vie l’ont empêchée de savoir” (337), and that she and Ralph use most of their money to buy the freedom of slaves, but there is no evidence given of Indiana’s new learning, and the text implies that she takes no direct role in the negotiations with the slave owners.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the main thrust of the narrative at this point suggests the exact opposite of change or growth. When the narrator visits the pair in their rustic retreat, Sir Ralph is clearly the dominant personality, and his principal role seems to be that of a father trying to shield his child from any unpleasant experiences — especially nasty gossip — on the part of outsiders. As for Indiana, she seems most content to let Sir Ralph take charge, while she remains a self-effacing and rather inarticulate figure in the background. Since the function of the animus, as Irene de Castillejo has explained, is to enable a woman to focus her consciousness so that she may then use her own feminine ego and thinking powers to tackle the concrete problems of life,<sup>10</sup> the fact that Indiana’s personality seems so passive and even dream-like by the novel’s end suggests that she has projected her animus so completely on Sir Ralph that she is unable to withdraw it, thus leaving her psyche diffused rather than focused, child-like rather than mature.

Why has Indiana not been able to make greater progress towards wholeness? Partly because Sir Ralph’s overprotectiveness fosters her continued dependency on him, letting him do what her own animus should be helping her to do, and also because of the very heights on which they live. Isolated from society’s evils, they are also separated from its life. Alone with Sir Ralph in the tropics where food is abundant and life easy, Indiana has no need to develop “capacity for planned action” or the power of the word. The flight to the hills may protect her from the calumny of gossipers, but it leads her and Ralph into a paradisaic stasis that impedes further growth on her part. The narrative thus closes on a troubling note of ambiguity.

*Jacques* explores a different problem, but it repeats some of the same motifs. The heroine, an inexperienced girl of seventeen, marries a thirty-five year old man, Jacques, who has been soured on the world after a stoically gallant career as an officer in Napoleon’s bloody campaigns and has been disappointed, more than once, in passionate love affairs. Attracted by the innocence of young Fernande, he wishes to try one last time to find happiness. He also hopes to remove Fernande from the influence of her mother, whose only values are based on money and the negative conventions of Parisian society. Sand makes sure that we get the point through the mother’s name: Madame de Luxeuil. *Luxe* — she loves luxury, and *euil* (œil) — she, like the society she stands for, keeps her eye on money and status.

So the pair marry and leave for the solitary uplands of the Dauphiné. There, far from the corruption of the city, all is well for awhile. The two do not remain alone, however. A ward of Jacques, one Sylvia, comes to live with them, and they are soon joined by a young man, Octave, who has come to court her. The situation quickly deteriorates. Fernande falls in love with Octave and he with her, and she eventually yields to her passion and becomes pregnant by her lover. At the end, Jacques, realizing that he is standing in the way of true young love, arranges his suicide so that it will appear an accident. In that way Fernande can live with Octave without being crippled by feelings of guilt. Jacques explains to Sylvia in a final letter: “ils ne sont pas

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<sup>9</sup> We refer the reader to Véronique Machelidon’s discussion of Indiana’s “invisibility” in “George Sand’s Praise of Creoleness: Race, Slavery and (In)Visibility in *Indiana*” for a more in-depth analysis of this aspect of Indiana. *George Sand Studies* 28, 2009: 27-45.

<sup>10</sup> Irene de Castillejo. *Knowing Woman: A Feminine Psychology*. (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974) 76-79.

coupables. ... Il n'y a pas de crime là où il y a de l'amour sincère."<sup>11</sup>

When the novel was first published, conservative critics were outraged. Sand was accused of undermining family values and preaching selfishness.<sup>12</sup> In the early twentieth century, Ernest Seillière deplored what he saw as Sand's thesis, that is, "le droit de la femme à remplacer aussitôt par un autre amour tout amour qui lui semble épuisé dans son âme."<sup>13</sup> René Doumic did have the sense to realize that the failure of the marriage lay more with the husband ("un pur niais")<sup>14</sup> than with the wife, but in his exasperation at Sand, he refused to explore the matter more deeply.

The view that *Jacques* preached replacing one lover with another when ardor had cooled was not entirely wrong. In fact, it had its origin in Sand's life, when in Venice Alfred de Musset had stepped aside for Dr. Pagello. Yet, the novel goes well beyond this obvious thesis. At its heart is Sand's concern for the relationships between men and women, which so often fail because of an inability or unwillingness to communicate. She had been unable to talk seriously with her husband, Casimir, and even with her platonic lover, Aurélien de Sèze, communication was clearly a problem. Aurélien tended to avoid sharing his deepest feelings and complained that Sand liked to analyze "notre nature" excessively. He, on the other hand, preferred to leave complex matters of personality to wiser heads, the "sages des siècles."<sup>15</sup>

In the novel the failure to establish communication comes about because Jacques refuses to let any human weakness in himself ever show. He represses all the suffering that he had undergone in the past (in war and in love) and hides any present disappointments behind a serene mask, believing that such stoicism can lead to an ideal marriage. He also expects others to do the same. The result is that Fernande is rebuffed for being childish when she pleads with her husband for more openness. She is so dominated and deceived by Jacques' quiet air of superiority who, she believes, is so perfect, even so angelic, that she can never rise to his sublime level. As a result, she suffers greatly from loneliness and a sense of inferiority, and is ready to find acceptance, warmth, and closeness elsewhere. Meanwhile, Sylvia, who shares most of Jacques' attitudes and values, rejects the rather impulsive and immature Octave, thus freeing him to fall in love with Fernande. The consequence of these shifting relationships is that if Octave and Fernande grow closer together, Jacques feels progressively more alone. Indeed, his behavior isolates him not only from others but also from his own nature. Underneath his sublime exterior, anger, even rage at the world and its impurity has been building up, and this repressed shadow side breaks out violently when he hears his wife's honor impugned by some army officers back in the lowlands. In a cold rage he duels with one man and kills him, disfigures another, and almost butchers a third, an inexperienced adolescent. Afterwards, shocked by his own ferocity, he feels that he had become another person, one with "un instinct de tigre" (348), and he has to confess that he was possessed by a thirst for blood. It was like a nightmare in which he had to obey "une main impitoyable" (357). But of course he was not another person; it was his own dark side that had taken him over, thanks to his pattern of repression.

In short, to try to escape to the heights is understandable when one has been embittered by the horrors of war and the corruption of contemporary society, but the message of *Jacques* is that what this flight gains in one direction it loses in another. At the end there is for the titular hero

<sup>11</sup> *Jacques*. (Plan de la Tour: Éditions d'aujourd'hui, Collection "Les Introuvables", 1976) 392. All further references will be taken from this edition, page numbers in parentheses.

<sup>12</sup> See Alex de Saint-Chéron's critique in *Corr.* Vol. 3, n.3, 118.

<sup>13</sup> *George Sand, mystique de la passion*. (Paris: Félix-Alcan, 1920) 100.

<sup>14</sup> *George Sand*. (Paris: Perrin, 1922) 101.

<sup>15</sup> *Corr.* Vol. 1, 450.

only solitude, loss of love, and a mixture of rage and icy hostility, which ends with his suicidal fall into the crevasse of a glacier still higher up in the Alps.

To conclude: Sand's vision of the heights was clearly ambiguous. She really detested the moral degradation of the Parisian society of 1830. She often referred in her correspondence to *la boue* — *mud* — of Paris in a moral as well as in a physical sense. Hence her desire to flee remained as strong as her awareness of the dangers inherent in trying to rise above it all. Because the ambiguity remained unresolved in these early novels, Sand was to repeat the same motifs and forms in several later works. The content, of course, continued to vary. In *Indiana* the mountains had represented the temptation of ideal love and in *Jacques* an ideal of superhuman perfection. In *Spiridion* (1839) the heights are less topographical and more metaphoric, and the metaphor is openly spiritual, even theological. The monk, Alexis, a star-gazing astronomer, significantly enough, spends his life on a noble but ultimately flawed attempt to ascend up to God through study and knowledge, while God's truth is actually to be found in a document hidden underground. A still different content to the basic pattern can be found in *Les Maîtres Sonneurs* (1853). The musical genius, Joset, must leave the lowlands of the Berry for the higher elevations of the Bourbonnais in order to develop his gifts to the fullest. There is again ambiguity and irony inasmuch as he does develop his genius magnificently, but he also becomes so arrogant that he is killed.

The ambiguous messages based on the motif of scaling the heights do not, of course, invalidate Sand's fiction. Quite to the contrary, they increase our interest in it, for they reveal a woman embarked up on a search for a meaning to life, and such a search, when genuine, inevitably brings with it some degree of uncertainty or paradox. One should not forget however that behind the ambiguities, and giving substance and direction to her entire literary corpus, we find Sand's basic concern with the mystery of our human nature and her hope that we can create richer relationships with each other.

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