George Sand, Antisex Feminist

I want a hero; an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one.

Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, canto 1

In September 2015, the *New York Times* published a feature with the ominous title "The Return of the Sex Wars."[1] Emily Bazelon's article responded to disagreements between and among feminist-identified students and faculty about the handling of sexual assault allegations on college campuses. This was "the latest salvo in a long-running war, with deep intellectual roots, over how to grapple with rape and sex as a feminist," the origins of which, Bazelon suggested, were to be sought in the antagonism between the so-called "antipornography" feminists of the 1980s and their "pro-sex" critics. Three years later, in a dazzling essay in the *London Review of Books*, philosopher Amia Srinivasan suggested that it might be time for feminism, and the culture more broadly, to revisit the "political critique of desire" offered in the 1980s by Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and others, in order to understand "how sexual desire [...] is shaped by oppression" (76). And in 2021's *Why We Lost the Sex Wars*, Lorna N. Bracewell responded to the tidal wave of activism around sexual harassment and violence that was the #MeToo movement, by offering a "history of the present" tracing "the descent of our current [...] sexual politics back through the political struggles and conceptual transformations of the feminist sex wars" (5).

These responses to the convulsion in heterosexual relations of the last half-decade all suggest that a problem not satisfactorily settled decades ago—the problem, simply put, of the political meanings of sexual desire—is once again demanding our attention. As the discrepancy

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between the *Times*'s headline ("The Return of the Sex Wars") and Bazelon's actual text ("a long-running war") aptly hints, the sex wars aren't really over, and we aren't really over the sex wars. Moreover, as Bracewell powerfully argues, the framing of the feminist thought of the 1970s, 80s and 90s as "wars" obscures the richness of the critique of desire offered by feminists on both "sides," putting out of service a wealth of wisdom that might help us ameliorate, or just understand, our current sexual predicament. This reductive framing also fails to grasp the *fundamentally problematic* place of desire within any account of sexual politics or sexual ethics: to present the feminist controversy around sexuality as a "war" that could be and was "won" is to create through metaphor an illusory resolution to a problem that will continue to insist for as long as we experience desire and live in society. If the sex wars seem to be returning, it is in the mode of an *eternal* return.[2]

In this article, I revisit a further moment in feminism's past—the writing of George Sand—as Bracewell, Bazelon and Srinivasan revisit the sex wars: as a source of reflections on contemporary problems. I read Sand through the sex wars, and vice versa, putting the two into dialogue in a way that foregrounds what Jessica Tanner calls the "out-of-phase contemporaneity" of literature (200), the strange commentary its historical otherness and peculiar preoccupations allow it to offer on questions whose terms we think we understand. The *tertium comparationis* of this double revisiting is the attitude that we might crudely call "sex negativity": the intuition—central to the radical feminist thought of the 1980s and legible, I shall suggest, in Sand's novels—that sexual desire, both men's and women's, might be impervious to ethical critique and therefore constitute a permanent stumbling block to sexual-political progress.

Revisiting George Sand's Feminism

[2] I do not have space to offer a narrative account of the "sex wars" here. Bracewell's book provides an excellent summary and a perceptive critique of the standard narrative; Bronstein, *Battling Pornography* provides a very detailed account of the antipornography movement.

"Sand's feminism," Naomi Schor rather intimidatingly warns, "is the pons asinorum of George Sand studies" (*George Sand* 71). The difficulty of getting Sand's feminism "right" lies, it would seem, at least in part in resisting the urge to say whether or not Sand herself got it "right": in the decades preceding her intervention of 1993, Schor suggests, too many scholars had attempted to evaluate Sand's novels against some ahistorical standard of "true" feminism, before "tak[ing] a position pro or con." The better approach, Schor suggested, was to engage with Sand's ideas about gender on their own terms, and thus to recognize in Sand "a theoretician of sexual difference" (*George Sand* 76). A number of scholars since have pursued this suggestion by reading Sand in dialogue with late twentieth-century francophone "theoreticians of sexual difference" such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.[3] Such readings reflect certain consistent preoccupations of francophone feminist thought: thus for Schor, Sand and Irigaray alike "subscribe to the notion of an inalienable female difference" (*Bad Objects* 6); or else as Eileen Boyd Sivert puts it in an important early contribution, Cixous's critique of the contradictory injunctions placed on women's desire under patriarchy "could have been written specifically to describe Lélia" (53). In what follows, I establish similar connections between Sand's work and the antipornography, "sex-negative," or even "antisex" feminism of the 1980s.

In 1987's *Intercourse,* however, Andrea Dworkin objects to the very term "sex-negative" as an antifeminist canard designed to protect the conditions of male heterosexual arousal from political scrutiny. "Sex-negative," she writes, "is the current secular *reductio ad absurdum* used to dismiss or discredit ideas, particularly political critiques, that might lead to detumescence" (61). Dworkin's point here is that what her brand of feminism opposes isn't sex per se but *a particular regime of sex,* that of capitalist patriarchy; sure enough in this very moment Dworkin is insisting, sex-positively as it were, on the capacity of our "imagination" to find "new meanings, new forms" of sexual intimacy beyond those supplied by the "programmed tape loop" of a

[3] See especially Sivert and Harkness, as well as Schor herself.

pornified culture (60). And yet Dworkin's own work reveals nothing so clearly as the thoroughgoing constructedness of sex, its atomic-level saturation by cultural and political meanings—the effect of which is that any critique of sex-as-it-is-now will tend to appear indistinguishable from a critique of sex-as-such. If there is a non-dismissive, non-discrediting, feminist use for terms such as "sex-negative" or "antisex," then, it is precisely that they name lines of thought that lead inexorably to the vanishing point where the political circumstances in which sex happens blur into the act itself, and classify thinkers—like Dworkin and even, as we shall see, Immanuel Kant—who willingly run the risk of looking absurd by making the claim that "sex is wrong."

This article reads George Sand as an "antisex feminist" in that particular sense: Sand, I shall argue, was a writer drawn compulsively to the *problem* of sexual desire, and unwilling to bracket the contradictions, tensions, and even absurdities that emerge whenever we attempt to think desire politically. Sand was moreover perhaps uniquely aware of the difficulty of imagining what sex—or anything else for that matter—would look like outside of Dworkin's "man-made world" (*Intercourse* 1). Central to the literary-critical discourse around her work, particularly as energized by Schor, is her general frustration with the constraints of a literary verisimilitude that requires the novelist endlessly to reproduce and naturalize, if not indeed to validate, the status quo. Sand's "idealist" poetics have often been understood analogously to Dworkin's appeal to the "imagination," as an optimistic yet clearly very fragile attempt to interrupt the "programmed tape loop" of masculinist cultural representations. And yet one effect of attending to Sand's relentless probing of the problem of sex is to show her in rather a different light from the optimistic, idealistic one in which traditional literary histories tend to present her: Sand the antisex feminist is also Sand the pessimist, or perhaps more accurately, Sand the realist.

To read Sand's novels as a historical prototype of the anglophone radical feminism of the 1980s is in any case to understand Sand not just as a "theoretician of sexual difference," but also

as a gifted theoretician of sexual *inequality*, which is to say that she is a political as well as a metaphysical thinker of sexual difference. Sand's early novels of the 1830s (especially *Indiana*, *Lélia*, and *Mauprat*) articulate implicitly what Carole Pateman, in her epochal feminist rereading of classical liberal theory, called "the sexual contract": "the construction of the difference between the sexes as the difference between freedom and subjection" (6). They also show an acute awareness of how our ability to recognize and act upon such inequality is significantly impeded by the play of sexual desire: in these early novels, men's and women's desire is produced by and invested in the system of gender subjection, and therefore acts as a force of brute resistance to any reformist politics. Indeed, Sand can sometimes even seem a theorist of what has been within the history of twentieth-century feminism the most divisive formulation of this idea: the doctrine of so-called "false consciousness," which argues that the pleasure and fulfilment women might (think they) find in heterosexual sexual relations are illusory, inauthentic, and a distraction.

In this sense, to read Sand in light—or in anticipation—of antipornography feminism is to center the question of sex in Sand's work. One objection that might be raised to some of what follows is that I too often assume the author is talking about sex, when what she really has in mind is romantic love, possibly of a nonsexual nature; readers of a timid bent will think she is *usually* talking about the latter. Yet at the time Sand was writing (as today), the word *amour* and its derivates were severely overdetermined: *amour* remained the single most common term for sexual intercourse in ordinary language, while simultaneously designating a sentiment that might sometimes be figured as somehow the opposite of sex. For Simone Lecointre, Sand deliberately plays on this ambiguity, the better to reveal an opposition between "love" and mere desire, also called "passion," that remains "englué dans la convoitise" ("mired in lust" [43-4]). Against such libidinal excess, Lecointre continues, Sand posits a higher love that is a version of the Romantic androgyne myth, a perfect "fusion" of beings with the power to dissolve difference, beginning

with the seemingly primordial opposition of male to female (46-7). I have no doubt that Sand often evokes and even promotes such a platonic model—how could she not? The platonic love motif provided the Romantic era's primary language for discussing the highest potential of human relationships. In this respect, Sand was of her time.

And yet there are good reasons to doubt that Sand's thinking about "love" can be reduced to the prescription that, to find it, we must learn to separate it from "passion," or "desire," or whatever. First, virtually all nineteenth-century narratives of platonic love turn precisely on its complicated but inescapable relationship to physical desire and sexuality. But second and more importantly, the idea of Sand as a straightforward advocate of the fusional model of love runs athwart our sense of her as *also* the early nineteenth-century writer most alert to the depth and violence of the male/female split that model purported to transcend. While a hypothetical nineteenth-century gender ideologue would presumably have been able to move smoothly from the assumption of radical gender difference, via the notion of providential gender *complementarity,* to a fusional fantasy of perfect gender harmony, for George Sand the exceptionally acute critic of the real-world consequences of such thinking that journey must surely have been much more difficult. One can quite see why, faced with what the 1842 preface to *Indiana* straightforwardly calls the "rapport mal établi entre les sexes" ("ill-organized relationship between the sexes" [42/10]), an ideal of a love able to transcend sexual difference might have seemed especially tantalizing, even necessary to Sand; but we can also see why, in such circumstances, that ideal might have seemed to her especially distant and implausible.[4]

In this article, I trace this failure of an erotic ideal through two distinctively Sandian figures: on the one hand, the angel, a common French Romantic trope whose ideal sexlessness evokes at once a transcending of sexual difference *and* of lust; and on the other, the figure of

[4] Translations from *Indiana* are Sylva Raphael's from the Oxford World's Classic edition. Page references refer first to the Gallimard French text edited by Béatrice Didier, then to the translation. All other translations are my own.

Don Juan, the great libertine seducer. In Sand's writing, Don Juan crystallizes a problem within the (hetero)sexual encounter and the play of desire—for while Don Juan obviously embodies male sexual incontinence and contempt for women, he *also* embodies for Sand a form of masculinity that women find, or have been socialized to find, desirable. Through these two figures, Sand allegorizes the interaction between intimate longings and social and political forces—the very terrain that formed the primary battleground of the sex wars.

Misrecognition and Misreading

In one of the most commented-upon episodes of *Indiana*, Noun, the eponymous heroine's ambiguously racialized maidservant, seduces the seducer Raymon de Ramière in her mistress's bedroom, while wearing her mistress's clothes.[5] The sexual relationship between Noun and Raymon has already left Noun pregnant, and will lead to her suicide by drowning at the close of Part One. The bedroom scene inaugurates one of Sand's favored devices, exploited in *Indiana*, *Valentine*, *Lélia*, and later in *Isidora*: the splitting of female sexuality into two mirrored characters, the virginal versus the fallen woman (see Rabine 5, 10; Didier 105). As Schor notes, this kind of splitting was long regarded as symptomatic of Sand's "failure to imagine female desiring subjects" (*Bad Objects* 99)—put differently, to be "sex positive." The other way of reading this scene is as a pseudo-allegory of the misrecognition at the heart of the sexual encounter. While the episode begins with an act of semi-deception (Raymon briefly believes that Noun *is* Indiana), it quickly shifts into the realm of self-deception, wherein both partners equivocate with themselves about their own *and* the other's desire. Noun's naïve stratagem—borrowing Indiana's clothes—suggests her unconscious knowledge that Raymon's true desire is for Indiana; Raymon, meanwhile, knows that the woman before him only superficially resembles

[5] See for instance Harkness 57-8; Jenson 200-01; Mathias 14-16; Prasad 40; Schor *Bad Objects* 99.

the object of his affections. Yet both accept the simulacrum, allowing themselves to mistake it temporarily for the "real thing."

This episode gave rise to an extraordinarily neat vignette of gendered novel-reading, in the form of an exchange of letters between the author and Alfred de Musset, in the week following their meeting in the summer of 1833. In a letter of 24 June, Musset sent Sand a poem in which he appears to understand the "point" of the scene as being Raymon's failure to live up to his lofty amorous aspirations. Indeed, Musset's poetic gloss of the episode reduces it to a rehash of the "platonic love" theme in its most androcentric guise, as rehearsed from *René* to *Sylvie*: Indiana, that evanescent "fantôme" ("ghost"), represents "l'Idéal" ("the Ideal"), while in her lesser likeness Noun, Raymon finds only "le Réel dans toute sa tristesse" ("the Real in all its sadness" [512]). Responding, one assumes, to the narrative voice's ironic identification with Raymon's point of view in the bedroom scene, Musset appears to impute a version of that point of view to the author of *Indiana*, who is apostrophized successively as "Sand," then as "George," then as (the poem's final word) "Lélia," with rhetorical questions that at once assert and marvel at the fact that a woman could have intuited this sort of erotic disappointment: "En as-tu jamais fait la triste expérience? / Ce qu'éprouvait Raimon [*sic*], te le rappelais-tu?" ("Have you, too, known this sad experience? / This feeling of Raimon's—was it once yours?"). Musset thus makes the male experience of sexual disillusionment the dominant subjective position of the novel, as well as (of course) of his own poem.

This will strike most readers as an odd take—and Sand appears to have shared their perplexity. Her response praised the beauty of the verse but demurred from the interpretation; Sand doesn't spell out the gender politics at stake in this disagreement, but her response points in this direction even as it appears to confine itself to esthetic questions. First, Sand distinguishes her own literary creations from Musset's in terms of their greater realism: "Mes figures sont d'une réalité plus saisissable et plus grossière. Ils ont traversé ces temps de prose et de

mesquinerie" ("My characters have a coarser, more tangible reality. They bear the marks of these meaner, prosaic times" [*Correspondance* 2: 340]). Musset's reading of Raymon as a thwarted idealist is, Sand suggests, precisely an *idealizing* reading, which confers undue dignity on a two-bit seducer—and it's at this point that Don Juan makes his appearance, seemingly unbidden: "Don Juan n'est-il pas misérablement travesti sous l'habit de Raymon? au lieu qu'on le retrouve dans son éclat, dans sa poésie, dans sa grandeur sous les traits que vous lui donnez" ("Isn't Don Juan rather miserably disguised beneath Raymon's cloak? While we find him in all his glory, in all his poetry, in all his grandeur when you draw him"). This insistence on Raymon's prosaic reality in comparison to the mythical figure of Don Juan is, at least implicitly, a reproach to the poem's seeming assumption that only men can be disappointed in their desire (or that only their disappointment is literarily interesting). Noun may well represent "le Réel dans toute sa tristesse" for Raymon; but she in turn, much like her mistress, will find in him only a pale imitation of an archetype, a petty Don Juan. If Noun is "habillée et non pas vêtue" in Indiana's gown ("dressed up rather than dressed in" [102/62]), Raymon himself is nothing more than an "habit" in which Don Juan finds himself momentarily travestied.

Now a more charitable reading of Musset's poem might find that men's and women's equal capacity to be disappointed in love is exactly what Musset is getting at; the final flourish in particular, the single-hemistich sentence "N'est-ce pas, Lélia?" ("Is it not so, Lélia?"), perhaps reacts to the excerpt of Sand's forthcoming novel that had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on 15 May, consisting of chapters from the second part in which Lélia confesses her own erotic disillusionment. In her reply, Sand reacts to this allusion both directly and indirectly, and both reactions point beyond the easy notion of a unisex *mal du siècle,* towards a more vexatious set of problems in erotic relations between men and women. Her direct response is to tell Musset that, if he wants answers to the questions posed in the poem about her experience of sexual disappointment, "je le prierais bien de jeter les yeux dans quelques jours sur les feuilles

de *Lélia*" ("I should ask him to take a look in a few days at the pages of *Lélia*" [*Correspondance* 2: 341]). (Sure enough, the novel would appear on 31 July.) The reference to Don Juan, meanwhile, can be considered an *in*direct reaction to Musset's allusion to *Lélia*, since the final part of that novel would contain a long discourse on the Don Juan archetype whose composition must have been closely contemporaneous with this exchange. What Musset will read in *Lélia*, then, will not be Aurore Dupin spilling the beans on the bad sex she's had (as his conflation of "George," "Sand," and "Lélia" might imply), but rather the writer George Sand critiquing the very archetype perpetuated, she suggests, in the cockeyed idealism with which Musset has read *Indiana*.

For to say as Sand does that Raymon is a poor imitation of the Don Juan archetype is, at least on the face of it, to point to a grave asymmetry. Where Noun fails to be what Raymon wants her to be, Raymon fails to be... what Raymon wants *himself* to be, and what Musset wants him to be: Don Juan, who seduces and discards women, but does so, as it were, with style, and not the "mesquinerie" exemplified by Raymon. Even the idealized version of Raymon, that is, is a *male* fantasy that is harmful to women's interests. The tirade against Don Juan in the 1833 version of *Lélia* makes just this point. Towards the end of the novel the poet Sténio, broken by his life of vice and recuperating in a monastery, embarks upon a pages-long denunciation of the pursuit of sexual love which soon becomes organized around a rejection of the Don Juan archetype. That Sand was thinking about this passage in her exchange with Musset—or, just conceivably, vice versa—becomes especially obvious when Sténio complains that men (like him) have erroneously seen in Don Juan "une lutte glorieuse et persévérante contre la réalité" ("a glorious, persevering struggle against reality"), where they ought to have perceived the "mesquinerie" of Don Juan's ambitions (293); the very word Sand applies to the epigone Raymon in her letter attaches in *Lélia* to the archetype himself.

If the point were simply to demonstrate that this tirade anticipates feminist critiques of male sexual entitlement, one could cite virtually the whole thing.[6] What interests me, however, is the shift introduced by the reworking of this passage between the 1833 and the 1839 versions of the novel. The 1839 *Lélia* contains an extended version of Sténio's tirade, but one which is no longer spoken by Sténio. Rather, it is given by Lélia herself, in her role as abbess of the convent to which she has retreated, and is indeed a rebuke to Sténio, who has offered a wry parable in defense of Don Juan. The importance of this shift has of course not gone unnoticed. Unaccountably criticized by Pierre Reboul as making the speech somehow less powerful (in Sand, *Lélia* 290), the rewrite is, as Béatrice Didier argues, an ideological statement: Lélia's tirade supplies a feminist critique that it now strikes Sand as implausible to imagine a man supplying himself, and further diminishes the character of Sténio (152).

It is not only the speaker who has changed from 1833 to 1839, however, but also the audience: a harangue delivered by Sténio to a man, Trenmor, in 1834, becomes in 1839 a sermon delivered by Lélia to the assembled novices of the convent—that is, to a gathering of young women. For Didier, this is all part of Sand's more explicitly feminist rewriting of her novel, but it also introduces an additional element to the scene that is vital for our purposes. Both versions contain a flamboyant sequence ridiculing Don Juan's delusional belief that creation itself has been ordered by God to service his sexual desires. The passage recalls Molière's *Dom Juan* of 1665, whose rakish protagonist constantly and wryly invokes the will of "le Ciel" ("Heaven") in justifying his carryings-on; but it is also a sort of perverted revision of the book of Genesis itself. "À quelle heure, en quel lieu," Sténio/Lélia sarcastically enquires, "Dieu t'avait-il dit: '[...] Toutes les femmes que tu auras préférées sont destinées à ta couche'?" ("In what hour, in what place did God say to you: 'Every woman that shall catch thy favor shall be destined for thy bed'?" [514]). It's true, of course, that God said no such thing—for it was rather to the woman,

[6] On the critique of masculinity in this passage, see Harkness 135-6.

as Sand well knows, that the God of Genesis said: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3.16). The suppressed sense that the problem of heterosexuality might have as much to do with what women want as with what men want resurfaces in the 1839 version of the passage. Having delivered virtually verbatim the bulk of Sténio's 1833 harangue, Lélia's later version continues with new text, as she apostrophizes the assembled novices: "O mes sœurs! ô mes filles! voilà ce que c'est que Don Juan. Aimez-le maintenant, si vous pouvez. [....] Faites-vous victimes, faites-vous esclaves, faites-vous femmes!" ("Oh, sisters! Oh, daughters! See: this is Don Juan. Love him now, if you can. Make of yourselves victims; make of yourselves slaves; make of yourselves women!" [514]). What was in 1833 denounced as a problem of male behavior is recognized in 1839 as being *also* a problem of female desire; the trouble with Don Juan is not that he's wicked, but that he's sexy. Ending his prestige, then, will not simply be a case of changing men's desire, but also women's. The latter problem will concern us in the later sections of this article. But the former question, that of "fixing men," is not without interest either, and forms the central subject of Sand's *Mauprat*.

Remaking Men: *Mauprat*

Of all Sand's fictions of the 1830s, 1837's *Mauprat* perhaps bears the most the hallmarks of the *roman à thèse*; more specifically, it is "a *roman à thèse*" on "the re-education of masculinity" (Harkness 125). Its central plot follows the restraining and taming of the libido of the narrator-protagonist Bernard. Early on in the work, the elderly Bernard frames the novel's key preoccupation with the explicitness characteristic of the thesis novel: "C'est une grande question à résoudre que celle-ci: 'Y a-t-il en nous des penchants invincibles, et l'éducation peut-elle les modifier seulement ou les détruire?'" ("It is quite a question to answer: 'Are there within us irresistible inclinations, and can education merely modify them, or destroy them?'" [53]). As the plot begins, the adolescent Bernard has been being raised since infancy in a chaotic home,

consisting of his larcenous tyrant of a grandfather and a cadre of violent uncles. He has grown up steeped in what a reader of 2022 can scarcely help calling "toxic masculinity": in the castle of the Mauprats, La Roche-Mauprat, to be a nobleman is to take what one wants when one wants it, by force or threat of force. The novel's plot unfolds from the moment when the older Mauprats trick and abduct the heroine Edmée, the brilliant and independent daughter of a cadet branch of their family, bringing her back to La Roche-Mauprat in order to initiate Bernard sexually—their intention being plainly that he should prove himself a man by raping her. That there is a glimmer of native goodness in Bernard is confirmed by the fact that, in the face of her desperate pleas, Bernard agrees to forebear from possessing her there and then; instead, he will help her escape the castle (currently under siege by the marshalcy), on the condition that she will be "his" later on. They do escape, and the rest of the plot follows the negotiation of that original "contract."

Edmée's desperate bargain with Bernard seems to allegorize the formation of the "sexual contract": the agreement ends the anarchy of the opening scene by creating a relationship that it also perverts, binding man to woman while alienating them from each other in mutual resentment and mistrust. The novel's postponement of sex between the pair is thus as much politically as narratologically motivated: the challenge is to imagine a set of circumstances under which Edmée's consent might be freely given, the contract not so much fulfilled as dissolved. Through a decade-long process of obstacles, struggles, and misunderstandings, the reformation of Bernard's entire personality is a success—though it's a radical process, an "effroyable révolution" ("frightful revolution" [204]), akin to a sort of brain-washing, as Bernard-as-narrator recalls. By the end of the novel, Bernard is truly a "new man": the pair marry, have six children, and live years of "bonheur" that, as Bernard mercifully puts it, "ne se racontent pas" ("cannot be recounted" [430]).

To say that the novel's vindication of its optimistic thesis is "problematic" is only to acknowledge the profound complexity of the questions it addresses. One must be wary,

moreover, of reproaching novelists for writing novels: while large-scale political problems can readily be allegorized through the small-scale private plots characteristic of the genre, "solutions" devised at that microcosmic level are seldom obviously scalable in the opposite direction. The resolutions provided by novels will thus often raise more questions than they answer; and sure enough, *Mauprat* raises plenty of questions. First, in contrasting the nightmare of La Roche-Mauprat with the ideal community that Bernard and Edmée will found together by the end of the novel, Sand sets up a historical allegory that is best admired from a distance. The regime of toxic masculinity represented by the Mauprat clan is explicitly aligned with a sort of atavistic, lawless feudalism, a "brigandage féodal" ("feudal brigandage" [43]) that is to be corrected, we are led to understand, by the civilizing influence of the Enlightenment and the reforms of the French Revolution. Yet the latter cataclysm unfolds suspiciously uneventfully around our aristocratic heroes at the novel's end: "Les orages de la révolution ne détruisirent pas notre existence," Bernard summarizes, "et les passions qu'elle souleva ne troublèrent pas l'union de notre intérieur" ("the storms of the Revolution did not destroy our existence, and the passions it awoke did not trouble the good harmony of our home" [431]). Is the apparent paradox here—the couple in a sense *represent* the Revolution, yet are at the narrative level weirdly and implausibly insulated from it—symptomatic, or deliberate? Elena Patrick reads *Mauprat* as demonstrating the superiority of bourgeois models of self-control and universal rights over the immorality and hidebound hierarchies of the aristocracy; on that showing, the curious treatment of the Revolution in the closing pages would reveal Sand's unconscious skirting of the realization that what it brought about was not the end of patriarchy, but the advent of Pateman's reformed "fraternal patriarchy." We might on the other hand prefer to see these pages as evidence of Sand's *awareness* of the shortcomings of the Revolution in this respect, and thus as a tacit echo of Olympe de Gouges's denunciation of the Revolution's "inconséquence" ("inconsistency" [209]) where women were concerned. In either case, the curious non-event of revolution in *Mauprat*

underscores the historical Revolution's failure to be in fact what it continues to symbolize, for better or worse, in the realm of the Idea—the end of injustice.

Yet this "scalar" problem is inseparable from a second, this time in the novel's intimate narrative, the "effroyable révolution" undergone by Bernard. The adjustment in his attitude towards Edmée from the unbridled lust of the opening scene parallels—not deliberately, perhaps, but convergently—Immanuel Kant's distinction between ethically permissible and impermissible sex. In Kant's enormously influential account, sexual desire as an "appetite" is inherently objectifying; to act on my lust for another, or to allow another to satiate his lust upon me, is to treat humanity as a means, and thus to violate the second formulation of the categorical imperative (162-66). Sex within marriage can be ethically innocuous for Kant not, as is commonly assumed, because it is "mutual"—Kant explicitly rejects the possibility of mutual objectification as merely mutual degradation (164)—but because sex within marriage is a legal *duty*, and lust can therefore be assumed to be absent in, or at least incidental to, marital sex. This suspicion of sexual desire, which arguably makes Kant more "antisex" than Saint Paul, finds its echo in *Mauprat*. The adjustment of Bernard's attitude towards Edmée involves his coming to see her simultaneously as a sexless "angel," then as "un jeune homme de mon âge" to whom he might relate as though they were two "frères d'armes" ("a young man of my age," "brothers in arms" [197])—that is, his coming to see her as an equal subject, rather than as a sexual object. These terms surely leave us with at least two interrelated quibbles. On the one hand, Bernard's imaginary conflation of Edmée-as-equal with Edmée-as-brother might appear to endorse the logic of fraternal patriarchy, reinforcing the notion that women *as women* cannot be political subjects and vice versa. (Sure enough, Edmée is consistently presented in the narrative as somewhat masculine; see Bozon-Scalzitti 3.) And on the other, Bernard's move from viewing Edmée as a sexual object to viewing her as a (sexless) equal subject reflects the assumption that *one can't be both*—the strict Kantian assumption, we might say, that one cannot revere the

humanity of the other while lusting appetitively after their flesh. The "problem" of Bernard's libido, then, has not so much been solved by the novel, as disavowed.

The third "problematic" aspect of the novel is given away at the end of the first chapter, in which Bernard relates the predations of the wicked Mauprat clan. They are, as we have seen, given to acts of "brigandage féodal"; they represent "les abus de la féodalité" ("feudalist abuses" [46]) and, in case we haven't grasped the point, "l'ancienne tyrannie des hobereaux" ("ancient tyranny of the petty barons" [48]). And they have also, Bernard continues, corrupted the local peasantry with their "libertinage" (48). The reader may well do a double take at the strange cultural-historical elision here. Clearly, Sand means to align the Mauprat clan's "bad" sexuality with retrograde politics, brutal masculinity, and a lack of civilization and culture, which is fair enough. But the repellent image of male sexuality thus conjured is more that of a monstrous Gilles de Rais than, say, a seductive Vicomte de Valmont— who might well seem a more pertinent reference given the novel's immediately pre-revolutionary setting, and who gets his way not through simple force, but because he has "des façons de dire, qu'on ne sait pas comment faire pour lui répondre," as his victim Cécile Volanges puts it ("ways of putting things, that means you don't know how to reply" [Laclos 270]). To call the Mauprats' brand of sexual brutality "libertinage" is to obscure the problem posed to Sand's allegory by the Ancien Régime cultural pattern more commonly known by that name: a vision of sexuality as at once manipulative *and* charismatic, embodied *and* silver-tongued, coercive *and* attractive. In short, *Mauprat*'s optimistic thesis in made tenable only because it elides the problem already raised by Sand in *Indiana*, then in *Lélia*, and to which she would return in the second *Lélia* two years later: the problem of Don Juan.

Better Angels

A worst-case statement of that "problem" comes in possibly the most quoted sentence of *Indiana*. In Part Three of the novel, Sand's male narrator is heard to observe:

> La femme est imbécile par nature; il semble que, pour contre-balancer l'éminente supériorité que ses délicates perceptions lui donnent sur nous, le ciel ait mis à dessein dans son cœur une vanité aveugle, une idiote crédulité. (251)

> Woman is naturally foolish. To counterbalance the outstanding superiority which her sensitive perceptions give her over us men, it seems that heaven has intentionally placed in her heart a blind vanity, a stupid credulity. (192)

In another ironic reimagining of Genesis (though one that is not, ultimately, that different from the actual content of Genesis 3.16), the narrator imagines "woman" to have been created by God (or by *le ciel*—the favored term of Molière's Dom Juan, as we've seen) with a deliberate design flaw: an imbecilic susceptibility to seduction by unworthy men. The passage is clearly ironic, and on the face of it, the novel refuses to vindicate this masculinist account of feminine "nature." Indeed, it even appears to *solve* the Don Juan problem—in its dénouement, through the relationship between the heroine and her cousin, friend, and protector since childhood, Sir Ralph Brown.

Indiana's romantic anagnorisis occurs in the final paragraphs of Part Four, as she and Ralph prepare to leap to their death in a suicide pact. Ralph has just disburdened himself of a declaration from which he emerges as something other than the priggish buzz-kill he has always seemed; behind that "insignificant" face (as the narrator puts it) quivers an exquisite sensibility and a selfless love for our heroine. As his confession ends, Sand employs an insistent vocabulary of visuality to convey Indiana's new understanding of her lifelong friend: "Le bandeau [...] tomba tout à fait de ses yeux [...]. Elle vit le cœur de Ralph tel qu'il était" ("The bandage [...] fell altogether from her eyes. Having realized the true nature of Ralph's heart, she saw it as it really was" [329/260]). And then:

> Elle vit aussi ses traits tels qu'elle ne les avait jamais vus [...]. Paré de sa franchise et de sa vertu, il était bien plus beau que Raymon, et Indiana sentit que c'était lui qu'il aurait fallu aimer. [....]

> Leurs lèvres s'unirent; et sans doute il y a dans un amour qui part du cœur une puissance plus soudaine que dans les ardeurs d'un désir éphémère; car ce baiser, sur le seuil d'une autre vie, résuma pour eux toutes les joies de celle-ci. (329-30)

> She also saw his features as she had never seen them before. [....] Embellished by his frankness and his virtue, he was much more handsome than Raymon, and Indiana felt that he was the man she should have loved. [....]
>
> Their lips met. In a love which comes from the heart there is, no doubt, a more striking power than in the ardours of an ephemeral desire, for this kiss, on the threshold of another life, contained all their joys. (260)

Sand's plain intention here, we might assume, is to distinguish between purely carnal desire, which is disparaged as shallow and fleeting, and "true love," which is valorized, and which we are told Indiana feels for Ralph. Am I reading needlessly against the grain, then, in finding these lines as ambiguous—indeed, as ambivalent—as I do? It's surely noteworthy that, rather than passing cleanly from the language of desire and ardor to the language of superior love, the extended visual metaphor in these lines attempts instead to combine the two, making of sight—the vector *par excellence* of lust—a vehicle of moral understanding. To be sure, this is squarely consonant with an idea of Sand "fundamentally concerned," in Manon Mathias's words, "with bridging the gap between physical sight and abstract vision" (3). Indiana "sees" Ralph's heart, and in seeing it, sees his physical appearance ("ses traits") differently too, her perception of his inner being shifting her perception of his outward person. But this idea is then pushed further, into the realms of the paradoxical indeed, as Ralph is said to be "paré" with the honesty and virtue that his speech has revealed; moral qualities now become external adornments or draperies, the uncanny echoes of Indiana's "parures" ("draperies") in which Noun appeared "habillée et non pas vêtue" (102), with nothing like the same seductive effect. These moral adornments, we are assured, do not simply make Ralph more *deserving* of Indiana's love. No: they make him, plausibly or not, "bien plus beau," that is, more *physically attractive,* more desirable than Raymon.

But the "ambivalent" reading of this passage turns on the words that immediately follow: "Indiana sentit que c'était lui qu'il aurait fallu aimer." Perhaps the perfect conditional here—the thwarted mood of the might-have-been, the missed opportunity—can be explained by the fact that, at this point, Indiana believes they are both about to die, and therefore that their chance for earthly love together is already passed. But what about the modal verb *falloir*? Indiana *ought to* love, or to have loved, Ralph. This idea must surely leave us pensive. Is my realization that I *ought* to love someone, that it would be better to love that person, the same as my loving him? Is love really amenable to the logic of "ought"? Surely not love as most of us conceive of it, though of course that may be our limitation. In the Conclusion, sure enough, Ralph will explain to the narrator that if some angel attempted to explain the nature of Ralph and Indiana's bond, the narrator's earthly ears would not understand the celestial language required for such a definition (341-42/269). In the 1839 version of *Lélia*, the Don Juan passage will also be presented as a tale of unsuccessful angelic intervention. Sténio's parable imagines Don Juan's guardian angel saving its charge from damnation by descending to Earth, taking the form of a woman, and loving and being loved by Don Juan "afin de le purifier et de le convertir" ("in order to purify and convert him" [512]). Lélia's angry riposte continues the story: Don Juan neither repented nor changed his ways, and the angel's human (and female) disguise became its miserable reality forevermore: "L'ange devenu femme perdit [...] la conscience de sa nature divine" ("The angel, now a woman, lost its awareness of its divine nature" [513]). Where Ralph's physical form is allegedly enhanced, made radiant by his inner moral worth, in *Lélia* the angel's divine spark is extinguished by the all-too human experience of physical love.

These moments recall another interfering guardian angel—Charles Baudelaire's, in "Le Rebelle," a sonnet that probably existed in some form as early as 1843:

> Un Ange furieux fond du ciel comme un aigle,
> Du mécréant saisit à plein poing les cheveux,

Et dit, le secouant : «Tu connaîtras la règle!
(Car je suis ton bon Ange, entends-tu?) Je le veux!

Sache qu'il faut aimer, sans faire la grimace,
Le pauvre, le méchant, le tortu, l'hébété,
Pour que tu puisses faire à Jesus, quand il passe,
Un tapis triomphal avec ta charité.

Tel est l'Amour! Avant que ton cœur ne se blase,
À la gloire de Dieu rallume ton extase;
C'est la Volupté vraie aux durables appas!»

Et l'Ange, châtiant autant, ma foi! qu'il aime,
De ses poings de géant torture 1'anathème;
Mais le damné répond toujours: «Je ne veux pas!» (140)

A furious Angel like an eagle swoops
From Heav'n, and, seizing the unbeliever's hair,
Shakes him, screaming, "You shall know the law!
For I'm your guardian angel; I insist!

Know, then, that you must love—no ifs or buts!—
The poor, the mean, the crooked and the dumb,
And thus create for Jesus, when he comes,
A royal road strewn with your charity.

For this is love! Let not your heart go cold,
But kindle, from God's glory, ecstasy;
Such is true rapture, whose charms never fade."

And the Angel, chiding as befits its love,
With giant fists assaults its wayward charge;
Yet still the damned one only says: "I shan't!"

While the angel is ostensibly exhorting the rebel to charity, a supposedly superior form of love to mere sensual pleasure, it prefers like the narrator of *Indiana* to describe the former in terms associated with the latter ("extase," "Volupté," "appas"). Together, "Le Rebelle" and the passage from *Indiana* mark out two different types of amorous duty, two ways of "loving better": Baudelaire's angel insists that the unbeliever should seek ecstasy in the love of the humblest and

even in repellent objects, because it is morally better to do so; Sand's narrator implies that Ralph is a *better object* and that it would therefore have been better *for Indiana* to have loved him rather than the unworthy Raymon. But both texts suggest—Baudelaire's very explicitly, Sand's very implicitly and even perhaps unconsciously—that the reorientation of desire this would require is a thing easier spoken of than done. Desire, it seems, is rebellious, miscreant, incorrigible.

A version of this idea is indeed something of a doxa in contemporary thinking about sexuality. "Desire," writes Katherine Franke, "is not subject to cleaning up, to being purged of its nasty, messy perilous dimensions" (207)—and this, to be clear, is a proposition I consider obviously correct. But that I should consider it so is in a sense symptomatic of the outcome of the "sex wars"— generally understood to have been the victory of "pro-sex" feminism. As Ellen Willis put it in "Lust Horizons," her influential essay of 1981, "the 'I'm O.K., you're O.K.' brand of sexual libertarianism is a logical extension of the feminist and gay liberationist demand for the right to self-definition;" "authoritarian moralism"—of the sort dispensed by antipornography feminists and Baudelaire's angel alike, we might say—"has no place in a movement for social change (13-14). "Lust Horizons" is often hailed as one of the inaugural works of a "pro-sex" feminism for which it's an article of faith that we shouldn't try to tell other people (though especially women) what they should desire. And yet the essay's gripping conclusion offers precisely a reflection on the "contradictions" of this attitude, and ends by asking a couple of what Willis calls "fundamental questions": "Why do we choose what we choose? What would we choose if we had a real choice?" (14). Re-reading Willis in her 2018 essay, Amia Srinivasan comments:

> One might feel that Willis has given with one hand and taken away with the other. But perhaps she has given with both. Here, she tells us, is the task of feminism: to treat as axiomatic our free sexual choices, while also seeing why, as "anti-sex" and lesbian feminists have always said, such choices, under patriarchy, are rarely free. (84)

Srinivasan's purpose in insisting on this crucial ambivalence at the end of "Lust Horizons" is to caution against a contemporary tendency to confuse the prudent avoidance of passing *judgement*

on other people's desires, endorsed by Willis, with the insouciant cessation of all enquiry into the *formation* of those desires, which is quite the opposite of Willis's intention. There might, Srinivasan seems to imply, be good reason to do a little bit more of this type of enquiry—to be willing, in other words, to be a bit more "antisex" from time to time. And here again, Sand's *Indiana* can give us food for thought.

Indiana's Desire

What does Indiana desire? In truth, Indiana spends more time making clear what she *doesn't* want. Part of the effect of the Noun/Indiana split is to position sex per se as a "bad object," viscerally repudiated by the heroine in reaction to her *sœur de lait*'s tragic fate. In Part Three, Indiana explains to Raymon that while it might once have been possible that she would sleep with him, the discovery of his affair with Noun means that she can now only see in this prospect "une effrayante parité avec Noun" ("a frightening equality with Noun" [200/147]); the phrase, at once pitying and slut-shaming, crackles with that special ambivalence—or just that special negativity—that only sex can generate. Noun's death confirms for Indiana that "l'amour physique est un abandon du pouvoir par la femme" ("physical love involves a relinquishing of power by the woman" [McCallum-Schwarz 176]).[7] This makes sex an unacceptable prospect for a heroine whose role is to act as spokesperson for the author's critique of women's disempowerment, specifically through the unjust marriage laws of nineteenth-century France.

This critique of the legal subjection of women to men is articulated fairly consistently through the metaphor of slavery, which first appears in the 1842 preface: "le malheur de la femme entraîne celui de l'homme, comme celui de l'esclave entraîne celui du maître" ("the distress of women entails that of men, as the distress of the slave entails that of the master" [46/13]). Indiana too uses this language of slave and master to characterize her relationship with her boorish

[7] See also Massardier-Kennedy 26-7.

husband Delmare (232/176). And in explaining the readiness of Indiana to fall for Raymon, the narrator tells us that "cette femme esclave [...] n'attendait qu'un signe pour briser sa chaîne" ("this enslaved woman [...] was only waiting for a sign in order to break her chain" [90/52]). Twenty-first century sensibilities inevitably bridle at the metaphorical use of the historic evil of chattel slavery, since such metaphors always involve false equivalences. One might observe in Sand's defence, as do Aimée Boutin and Lawrence M. Porter, that patriarchy and colonialism are two "systèmes conjugués" ("coordinated systems" [Boutin 131]) and that Sand sees "all violations of human freedom as interconnected" (Porter 7) making Sand's novel as sincerely abolitionist as it is sincerely feminist. Sand's analogies between the oppression of women in marriage and the oppression of enslaved people moreover reflect the workings of *sympathy*, which was, as Fabienne Bercegol notes, the primary driver of moral intuitions within the eighteenth-century framework of sensibility that was Sand's inheritance (51). Indiana has grown up on her father's plantation on the Ile Bourbon, "au milieu des esclaves, pour qui elle n'avait d'autre secours, d'autre consolation que sa compassion et ses larmes" ("surrounded by slaves whom she could help and console only with her pity and tears" [89/51]). These early experiences and the fellow feeling they engendered, the narrator explains, have shaped Indiana's capacity for inner resistance and inform her longing for a future in which *all* oppressions will cease.

Yet Indiana's childhood experiences in colonial Bourbon have also shaped her desire. The surface story is that the spectacle of bondage has led Indiana to imagine her future lover as a messiah and a liberator (89/51), and that she misrecognizes in Raymon such a messianic figure. There is, as Deborah Jenson persuasively argues, a shift here from a sympathetically rooted political response to slavery, to the heroine's self-projection as the protagonist of a hyperbolic scene of suffering, in which the pain of others becomes the "paradoxical stuff of narcissism" (198). The problem reaches its apogee in Part Four of the novel, when Indiana deserts her

husband's home on the Ile Bourbon and returns unaccompanied to Paris to seek out Raymon. In the climax of the novel's adultery plot, Indiana throws herself at Raymon's feet and exclaims:

> — Reconnais-moi donc, [...] c'est moi, c'est ton Indiana, c'est ton esclave que tu as rappelée de l'exil et qui est venue de trois mille lieues pour t'aimer et te servir; [....] je viens pour te donner du bonheur, pour être tout ce que tu voudras, ta compagne, ta servante ou ta maîtresse. [...] Dispose de moi, de mon sang, de ma vie; je suis à toi corps et âme. J'ai fait trois mille lieues pour t'appartenir, pour te dire cela; prends-moi, je suis ton bien, tu es mon maître. (296-7)

> "Recognize me, then, [...] it's me; it's your Indiana; it's your slave, whom you recalled from exile and who has come a thousand miles to love and serve you. [....] I've come to bring you happiness, to be whatever you want, your companion, your servant, or your mistress. [....] Do what you like with me, with my blood, with my life. I am yours, body and soul. I've travelled three thousand miles to belong to you, to tell you that. I am your property, you are my master." (231-2)

Given the enormous conceptual importance of slavery in the rest of the novel, and the explicitness and insistent hyperbole of the language of slavery in this jarring moment, I find it extremely hard to regard the latter as a slip of the pen, an accident, or a lapse in judgement on Sand's part. In Jenson's analysis, this passage is simply the one that reveals most vividly the political limitations of sympathy: Indiana's words upset the novel's central political analogies by altering the polarity of the "slavery" idea, giving the impression of an "interchangeability of the positive and negative connotations of slavery" that damages the novel's moral seriousness (198). Yet while I agree that this moment is deeply disruptive to the heroine's and the novel's shared political analogies, I would read that disruption rather differently—as an example, precisely, of the disruption caused by desire.

There can surely be no doubt that *somebody's* desire is at stake here. Some readers will doubtless parse Indiana's words as symptomatic of her desperate situation, a forced recourse to an alien discourse—the "programmed tape loop" of male heterosexual eroticism—by a woman with no options and no protectors. In appealing to Raymon in these terms, such an argument might run, she attempts (perhaps rather clumsily) to match herself to what she imagines to be *his* desire; doesn't she indeed offer to be "tout ce que tu voudras"? But of course, another reading is

possible: that what speaks here *is* Indiana's desire, at least at this moment. In that interpretation, Sand would be dramatizing that intractable problem of feminist thought: the formation of female desire under patriarchy. For the trouble is not simply that Indiana's desire for Raymon doesn't quite live up to her political intuitions; rather, her desire is, as Jenson notes, an *inversion* of those intuitions. But that's because her desire has been shaped by the same circumstances as her politics, meaning *by* the social injustices she consciously critiques, and especially *by* the spectacles of mastery and slavery to which she has been exposed as a child, and which now strike us as so many primal scenes. The inversion isn't then as simple as the "interchangeability of the positive and negative connotations of slavery," as Jenson puts it. Instead, slavery *retains* its negative connotations and the novel's moral axioms remain unchanged; Indiana simply *doesn't want what's good for her*. Didier, indeed, identifies this as being arguably the "point" of the novel:

> L'intérêt d'*Indiana* provient peut-être de ce que l'héroïne y est le lieu d'un conflit, d'une tension entre un désir de liberté et des fantasmes de servitude. Il n'est pas difficile de trouver dans ce texte tout un jeu d'images sado-masochistes. (81)
>
> Perhaps what makes *Indiana* interesting is that the heroine is the location of a conflict, a tension between a desire for liberty and fantasies of servitude. It is not hard to find in this text a whole set of sadomasochistic images.

What if Indiana's self-projection into the scene of slavery shouldn't be understood as narcissistic, but rather as *masochistic*?

The conflict Didier identifies between an emancipatory feminist politics—which, Didier's phrasing reminds us, is itself a sort of desire—and a socially constructed female masochism would be replayed in the feminist thought of the 1980s. In 1977, Luce Irigaray famously observed that the pleasure a woman might obtain from heterosexual sex under patriarchy would be "avant tout [la] prostitution masochiste de son corps à un désir qui n'est pas le sien" ("first and foremost the masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not hers"

[25]). Dworkin, though working in a far less psychoanalytically inflected tradition, noted in 1981's *Pornography* that the patriarchal distribution of sex roles presupposes a "normal and natural sadism of the male, happily complemented by the normal and natural masochism of the female" (109). By an odd coincidence, the text Dworkin reacts to at this moment is Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, sending us hurtling us back to 1830s Paris. A woman, Dworkin quotes Gautier's protagonist D'Albert as saying, "possesses this unquestionable advantage over a statue, that she turns of herself in the direction you wish, whereas you are obliged to walk round the statue" (109); she is a self-objectifying thing, and her compliance in this respect—indeed, her identification of her own desire with her objectification—leads Dworkin to one of her most quoted lines: "The object is allowed to desire if she desires to be an object" (109). It is hard not to hear an anticipatory echo of these words when Indiana exclaims: "Dispose de moi, [...] prends-moi, je suis ton bien." MacKinnon, writing in 1989, similarly notes that:

> So many distinctive features of women's status as second class—the restriction and constraint and contortion, the servility and the display, the self-mutilation and requisite presentation of self as a beautiful thing, the enforced passivity, the humiliation—are made into the content of sex for women. Being a thing for sexual use is fundamental to it. ("Sexuality" 318)

Here MacKinnon makes explicit the relationship between the libidinal posture she describes and the political regime that produces it; this same intellectual purpose, I am suggesting, is served in *Indiana* by the shocking redeployment of the language of slavery.

The contrast between "worthy" Ralph and "unworthy" Raymon appears in this light as something of a red herring. The problem with Indiana's desire isn't really its object, but its nature: its masochism, its submissiveness, its self-objectification. The ethical problem of objectification, then, is once again central to Sand's interrogation of sex and desire. While that concept may seem characteristic of late twentieth-century feminism, it was "available" to anyone writing after Kant and is, indeed, always in some sense Kantian—Martha Nussbaum considers a Kantian notion of the human "implicit in most critiques of objectification in the

MacKinnon/Dworkin tradition" (218), and when Dworkin straightforwardly notes that the "intrinsic cruelty involved in turning a person into an object should be apparent," she clearly doesn't regard herself as offering a specifically feminist moral intuition (*Pornography* 109). *Indiana* follows Kant by showing that objectification is wrong even when invited by the objectified person, and anticipates "the MacKinnon/Dworkin tradition" by suggesting how social forces under patriarchy condition women specifically towards self-objectification. Either reading tends to blur the difference between the two possible interpretations I proposed a moment ago: in their equal moral austerity, the Kantian categorical imperative and the radical feminist concept of false consciousness both make it irrelevant whether Indiana does or does not want to be made a thing.

This episode of Sand's novel adds something to the analysis of desire, I would insist, that theory and philosophy can't do, or at least, not so easily. For the novel as a genre turns, we might say, on the interplay between the general and the specific, the symbolic and the literal, the ideal and the real—and, of course, on the unpredictable play of irony. The irony, in this instance, lies in Raymon's reaction to Indiana's passionate offer of sexual and moral subservience:

> Raymon ne répondait rien; son admirable présence d'esprit l'avait abandonné. Il était écrasé de surprise, de remords et de terreur en voyant cette femme à ses pieds; il cacha sa tête dans ses mains et désira la mort. [....]
>
> — Je voudrais pleurer, dit Raymon d'une voix étouffée. (296)

> Raymon made no reply; his remarkable presence of mind had deserted him. He was overwhelmed with surprise, remorse, and terror at seeing this woman at his feet. He hid his head in his hands and longed for death. [....]
>
> "I'd like to weep," said Raymon in a choking voice. (231)

Indiana has come to find her Don Juan, but what she finds instead is that great archetype of male dominance "misérablement travesti sous l'habit de Raymon," as Sand put it in her letter to Musset. His reaction to Indiana's scandalous eruption in his home is one of stereotypically feminine discombobulation. Worse, the pair are soon interrupted by Raymon's new wife, Laure

de Nangy, to whom as the narrator makes very clear Raymon is himself entirely subjugated. In a neat inversion of expected gender roles, Laure's smile on discovering the pair combines all the donjuanesque "virtues" her husband has failed to manifest—it is "amer, froid et méprisant" ("bitter, cold, contemptuous" [297/232])—and she leaves the room delighted with the "position d'infériorité et de dépendance où cet incident venait de placer son mari" ("inferior, dependent position in which this incident had put her husband" [298/233]). If, indeed, Indiana can be said to have made a "mistake" in her choice of object, then, it is to have chosen a lover who simply can't live up to the role of master that her fantasies require him to play. Raymon isn't good enough for her—but he isn't bad enough either.

All of which leads to something of an impasse. It is as if, on the one hand, Sand agrees with Franke that it is precisely and intrinsically "the proximity to danger, the lure of prohibition, the seamy side of shame that creates the heat that draws us towards our desires" (207), but cannot bring herself to endorse the "sex-positive" position that this is O.K., or in any case, just something we have to live with. Yet on the other, the supposedly superior relationship with Ralph involves, as we've seen, the awkward expression of moral qualities in the language of desire; it ignores, rather than accounting for, the palpably erotic energies unleashed in the crisis with Raymon. Naomi Schor is of course right to insist that it cannot "be ascertained whether Indiana is a virgin or not" at the end of the novel (in Sand *Indiana* [2008] xvii)—that is, whether her relationship with Ralph is a sexual one. And yet most readers will have a "feeling" in this regard; and my own feeling is that it is not. The Conclusion to *Indiana* is, as Christophe Ippolito has demonstrated, ambiguous and (to many) unsatisfactory, offering at best a wounded utopia and side-stepping the very political questions that had elsewhere seemed to be the novel's *raison d'être*. The political "problem" of sex is, I would argue, precisely subject to this odd suspension in the Conclusion: the novel has thought about it, but finding no satisfactory solutions, has allowed the heroine to secede from the realm of the erotic. On this showing, the novel would end

the way it does because there is simply nothing to be done, anticipating some of the more pessimistic moments of Dworkin—such as when she speculates in *Intercourse* that if "male-dominant gender hierarchy [...] seems immune to reform by reasoned or visionary argument [...] this may be because intercourse itself is immune to reform" (174). Lélia, too, will close her harangue to her novices by exhorting them to remain forever celibate in their convent—the equivalent, perhaps, of political lesbianism, that "nouveau cloître" ("new cloister") in Irigaray's cautionary words (31), that was the most extreme conclusion of radical feminism.

As Leslie Rabine has suggested, this impasse is arguably made inevitable by an aspect of the novel's deep conceptual structure (12-13). Part of what Indiana has acquired through her childhood exposure to the spectacle of slavery is, the narrator tells us, "une volonté de fer, une force de résistance incalculable" ("a will of iron and an incalculable strength of resistance" [88/51]). Indiana's charisma as a heroine appears based on this rhetoric of inner resistance: not unlike Mozart's Don Giovanni, whose heart remains *fermo* as he takes his stone adversary's hand, Indiana is "roide et hautaine dans sa soumission" ("Indiana's submission was stiff and haughty" [207/154]); she possesses an "énergie sombre et inflexible" ("grim, inflexible strength" [264/202]); faced with social constraint, she "roidissait toutes les forces de son âme" ("stiffened all the sinews of her heart" [272/209]). It is difficult not to read this kind of language as phallicizing. While Bernard in *Mauprat* must Edmée as "un jeune homme" in order to accept her as a subject, and while Lélia will be explicitly presented as a "phallic woman" (Harkness 127-8), the earlier novel appears to identify *subjectivity itself*—or at least the robustly autonomous subjecthood it admires—with virility. This may not be Sand's problem alone, moreover. In an epochal essay that begins as a response to MacKinnon and Dworkin, Leo Bersani contends that our cultures' highly phallic conception of the autonomous, coherent ego must necessarily make the act of sexual penetration appear as a scene of domination, in which the penetrated is degraded while the penetrator experiences a delusional "self-hyperbole" and "psychic tumescence"—

delusional because in reality sex done right *shatters* the coherence and mastery of the self (24). "Sex-negativity," then, far from posing a threat to what Dworkin also calls "tumescence," might in fact be the symptom of a phallic culture, and of a piece with straight men's historic contempt for women and gay men. As Bersani wryly puts it in starting his essay: "There is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it"—including men (3). Donna Haraway makes a similar point from a more obviously feminist angle when she reproaches MacKinnon for constructing woman as "a non-subject, a non-being," and for developing a "theory of consciousness that enforces what can count as 'women's' experience—anything that names sexual violation" (159). At issue here is not a simple accusation of biological essentialism (the classic reproach to radical feminism of this type), but rather a critique of an *already gendered conception of "proper" subjecthood*. The extent to which such a conception is at work in the formation of antisex ethical intuitions is perhaps underappreciated, and the presence of this effect in *Indiana* gives a sense of how longstanding it might be within (and beyond) feminist thought.

Conclusion

I am not the first to note these tensions. "Sand is exemplarily feminist," writes Schor, "because of her contradictions and not despite them," for "feminism" might be precisely "the nodal point where dissatisfactions with contemporary society and the place it assigns women [...] clash and intertwine" (*George Sand* 75-6). If there is "hope" to be found in a novel that inhabits this zone of contradiction, of the insolubly problematic, it is of an odd sort. During her enforced exile with her husband back on the Ile Bourbon, Indiana writes Raymon a letter in which she rails against the "pouvoir des hommes" ("power of men") that keeps her subjugated. If she heeded the inner voice of conscience, she insists, she would cut herself off from the world of men completely: "je fuirais au désert, je saurais me passer d'aide, de protection et d'amour" ("I would flee to the desert, I would be able to do without help, protection, and love"). But this political self-exile is

a fantasy, she accepts, because "hélas! l'homme ne peut se passer de son semblable" ("alas! Man cannot do without his own kind" [250/191]). Clearly, this phrase is not meant to be "hopeful"; the sentiment it expresses is explicitly one of regret. It's the *phrasing,* in this context, that fascinates me. At the origin of the sentence is another biblical allusion—this time to Genesis 2.18, in which God announces His intention to create a helpmate for Adam. Yet the keywords upon which that allusion rests (*l'homme* and *semblable*) have undergone an important semantic shift in this rewriting, and the axiomatic rhetorical posture distances the sentence from its scriptural source: "man," within which category the sense requires that Indiana include *herself*, cannot do without "his likeness," by which in context she appears to mean—men, or some man. Having denounced the tyranny of men over women and the apparent impossibility of their cohabitation, Indiana resorts, first, to the so-called masculine-neuter to speak of men and women at once; and second, to a vision of men and women as fundamentally *alike*. She resorts, that is, once again to an eighteenth-century inheritance: the language of Enlightenment universalism.

It would be easy to dismiss this as a moment where Sand is irredeemably "of her time"—or perhaps behind her times, clinging to an Enlightenment promise of "equality" that her own novel, among others, has plainly debunked. In any case, this kind of thinking can surely be of no use to *us*, since as Schor puts it, "the dismantling of the universal is widely considered one of the founding gestures of twentieth-century thought" (*Bad Objects* 3). The deconstruction of the Enlightenment conception of a singular human "individual"—indeed, the exposure of how that conception has worked to obscure and perpetuate oppression—has been central to virtually all feminist thought since the mid-twentieth century. Yet what analyses such as those of Schor, Joan Wallach Scott, and Carole Pateman tend to show is not simply the limitations of the universalist conception of the human, but also the irritating indispensability of that concept for any philosophical project that aims at justice, including feminism. French feminism, as the title of Schor's essay has it, *is* a universalism—even when it seems not to be; hence Sand, who as we've

seen is for Schor precisely one of those feminists who "subscribe to the notion of an inalienable female difference," may be found to insist on a *resemblance* between men and women even at this, the most seemingly paradoxical of moments to do so. Besides, the grain of hope in the concession that "l'homme ne peut se passer de son semblable" lies not simply in the notion of men's and women's similarity, but also in the recognition of a shared and fundamental non-self-sufficiency of men and women *as human beings*. Sand's phrasing, though hampered by grammatical gender, allows for the coming together of men and women *despite* gender, without prescribing it *because* of gender—this isn't simply an avatar of the nineteenth-century "complementarity" theory of sexual difference. If we reread the whole drama of the novel in the light of the insight contained in this sentence, we might even find something akin to Judith Butler's contention that "when we speak about *my* sexuality, or *my* gender [...] neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are to be understood as *modes of being dispossessed*, ways of being for another or, indeed, by virtue of another" (19). *Indiana* is, to be sure, a novel about autonomy; but it's also a novel about autonomy's limits.

In light of this, we might finally revisit Sténio's and Lélia's angel. The angel, we recall, loves Don Juan, wishes to save him; descends to earth and takes on human and female form in order to marry him; but—Lélia adds—fails to convert him, and lives out its mortal days as an unhappy wife. The conception of human nature implied in the fable is, I'd like to suggest, a subtly optimistic one. Angels, it is often said, are sexless, but in this case that word should be understood to mean that the angel is not *sexed*: that is, it has no biological or bodily sex, no gender, it belongs, it would seem, to an undifferentiated species. But it is not sexless in the other sense—at least, not if its mad love, its desperate, transformative devotion to Don Juan, its willingness to forsake everything to be with him, is anything to judge by. In this nostalgic image of a lost angelic human nature, Sand imagines a prior, fundamental human "individual" unlike that of the Enlightenment tradition in that it is truly ungendered; *and* unlike that of the Platonic

myth in that it is primordially incomplete, always already marked by an unspecified dependency on the other. To aspire towards recovering our angelic natures would not, then, mean to renounce sex, but rather to imagine a future without gender.

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