

Sand and Genlis : *Je(ux) de miroirs, questions de genre(s) littéraire(s), sexuel(s)*

Tim FARRANT, Pembroke College, University of Oxford

tim.farrant@pmb.ox.ac.uk

In the *Histoire de ma vie*, Sand describes the sometimes unorthodox effect of her childhood reading and her upbringing on her convictions and practice as a writer. Taking her comments on one of her ‘premières lectures’, Genlis’s *Les Battuécas*¹, as a starting-point, this article will explore the mirrorings and unexpected reversals brought about by the interaction between Genlis’s writing and Sand’s recollections of its impact on her infancy. Sand’s *histoire* will be examined in the light of her reading of Genlis as a kind of ‘contextualized’ or ‘relativized’ pedagogy, exploring the importance of this first encounter with Genlis for Sand. It is a mirroring between two writers with very different politics; but also a mirroring of gender roles, in terms of a tension, for Sand, between male and female models of the poet/writer. It will suggest, finally, that the real value of literature for Sand in relation to this *consoeur* is as a kind of mirroring of the ‘je’ or ‘I’ (what kind of writer should ‘I’, Aurore Dupin, become, defined by, but also against, my elder and ideological opposite, Genlis?); but also as a kind of morality in action which achieves its truest and most potent value only in retrospect, and in the context of other writers, seen from the vantage-point of Sand in middle age, writing, and publishing, in the early Second Empire².

¹ Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Les Battuécas*, Paris, Maradan, 1816, 2 duodecimo vols.

² Begun in April 1847, and undertaken in earnest in October, Sand interrupted writing the *Histoire* when news of the 1848 February Revolution reached her, taking the work up again at Nohant on 1 June. Girardin acquired the rights to for *La Presse* in August 1854, where it was serialized between 5 October and 17 August 1855, appearing in book form in 1855-56 (Paris, Victor Lecou & Cadot, 20 vols) and 1856 (Paris, Michel Lévy, 10 vols). This version is reproduced in the edition by Denise Brahimi, Anna Szabó *et al.*, (Saint-Cyr sur Loire, Christian Pirot, 1993-2003), but this paper references *Histoire de ma vie*, ed. Damien Zanone (Paris, Garnier Flammarion, 2001, 2 vols), designated as *HMV* followed by part and chapter thus: Pt. I ch xvi, and/or, where appropriate, volume and page no: *HMV* I 249). The *Histoire de ma vie* was conceived and written alongside both some of Sand’s most enduring works, notably *François le Champi* and *La Petite Fadette* (1847 and 1849 respectively), and Chateaubriand’s *Mémoires d’outre-tombe* which, from October 1848, had preceded it in *La Presse*. Sand’s most prominent memorialist *âme soeur* was thus an ideological (*con*)frère ennemi; but her *Histoire* could also be read against the recurrent (re) publication, through the nineteenth century, of the *Mémoires* and other works of her mirror-sister Genlis.

One of the striking features of the *Histoire* is that although it does not mention *premières lectures* until we might expect them, when she was perhaps five or six years old, after ‘*premiers souvenirs*’ and ‘*premières prières*’: *Histoire de ma vie*, Pt. I ch. xi. Although the *lectures* are as we might expect – *contes de fées*, *mythologies*, and perhaps less expectedly, Madame de Genlis’s *Les Battuécas* (Pt. I chs xv, xvi), these *lectures* are approached through a series of post-rationalized, intertextual references: to her own *Lettres d’un voyageur*, to Rousseau’s *Confessions* or Schiller, for example. Her reading is thus approached retrospectively, contextualized, not just in terms of literature, but also of all the other life-experiences she describes. So, an opening reference to Rousseau, which serves to differentiate Sand’s autobiographical enterprise from his vanity, also implicitly situates Sand as a writer who is *like* Rousseau, in pitting herself against the frivolity, complacency and injustice of her time:

‘Ce qui nous intéresse, c’est le spectacle de cette âme inspirée aux prises avec les erreurs de son temps et les obstacles de sa destinée philosophique, c’est le combat de ce génie épris d’austérité, d’indépendance et de dignité, avec le milieu frivole, incrédule ou corrompu qu’il traversait’ (*HMV* I 52).

But this that declaration could, perhaps should, be taken as applying primarily to Sand herself. For her position of *difference*, like Rousseau’s, if it is not explicitly related by Sand to herself, is that of the critical (if not self-accusing) outsider, the liberal, perhaps even ‘d’avant la Révolution’ (*HMV* Pt. I ch. iii) who is reviewing (critically, retrospectively, with hindsight) her *premières lectures*. And Sand’s presentation of Genlis in the *Histoire* could also be seen as an exploitation of Genlis for Sand’s presentation of herself. *Je(ux) de miroirs* indeed.

A word, first, about Madame de Genlis. Despite their opposed political positions, which might lead us to expect first to encounter Staël, it is nonetheless unsurprising that Genlis should be the first woman writer Sand mentions in her *Histoire*, for Sand’s business at this point is self-definition against, and in contrast to others, ideological and sexual, and Genlis (1746-1830), was arguably the most important woman writer of her age. Married (like Sand) young, but to an influential Royalist aristocrat, Genlis’s output is extraordinary, involving approaching 150 volumes, in a dizzying range of genres³. The Bodleian libraries alone contain no fewer than 269 items by Genlis, most dating from her lifetime but many acquired by posterity, a high proportion

³ See, notably, Alice Laborde, *Madame de Genlis*, Paris, Nizet, 1966; Gabriel de Broglie, *Madame de Genlis*, Paris, Librairie Académique Perrin, 1985; Gillian Dow, ‘Reviewing Madame de Genlis: ‘Gouverneur’, ‘Mère de l’Eglise’, ‘Hypocrite’, D. Phil., Oxford, 2004.

in contemporary English translation, some with surprising bedfellows⁴ – an index of her enduring interest and significance – and, intriguingly, published all over the British Isles (Perth and Newcastle, for example, as well as London). Genlis also published a *Manuel du voyageur en six langues*, and her volumes show remarkable persistence into the nineteenth century. Sand, in the *Histoire*, sets out to be different from Chateaubriand, but also, silently, from Genlis’s *Mémoires inédits sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution française*⁵. Genlis’s husband intervened frequently in contemporary political debate⁶, whilst his wife engaged in pedagogic history⁷ and pedagogic theatre.⁸ Genlis also anticipated, so to speak, the newspaper before the newspaper, envisaging, in 1813, *La Feuille des gens du monde, ou Journal imaginaire*,⁹ thus turning first-person narrative into celebrity narrative. Her range of *contes et nouvelles* is extraordinary, from *Mademoiselle de Lafayette ; suivie de nouvelles* to *Nouveaux contes moraux et nouvelles historiques*.¹⁰

The most striking feature of Sand’s encounter with Genlis in the *Histoire* is its vividly imaginative character. The chapter in which it appears (Pt II ch. v) begins with an account of Sand’s playing with her siblings Hippolyte and Ursule over an imaginary river, drawn in chalk in their room, before moving to her attempts at learning to write and record her thoughts in personal, private-language hieroglyphs, and then, finally, to her discovery of the fairy-tales of Mme d’Aulnoy (mentioned first) and Perrault ‘dans une vieille édition qui a fait mes délices pendant cinq ou six années’. [...] *L’Oiseau bleu, Le Petit Poucet ... La Souris bienfaisante !* je ne les ai jamais relus depuis, mais je pourrais tous les raconter d’un bout à l’autre, et je ne crois pas que

⁴ For example, Mary Wollstonecraft et al., *The Female Reader; or miscellaneous pieces in Prose and Verse, selected from the Best Writers, and Disposed under proper Heads, for the Improvement of Young Women*, London, J. Johnson, 1789. Noteworthy both for the variety of bedfellows (including Shakespeare and Cowper) and the modernity of its title.

⁵ *Mémoires inédits de Madame la Comtesse de Genlis sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution française depuis 1756 jusqu’à nos jours*, Paris, Ladvoat, 1825, 10 vol. ‘Je m’applaudis d’être le premier auteur qui ait donné l’utile exemple de publier ses mémoires de son vivant’, writes Genlis in her preface (p. 7).

⁶ Charles Alexis P. Marquis de Sillery. *Opinion (...) relative au projet de décret propose par le comité de révision, sur le droit politique des princes de la famille royale*.

⁷ *Les Annales de la vertu, ou, Histoire universelle, iconographique et littéraire: à l’usage des artistes et des jeunes littératures, et pour servir à l’éducation de la jeunesse*, Paris, Maradan, 1806, 5 vols.

⁸ Stéphanie-Félicité Bruart, Comtesse de Genlis, *The Theatre of Education*, 1813 | Paris; et Londres Chez Colburn, libraire ..., à Londres Imprimé par J. Dennett ... | [2], viii, 338, [2] p., 4 folded p. of plates : music ; 8°.

⁹ *La Feuille des gens du monde, ou Journal imaginaire*, Paris, Colburn, and London, Dennett, 1813.

¹⁰ Paris, Didier, 1843.

rien puisse être comparé, dans la suite de notre vie intellectuelle, à ces premières jouissances de l'imagination'. (HMV I 238).

Imagination is thus, for Sand (as, one might infer, for Genlis), the founding feature of human as of literary existence, 'la reine des facultés', to appropriate Baudelaire's phrase¹¹. Sand will in due course turn, a few pages later, at the beginning of the next chapter (Pt II ch. xvi), for the first time explicitly to Mme de Genlis and to *Les Battuécas*, again via poetry and the imagination. The chapter begins with Sand's infancy, her undeveloped physicality ('Ma petite cervelle'), and ends with imagination and the transcendent:

'Ma petite cervelle était toujours pleine de poésie, et mes lectures me tenaient en haleine sous ce rapport. Berquin, ce vieux ami des enfants qu'on a, je crois, trop vanté, ne me passionna jamais. Quelquefois ma mère nous lisait tout haut des fragments de roman de madame de Genlis, cette bonne dame qu'on a trop oubliée, et qui avait un talent réel. Qu'importe aujourd'hui ses préjugés, sa demi-morale souvent fautive, et son caractère personnel, qui ne semble pas avoir eu de de parti pris entre l'ancien monde et le nouveau ? Relativement au cadre qui a pesé sur elle, elle a peint aussi largement que possible. Son véritable naturel a dû être excellent, et il y a certain roman d'elle qui ouvre vers l'avenir des perspectives très larges. Son imagination est restée fraîche sous les glaces de l'âge, et dans les détails elle est véritablement artiste et poète.' (HMV I 247)

Genlis is, in fact, the unstated missing link in Sand's account of her developing imagination. In the preceding chapter (Pt ii ch. xv) this account runs uninterruptedly from 'je ne crois pas que rien puisse être comparé, dans la suite de notre vie intellectuelle, à ces premières jouissances de l'imagination' to 'Je commençais aussi à lire moi-même mon *Abrégé de mythologie grecque*, et j'y prenais grand plaisir ; car cela ressemble aux contes de fées par certains côtés' (HMV I 238).

What, and whose, might this *Abrégé* be? There was no shortage of contemporary or relatively recently-published works with this title during Sand's childhood: Choffin's *Dictionnaire abrégé de la Fable*, for example, or Barba's *Dictionnaire abrégé des mythologies*¹² both present mythology in the fairytale way Sand evokes. Both are, however, precisely, dictionaries, of sizeable

¹¹ *Salon de 1859*, in Charles-Pierre Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, Paris, Gallimard-Pléiade, 1975, 2 vols, II 620.

¹² David-Étienne Choffin, *Dictionnaire abrégé de la fable, ou de la Mythologie. Pour l'intelligence des poètes, de l'Histoire Fabuleuse, des Tableaux, des Monuments historiques, des termes d'Astronomie, & de l'excellent Poème Epique intitulé Les Aventures de Télémaque. Servant de supplément aux Amusements philologiques. Troisième édition*. Halle, A la maison des Orphelins, 1767; Jean-Nicolas Barba, *Dictionnaire abrégé des mythologies, de tous les personnes policés ou barbares, tant anciens que modernes*, Paris, Barba, n.d. (c.1805-1830), 2 vols in 1.

dimensions: octavo volumes of 440 and 381 pages respectively, devoid of illustrations, like Chompré's *Dictionnaire abrégé de la fable*, 432 pages long in its twelfth, 1775 edition¹³, or F.-J.-M. Noël's even more voluminous 647 page 1805 *Abrégé de la mythologie universelle*¹⁴; thus hardly likely to have been readily manipulated by the infant Sand or her nurse.

The most likely candidate for authorship of the book Sand calls an *Abrégé* is, in fact, Genlis herself. Her *Arabesques mythologiques, ou les attributs de toutes les divinités de la fable* was published in 1810, when Sand was exactly the age (six) at which she describes her encounter with mythology in the *Histoire*. It is true that Genlis's work is called *Arabesque*, not *abrégé*; indeed, Genlis's *Avertissement* explicitly declares that it is not an *Abrégé*, for such works are variously insufficiently *bienséant*, too scholarly, or in the case of Noël's too indecent for young people¹⁵. But its girth, at xxx/166 octavo pages considerably slimmer than any of the works explicitly entitled *Abrégés*, and its aspect, ornamented by 54 hand-coloured illustrations of the *divinités*, all but one of them by Genlis, make it much more child-user friendly, as does the assumption in the *Avertissement*, despite its warning about adult content, that the book will be read, or given, by mothers to their children. And its view that the origin of myth is history anticipates Sand's position in the *Légendes rustiques*, some half-a-century later, that 'l'imagination populaire (...) n'est jamais qu'une forme efface ou altérée de quelque souvenir collectif'¹⁶. All these factors, together with the surprisingly admiring mention of Genlis elsewhere in the *Histoire*, point to the work Sand refers to as her *Abrégé* in fact being Genlis's *Arabesque*.

¹³ Paris, Saillant & Nyon; Veuve Dessaint, 1775.

¹⁴ An 1807 edn of Chompré (Pierre Chompré, *Dictionnaire abrégé de la fable* (Paris, Imprimerie de Moronval, 1807; 1st edn. 1727) and François-Joseph-Michel Noël, *Abrégé de la mythologie universelle* (Paris, Le Normant, 1805) are proposed as sources by Isabelle Naginski and George Lubin respectively: I. Naginski, *George Sand Mythographe* (Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2007), p. 27 n.1.

¹⁵ Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Arabesques mythologiques, ou Les Attributs de toutes les divinités de la Fable; En 54 planches gravées en couleurs d'après les dessins coloriés de Madame de Genlis. Le texte contenant l'histoire des faux Dieux, de leur culte, le détail des cérémonies religieuses, etc. précédé d'un discours sur la Mythologie en général et particulièrement sur l'influence que dut avoir le paganisme sur le caractère, les mœurs et la littérature des anciens Grecs et des Romains Arabesques mythologiques, ou les attributs de toutes les divinités de la fable [...]* Paris, Charles Barrois, 1810, p. ii-iv. One of the striking features of Genlis's illustrations for her *Arabesques* is that the name of each divinity appears with its mirror-image, as if placed on a reflective surface.

¹⁶ Sand's *Légendes* share with Genlis the conviction that the origins of the 'poème sans nom de la fabulosité ou merveilleosité universelle (...) remontent à l'apparition de l'homme sur la terre', but differ from Genlis in their emphasis on the collective, rather than the outstanding hero: *Légendes rustiques*. Dessins de Maurice Sand Texte de George Sand. Paris, A. Morel et Cie, Libraires-Éditeurs, 1858, *Avant-propos*, p. v.).

But so does another, more ominous trait. Fundamental to Genlis's *Arabesques* is her insistence on the duality of mythology. Dismissing the common modern misconception of mythology's joviality, Genlis stresses its duality, composed perhaps of a combination of the modern, joyous, vision of mythology, and a more ancient one of pain which is maybe more authentic, embodying the predominance of darker, more sinister traits:

Il est étonnant qu'on ait tant loué *les riantes fictions* de la Mythologie [...] à l'exception de quatre ou cinq pages tout est triste, lugubre, effrayant ou tragique dans ce volumineux recueil [...] les Fables de la Mythologie n'offrent que des crimes atroces ou des malheurs. [...] On répète que la Mythologie vivifie les campagnes; mais elle n'y prodigue les demi-Dieux et les fictions que pour les attrister¹⁷, pour répandre sur tous les objets la profonde mélancolie du génie grec et romain¹⁸.

This notion of duality, that myths are preponderantly melancholy, even tragic, rather than joyous, is central for Genlis, and can perhaps, in another mirroring, help explain the duality which accompanies the mythological figures the young Sand will see in her bedroom, as recounted in the *Histoire de ma vie*. Sand's *Histoire* shows this duality, and cruelty, by reference to mythology, and cruelty, but Genlis's *Arabesque* is buried under a double displacement – or rather, latent under one displacement and revealed by another. The first is that the word and supposed title *Abrégé* designates less Genlis's work than the process of assimilation it brought about for its infant reader Sand, in digesting and reducing Greek mythology and making it like fairy-tales, at least 'par certains côtés'. It is a miniaturization which will have a decisive effect on Sand's reading, and reception, of fiction: she will later write (*HMV* II 444: 'Vers l'âge de onze ans, je lus *L'Iliade* et *La Jérusalem délivrée*. Ah! que je les trouvais courtes, que je fus contrariée d'arriver à la dernière page'. But the second displacement is more like a repression. Sand was – is? – clearly uneasy about the aspects of Greek myth which were not quite (or at all) like fairy-tales: 'il y en avait d'autres qui me plaisaient moins; dans tous ces mythes, les symboles sont sanglants au milieu de leur poésie, et j'aimais mieux les dénouements heureux de mes contes'. Pourtant les nymphes, les zéphirs, l'écho, toutes ces personifications des riants mystères de la nature tournaient mon cerveau vers la poésie, et je n'étais pas encore assez esprit fort pour ne pas espérer parfois de surprendre les nappées et les dryades dans les bois et dans les prairies. (*HMV* I 238).

¹⁷ Genlis notes: 'Ou pour les souiller par des demi-Dieux infâmes, Pan, les Satyres, les Faunes, etc., et par la licence des orgies, des lupercals et des fêtes de Flore': *Arabesques mythologiques*, p. xv.

¹⁸ *Arabesques mythologiques*, p. xiii- xv.

The repression of the violent aspect of the arabesque and of myth returns not decades later, in woods and meadows, but instantaneously, in the very next paragraph, which describes the wallcovering in her infant bedchamber. The mice run unhindered behind it, ‘et il se passait, le soir, derrière le papier, des course échevelées, des grattements furtifs et de petits cris fort mystérieux’ (HMV I 238).

This miniature symphony is the accompaniment for the pandemonium depicted on the paper, and which is the real agent, as well as expression, of the repression of the arabesque. The arabesque, as well as being the repressed title of Genlis’s *Arabesques*, is also the decoration of the wallcovering in the bedroom: the mice scratching are not ‘ce qui m’occupait le plus’: ‘C’était la bordure et les ornements qui entouraient les panneaux. Cette bordure était large d’un pied et représentaient une guirlande de feuilles de vigne s’ouvrant par intervalles pour encadrer une suite de médaillons où l’on voyait rire, boire et danser des Silènes et des bacchantes’, and in the biggest medallion is of Flora, beautiful, waving a flower-garland, representing Spring and greeting her in the morning, and in the other, the daytime, serious one, wearing a crown of vines and holding a Thyrsus. The two figures seem to represent stability, serenity, joviality on the one hand, and on the other, threat. – ‘ils offraient le contraste bien tranche de la gaieté et de la tristesse, de la bienveillance et de la sévérité’ (HMV I 239). ‘Je regardais la bacchante avec étonnement, j’avais lu l’histoire d’Orphée déchirée par ces cruelles et le soir, quant la lumière vacillante éclairait le bras étendu et le thyrses, je croyais voir la tête du divin chantre au bout d’un javelot’. But these opposites are not quite as starkly contrasted as might at first seem to be the case, as Genlis explains:

Les florales, ou fêtes de Flore, furent instituées ou du moins renouvelées pour honorer la mémoire d’une courtisane, nommée Acca Laurentia, qui institua le peuple Romain héritier de tous ses biens. Le peuple, par reconnaissance, fit l’apothéose de sa bienfaitrice, lui donna le nom de *Flore*, et célébra en son honneur des fêtes dignes d’une telle divinité. Des courtisanes toutes nues y formoient des danses infâmes, et c’est ainsi que toutes les époques les plus intéressantes de l’année devinrent chez les Grecs et chez les Romains celles des excès les plus licencieux. La renaissance des fleurs et des fruits, les vendanges célébrées dans les fêtes champêtres, les florales, les lupercales les orgies, ne furent jamais, parmi les Païens, qu’une honteuse profanation des bienfaits les plus précieux de la nature¹⁹.

¹⁹ Genlis, *Arabesques*, p. 128. Flora –goddess of fertility – crowns Vertumnus and Pomona in Gaitte’s engraving on the facing page.

The wallpaper is thus the emblem of a double repression - of the memory of Genlis's *Arabesques*, and of the troubling mythology they embody, transmuted by Sand's memory into a simple *Abregé de mythologie*; which mythology then returns with a vengeance to, literally, surround her, on the walls of her room. For, when her mother rearranges the chamber so that it is the Bacchante which now faces her, the rearrangement causes a crisis, and the scrambling of the mice (already suggestive of some lower urge or form of life) seem as nothing compared to the nightmare which ensues:

Je tournais le dos à ma nymphe bien-aimée pour ne voir que la ménade redoutable (...) il me semblait que cette diablesse me regardait obstinément et me menaçait de son bras immobile, je mis ma tête sous mes couvertures pour ne pas la voir en m'endormant. Ce fut inutile, au milieu de la nuit elle se détacha du médaillon, se glissa le long de la porte, devint aussi grande qu'une *personne naturelle*, comme disent les enfants, et, marchant à la porte d'en face, elle essaya d'arracher la jolie nymphe de son médaillon. Celle-ci poussait des cris déchirants; mais la bacchante ne s'en souciait pas. Elle tourmenta et déchira le papier jusqu'à ce que la nymphe s'en détacha et s'enfuit au milieu de la chambre.... la bacchante furieuse vint vers moi et nous perça toutes deux de son thyrses, qui était devenu une lance acérée, et dont chaque coup était pour moi une blessure dont je sentais la douleur (...) Le réel et le chimérique étaient simultanément devant mes yeux, et je vis distinctement la bacchante s'atténuer, s'éloigner, à mesure que ma mère s'approchait d'elle.

And in the remainder of the passage, the two, the real and the *chimérique* continue to be conflated, the threat only disappearing in daytime to reappear at night, with Sand stating that she was nearly eight before she could contemplate the bacchante before going back to sleep.

Whatever its basis in fact the episode is redolent of texts postdating Sand's actual age at the recounted time – the ghoulish revenante of Scott's *Tapestried Chamber* (1828) or the animated wallpaper of Gautier's *La Cafetière* (1831). As Sand reminds us, 'il n'y a rien de moins réel que ce qui paraît le plus vrai dans un ouvrage d'art', *HMV I 243*). This is an absolutely fundamental scene – as fundamental as Proust's in many ways comparable *scène du coucher* at the beginning of *Combray* (which, of course, goes on to evoke *François le champi*). In the womb-like space of Aurore's bedroom emerges her destiny as an artist. It is not just in fairy-tales or mythology: the writing is literally on the wall. The figures of springtime and the *bacchante* embody, perhaps, Apollonian and Dionysiac impulses, but more essentially, stasis and progress, female and male. The reassuring presence of the mother who, as for Marcel, returns to put everything right, embodies the expected, established female role; whilst the *bacchante* suggests masculinity, progress, enshrined in the piercing *thyrses* which puts the female nymph to death (*HMV I 240*). The *bacchante*

is, of course, associated with tearing Orpheus to death when he looks back at Eurydice ('Je regardais la bacchante avec étonnement, j'avais lu l'histoire d'Orphée déchirée par ces cruelles', *HMV* I 239); when Sand evokes her, there is both perhaps a curious, but telling, conflation of bacchante and Medusa,²⁰ but also a more essential question of sexual and poetic identity: does Aurore identify, unthinkable, with the bacchante, putting Orpheus (the male writer/poet) to death? Or does she, equally unthinkable but more plausibly, identify with Orpheus, knowing she must look forward, look the *bacchante* and the Medusa in the eye. The scene thus deals, like the *Histoire de ma vie* itself, with something fundamental: with the realization of an ambition, of wanting, needing to become a writer (to reconfigure Genette on Proust, 'Aurore devient écrivain'²¹); and the simultaneous fear of expression, of taking the role of the male poet, of being turned to stone; it's not just about Sand and her *consoeurs*, but about what being a *femme auteur* might imply. It thus absolutely strikes at the heart of the question of writerly identity, of what being male or female might involve; for it is undoubtedly in the *Histoire* that Aurore comes out, not solely as a writer, but as a *woman* writer.

It is in this context, then, that Aurore, and the reader, approach Genlis, who is associated with the male/female opposition just as much as is Sand. Genlis's early history, as Lubin noted, was very like Sand's, despite Genlis's very different, reactionary catholic, monarchist, politics, (*HMV* I 622 nn. 84, 85, 86²²), and gender-questioning: she was the first female 'gouverneur des enfants de France' (and thereby the infant future Louis-Philippe's tutor) and, by dint of her support for Catholicism, reputed as a 'mère de l'église'). The presentation of Genlis and *Les Battuécas* in *HMV* Pt II ch. xvi enshrines this male/female opposition: Genlis is encountered via the sidelining of Berquin, the major male writer for children; it is this sidelining which clears the way for Berquin and for Sand: 'Ma petite cervelle était toujours pleine de poésie (...) Berquin, ce vieux ami des

²⁰ Evoked in Genlis's *Arabesques*: envy is a Medusa-like figure, 'coiffée de couleuvres et portant un serpent qui lui ronge le sein'; 'Le corail fut produit par le sang de la tête coupée de Méduse, et l'ambre par les larmes des sœurs de Phaëton (...) Toutes ces idées sont profondément mélancoliques' (p. x, xvi, xvii). And Orpheus? This interpretation may seem confused, but, as Sand reminds us, 'L'homme est si peu logique, si rempli de contrastes et de disparates dans la réalité, que la peinture d'un homme réel [i.e. real person, male or female] serait impossible et tout à fait insoutenable dans un ouvrage d'art': *HMV* I 242).

²¹ And, like Marcel in *Combray*, 'renonce aux lettres': *HMV* Pt III ch. viii.

²² 'En s'appuyant sur les *Mémoires* de Mme de Genlis (1825), G. Lubin a l'idée, en note à son édition d'*Histoire de ma vie*, d'un intéressant rapprochement entre les deux femmes auteurs: "sa jeunesse avide d'apprendre préfigure un peu celle de George Sand: jeune mariée, et vivant à la campagne elle étudie la harpe, joue la comédie, lit, écrit, apprend l'ostéologie, soigne les paysans, et monte à cheval. C'est presque l'emploi du temps de la jeune Aurore Dupin en 1821"'.

enfants, ne me passionna jamais. Quelquefois ma mère nous lisait tout haut des fragments de roman de madame de Genlis, cette bonne dame qu'on a trop oubliée, et qui avait un talent réel' (*HMV I* 247).

It is through the double perspective of the 'bonne dame...qui avait un talent réel' that Sand approaches Genlis. Genlis's strangely mixed, contradictory (or merely ambivalent) character, 'qui ne semble pas avoir eu de parti pris entre l'ancien monde et le nouveau', of 'préjugés, demi-morale souvent fausse' on the one hand, and 'naturel qui a dû être excellent', producing 'certain roman ... qui ouvre vers l'avenir des perspectives très larges' mirrors Sand's own. *Les Battuécas* is the 'certain roman' – the unknown novel by Genlis, but also, 'certain', the *clinching* novel by Genlis, the one which definitively reveals her merits, *Les Battuécas*. Described by Sand as 'éminemment socialiste', it relates the story of a small tribe, the Battuécas, which cuts itself off from society for several centuries, and from which one man one day discovers the path which leads to the outside world. Like Voltaire's *Ingénu* (explicitly mentioned) or Graffigny's *Péruvienne* (which is not), the young man is amazed to discover in civilized society great luxury but also great suffering and inequality, and, like the *Ingénu*, falls foul of convention – threatened for taking bread from a baker to give to a poor man, astonished that the flowers in the hair of a woman who seduces him are artificial.

The book has for Sand a magic resonance, like Proust's madeleine (and, like the Magdalen herself, a comparable moral poignancy): 'C'est une oeuvre chaste, sincère, sans amertume, et dont les détails ont une poésie infinie. Je crois que le jeune Battuécas retourne à sa vallée et recouvre sa vertu sans retrouver son Bonheur, car il a bu à la coupe empoisonnée du siècle. Je ne voudrais pas relire ce livre, je craindrais de ne plus le trouver aussi charmant qu'il m'a semblé'. (*HMV I* 249).

More essential, however, is the ambivalence of Genlis's, and in her slipstream, Sand's reaction to the *Battuécas*. The words just quoted, which open chapter *HMV* Book II ch XVI describing Genlis's ambiguity and conflictedness, are framed by those which close the passage on *Les Battuécas*. Genlis, Sand concludes, is to some extent justified in her defence of civilization, although she finds the arguments Genlis gives to the Battuécas's mentor weak in comparison to his social criticisms; and she initially believes that it is to the 'naïfs raisonnements du Battuécas'

and to Mme de Genlis, ‘l’institutrice et l’amie de Louis-Philippe, que je dois mes premiers instincts socialistes et démocratiques’ (HMV I 249)²³.

Another *je(u) du miroir*. But then Sand changes her mind. It is to her own, Sand’s, personal constitution, as much, if not more, than to the Battuécas, that her opinions and views are to be ascribed:

Mais je me trompe, je les dois [mes premiers instincts socialistes] à la singularité de ma position, à ma naissance à cheval pour ainsi dire sur deux classes, à mon amour pour ma mère, contrarié et brisé par des préjugés qui m’ont fait souffrir avant que je pusse les comprendre. Je les dois aussi à mon éducation, qui fut tour à tour philosophique et religieuse, et à tous les contrastes que ma propre vie m’a présentés dès l’âge le plus tendre. J’ai donc été démocrate non seulement par le sang que ma mère m’a mis dans les veines, mais par les luttes que ce sang du peuple a soulevées dans mon Cœur et dans mon existence, et si les livres ont fait de l’effet sur moi, c’est que leurs tendances ne faisaient que confirmer et consacrer les miennes.

Les Battuécas thus give Sand a moment of recognition and self-affirmation, via Genlis but also by dint of (and to some extent, despite) the women in her family - not quite a Pauline conversion, but something approaching, nonetheless. Genlis and her novel become the lens through which Sand will define herself as a writer. But it is also used as the screen which will redefine *Genlis* as a writer, and supplant the reputation which she still had, even in the sixties, as the author of the *Veillées du château*²⁴. In the subsequent part of the chapter, the *Veillées* (and, once more, Berquin) are elided behind the much more suggestive and progressive *Battuécas*, literally screened as Sand drifts into a reverie contemplating the points of light made by the fire shining through her mother’s fireside screen:

‘Je voyais un peu le feu à travers ce taffetas usé, et il y produisait de petites étoiles dont j’augmentais le rayonnement en clignant des yeux. Alors peu à peu je perdais le sens des phrases que lisait ma mère (...) Des images se dessinaient devant moi et venaient se fixer sur l’écran vert. C’étaient des bois, des prairies, des rivières, des villes d’une architecture bizarre et gigantesque, comme j’en vois encore en songe; des palais enchantés ... avec des milliers d’oiseaux d’azur (...) il y avait des roses vertes, noires, violettes, des roses bleues surtout. Il paraît que la rose bleue a été longtemps le rêve de Balzac.²⁵ Elle était aussi le mien

²³ For a study in relation in particular to *Indiana*, see Mary Seidman Trouille, ‘Towards a new appreciation of Madame de Genlis: the influence of *Les Battuécas* on George Sand’s political and social thought’, *French Review*, 71 (1998), p. 565-76.

²⁴ There were editions of these *Veillées* (1st edn 1784), as of many of Genlis’s other works, throughout the century, for example in 1852 (Paris, Didier), 1861 (Paris, Morizot), 1874 (Paris, Garnier Frères), 1902 (Limoges, Ardant).

²⁵ It is in *Honorine* (1843) that Balzac explicitly evokes this ideal, prefacing the novella with an epigraph from Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (‘Idéal! fleur bleue à coeur d’or, dont les racines fibreuses, mille fois plus déliées que les tresses de soie des fées, plongent au fond de notre âme pour en boire la plus pure substance!’), patterning the story with blue, white and violet, yet omitting the remainder of Gautier’s passage with its ‘fleurs

dans mon enfance, car les enfants, comme les poètes, sont amoureux de ce qui n'existe pas. (...) Enfin, tout le monde fantastique de mes contes devenait sensible, évident, et je m'y perdais avec délices' (HVM I 250-1).

We are already in the world of the Sandian novel as ideal, constructed via the downplaying of Balzac against her own imagination. This scene is another founding scene, to set against the earlier one of *bacchantes* and animated wallpaper; and unlike the wallpaper, it brings not terror, but illumination. It recalls, and who knows? is, perhaps inspired by, another moment of fireside, screen-like illumination in Hugo's poem *Le Mendiant*, (*Les Contemplations* V. ix) when the poet, like King Wenceslas, takes in a beggar from the cold, and spreads out before the fire his threadbare cloak, 'sa bure, où je voyais des constellations', as the firelight shines through.²⁶ This is a similar moment of illumination: the moment when Sand takes ownership of her imagination and subjectivity via reverie; and of her identity, and destiny, as a woman, by invoking what is effectively a hall of mirrors, the similar figures of herself, her mother, and of Genlis as politically, personally, conflicted, problematic, but creative women. Genlis becomes a substitute grandmother to set against the anti-model of her own frail, timorous, irascible, constrained grandmother, with whom the chapter ends: 'J'avais une peur invincible de devenir comme elle' (HVM I 262). Sand also, finally, switches the perspective on Genlis, eliding Genlis's *Veillées* behind what are effectively Sand's own *Veillées du château*, 'Tales of the Castle', in this memorable storytelling scene, foregrounding *Les Battuécas* as a progressive, proto-socialist novel and Genlis as the great woman writer on which Sand will model herself, a 'démocrate sans le savoir', to paraphrase Zola's comment on Balzac²⁷, via the recounting of the moment when outsiders, whether of gender, genre or ethnicity, Sand, Genlis or Battucéas, begin to come in from the cold.

trompeuses', suggesting the shadier dangers Sand hints at. (Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, ed. G. van den Bogaert (Paris, Garnier Flammarion, 1966), 234-5, cit. Tim Farrant, *Balzac's Shorter Fictions: Genesis and Genre* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, 267-8).

²⁶ Hugo's poem was first published in 1856, is dated 1854, but may have been written as early as 1846: Victor-Marie Hugo, *Les Contemplations*, ed. Léon Cellier, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 1969, p. 662.

²⁷ *La Tribune*, 31 Oct. 1869: Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand *et al.*, (Paris, Cercle du livre précieux, 1962-9), vol. X p. 912-916, 913.