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The Novel & Idealism: George Sand's 'Francois le champi' (The Country Waif) Transcript

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The Novel and Idealism: George Sand's '*François le Champi*' (*The Country Waif*)

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The New Year is a good time to think 'idealistically'. 'Idealism' is a word that has lost its glamour! It tends to be used pejoratively at the moment, suggesting a starry-eyed, unrealistic view of how things might be. Tonight I want to make a case for its possible validity in the face of cynicism, pessimism, and self-interested laissez-faire policies. George Sand [slide 1] (pseudonym of Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin 1804 – 8 June 1876), wrote to make a difference. She wrote for her contemporaries not for posterity, unlike most of her male writer-friends – I am thinking in particular of Gustav Flaubert [slide 2], author most famously of *Madame Bovary* (1856). Sand *wrote* in the hope of changing things and I believe that *reading* great writing can be equally transformative. It changes our understanding of ourselves, of others, of life. T.S.Eliot wrote, "We read many books, because we cannot know enough people."

This academic year we have been exploring the idea of literary genre [a class or category of writing that has a particular form, content, or technique]. Different literary genres allow for different kinds of *exploration* – of different kinds of human experience. Briefly, we might agree that the novel may be the best genre for exploring people living in society, the tensions between the individual and the group and how people may or may not succeed in making a good life for themselves. One of my contentions in relation to the novel as a form is that it is wonderfully capacious and baggy – you can stuff all sorts of different things of different sizes and shapes into it.

The first work we explored last autumn was Johnson's brilliant story, *Rasselas* and we considered the capacity of the novel to explore the morality of the pursuit of happiness. Is it incumbent on us to seek happiness? *Rasselas* and his sister and friends choose to leave the Happy Valley and journey extensively and meet many people. But at the end they return home to Abyssinia. Whether or not they return to the Happy Valley itself is left ambiguous.

Rasselas is about our propensity for restlessness and our desire to search for what there may be beyond our known environs – whether literal or metaphorical. I wonder was T.S.Eliot thinking of *Rasselas* when he wrote these lines in [Four Quartets](#):

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."
— T.S. Eliot, [Four Quartets](#) (1943)

[slide 3]

[I wanted to quote from Eliot in part to commemorate a great poet 50 years after his death].

We moved on to Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir* and considered the degree to which the novel can allow us to understand political history in ways which are distinct from the insights of political history proper. The Restoration in nineteenth-century France was a time of extraordinary stasis and stagnation. It was a time when all manner of subjects were taboo. In many ways it was also a period of artistic inertia. These antitheses – of events, lively debate and artistic innovation – are very difficult to convey within the constraints of politico-historical narrative. But the vagaries and acceptable ambiguities of literary narrative, on the other hand, allow for the creation of an immensely plausible social atmosphere which gives us a vivid sense of this peculiar moment in French social and political history. Reading Stendhal's extraordinary novel we feel that we know what it would have been like to have lived then and there. Stendhal does all this with brilliant, ironic humour. And as a novelist he does not need to provide a convincing conclusion. By omitting the most important event of the year he claims to be chronicling – the revolution of 1830 – he avoids any suggestion that this was the pivotal turning point. We expect explanations and answers from historians; but not from novelists. Novels need satisfying endings, not convincing conclusions. It is a useful distinction: one is formal or aesthetic, the other is intellectual.

Tonight we will be considering George Sand's novel, *François le Champi*, written in 1847, and finally published in 1848 in a Belgian edition, and in a French edition in 1850. This was because of the political upheavals of 1848. Sand lived through multiple political shifts and she took a great interest in them. Not only that, she was also very involved in the revolution of 1848. As well as writing novels and plays, she wrote essays and journalistic pieces. This range was highly unusual for a woman at the time. When I was writing my biography of her I was keen to try to explain what had made her so exceptional, and exceptional in so many ways. In the end I emphasised her unusual origins and upbringing. Her father was of aristocratic lineage and her mother, at best, an 'actress'. Her father died very early in her life and her mother struggled to bring her up. Aged four she was given to her paternal grandmother, and she moved from Paris to the country, to her grandmother's estate at Nohant [slide 4] in the Indre Department of France. Her grandmother was a *grande dame* of the eighteenth century, well-read, highly principled and formal. The adjustment cannot have been easy but her grandmother was a great admirer of

Rousseau and believed in giving Aurore immense freedom to roam the estate and to mix with the peasants who ran things. She listened to their stories by the fireside and learnt *berrichon*, the local patois, or dialect [In the 19th c. at least 50 major dialects in France]. She had started her life being read fairytales by her mother and then, at Nohant, lived between the formal and intellectual world of her grandmother and the intimate, homely world of the peasants on the estate. At the same time she moved between two languages – formal French and *berrichon*. As she reached adolescence her grandmother thought she had become somewhat wild and sent her to an English convent in Paris – another shock to the system. She married young and unhappily and decided to head for Paris to make her own way. And she soon discovered that writing was one of the few means of earning her living. She also discovered that she wrote with relative ease. There isn't time to continue with her life-story. I hope what I have already said gives some idea as to why she may have lived the life she did, why she cared about the impoverished, why she had such a good ear for language and perhaps why she was a natural story-teller.

But I do not just want to talk about Sand tonight, I also want to talk about 'The Novel and Idealism'. What do I mean by 'Idealism'? I categorically do not mean philosophical idealism. In philosophy, idealism, as I understand it, is the group of philosophies which assert that reality, or reality as we can know it, is fundamentally mental, mentally constructed, or otherwise immaterial. I would like to propose a definition of Idealism formulated by Pierre Leroux [slide 5], who was also a Christian Socialist or Utopian Socialist. He was a close friend of Sand. In 1841 he had established the *Revue indépendante*, with her help, and he exerted considerable influence over her. Her *Spiridion* (1839), was dedicated to him, and *Sept cordes de la lyre* (1843), *Consuelo* (1843), and *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1843), were all inspired by his Humanitarian Socialism.

Leroux's definition of Idealism is as follows:

Let us call *Idealism* the belief in the power and the benevolence of *ideas*. An idealist will be someone who *believes in tomorrow*, that is, who believes *that today's reality is the result of yesterday's thought* and that *tomorrow's reality will be the result of today's thought*. [*Oeuvres*, p. 149]

Leroux – and George Sand – believed in the power of ideas to effect change. Today's derogatory connotations of naïve and impractical beliefs in some unspecified but better world are not those of Sand and Leroux's Idealism.

So what are the ideas explored in Sand's story?

Like her grandmother, Sand was influenced by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories of the happiness of primitive man as well as Leroux's socialism. *François le Champi* can be read as an empirical exploration, an experiment, in social conditioning. The subject of Sand's experiment is the title's eponymous François who arrives in Cormouier, a small village in rural France. He is a *champi*, a child who has been abandoned in the fields; derived from the noun *un champ*, the French for 'a field'. Some historians have estimated that the pressures of economic deprivation and the stigma associated with illegitimacy contributed to some one in thirty babies being abandoned in France at this point. [Fermigier's preface, pp.20-29]

So here is a character who has not been influenced in any way by industrial, urban society – or indeed any society at all - but rather by Nature. At the very beginning of the novel François' *illegitimacy* is underlined. The heroine of the story, Madeleine Blanchet, the miller's wife, meets François, at the *lavoir* or public clothes washing place:

'Comment t'appelles tu? Reprit Madeleine Blanchet... [What's your name?, Madeleine Blanchet continued]

- François, répondit l'enfant [François, the child replied.]
- François qui? [François who?]
- Qui? dit l'enfant d'un air simple. [Who? said the child naively]
- A qui es-tu fils? [Whose son are you?]
- Je ne sais pas! [I don't know!]
- Tu ne sais pas le nom de ton père! [You don't know your father's name?]
- Je n'en ai pas. [I don't have one.]
- Il est donc mort? [So he's dead?]
- Je ne sais pas. [I don't know.]

A little later François says, 'Vous demandiez comment je m'appelle? On m'appelle François le Champi' (Live de poche (ldp), pp. 32-35.) [You were asking me what I am called. I am called François le champi.]

In the nineteenth century *champs* were social outcasts, presumed to be liars and thieves. One of the main ideas,

that is explored in Sand's novel, is the notion that if cared for and loved, *Champis* can become good members of society like other children.

The reader of Sand's novel is told early on that François is 'un être pur' ('a pure being'). When Madeleine realises that the boy has a fever she washes him and leaves him sleeping while she returns home with half her load of washing, intending to return to the boy and the second half of her load. François wakes before she has returned and his 'natural instinct' is to find his 'mother'. He picks up the shawl Madeleine had wrapped him in, her washing beater and her soap, and finds her. When he returns her things Madeleine says, 'tu n'es pas si bête que je croyais, toi, car tu es serviable, et celui qui a bon cœur n'est jamais sot...' [Sand's ellipsis; You're not as stupid as I thought, you, because you're helpful, and anyone with a good heart is never dumb.]

In the provincial French context, we know that goodness equates with intelligence; the opposite pairing is 'bête et méchant' ('stupid and bad'). Madeleine goes on to support François - and Isabelle (the impoverished neighbour who has taken François in, in part for the small financial return that this brings). Later he becomes part of the Blanchet household. Madeleine teaches him to read, has him prepared for his first communion and watches him grow into a decent, strong, fine-looking young man.

The Miller has a mistress and she stirs up her husband's jealousy by insinuating that Mme Blanchet and François have an adulterous relationship - which they do not. François is forced to leave, not knowing the reason for his expulsion but believing what Madeleine tells him, namely that he has reached an age when he must now go out into the world and make his own way. After his departure both Madeleine and François fall ill - symptomatically - but are not wholly incapacitated. The implication is that their separation is damaging to their physical and mental health. In other words it is an 'unnatural' way for them to have to live.

Their separation lasts three years and twists in the plot make his return to the mill plausible. By this point the miller has died and Madeleine is in need of help. François is in a position to repay the kindness she showed him as a boy.

The reader is well-prepared for the quasi-Oedipal - or recognition - scene as François has, 'par la volonté du Bon Dieu' [By the Grace of the Good Lord] overheard two other characters explaining the reason for his original expulsion from the mill, ie the allegation that he and Madeleine are lovers.

Et voilà que tout d'un coup François la vit toute jeune et la trouva belle comme la bonne dame, et le cœur lui sauta comme s'il avait monté au faite d'un clocher. Et il s'en alla coucher dans son moulin où il avait son lit bien propre dans un carré de planches *emmi les saches de farine*. Et quand il fut là tout seul, il se mit à trembler et à étouffer comme de fièvre. Et si, il n'était malade que d'amour, car il venait de se sentir brûlé pour la première fois par une grande bouffée de flamme, ayant toute sa vie chauffé doucement sous la cendre.'

[And then suddenly François recognised that she was a young woman and found her as beautiful as the Virgin Mary, and his heart leapt as though he had climbed to the pinnacle of a bell tower. And he went off to sleep in his mill where he had his clean and tidy bed made out of planks among the bags of flour. And when he was there, quite alone, he started to tremble and to struggle for breath, as though feverish. And yes, he was only lovesick, as he had just been burnt for the first time by a great flame, having all his life kept warm gently under the cinders.]

Emmi- en mi, Old French, *au milieu* ; *saches* - *sacs*

Now this is an Oedipal scene of recognition with a distinct twist. In Sophocles' famous drama Oedipus unwittingly murders his father and marries his mother. In Sand's novel François suddenly recognises that his feelings for Madeleine are not those of an adopted son for an adoptive mother, but those of a man for a woman. The religious language is intriguing. Recognising his erotic love, he likens Madeleine to the Virgin Mary - for the first time. And it is this quasi-incestuous ending, which at the same time alludes to the Christian tradition which is intriguing. Although there is no consanguinity, Madeleine has assumed the role of 'mother' and François, consequently, of 'son'. In the end they marry and the strong suggestion is that they live happily ever after.

Crucially, within the plot, there has been ample opportunity for a conventional ending as two other eminently eligible young women fall in love with François. While he is in exile, as it were, the miller for whom he works considers François an ideal match for his daughter, Jeanne, and back at Cormouier, after the miller's death, it emerges that the Miller's sister, Mariette, is also in love with him. François' marriage to either Jeanne or Mariette would be conventionally legitimate - both literally and symbolically. Literally in the sense that both marriages would be unproblematic within the law and, symbolically, in terms of a male transfer of property from father to eventual son-in-law. In both these scenarios François would have been a miller. But in terms of both these outcomes, Madeleine would be disenfranchised in terms of her love of François, and her status as a miller's wife.

Sand's ending is one in which the good woman is rewarded - both amorously and materially. The conventional *status quo* is subverted and an unconventional *denouement* is proposed.

So the 'ideas' that are conveyed by Sand's novel are many: the idea that everyone, if treated properly, can make something of their life, the idea that rural life has dignity and local languages preserve important traditions, the

idea that conventional ideas of marriage and the family are not the only way to organise ourselves as social beings. There is also the idea that women can play a transforming role in children's lives and the lives of the community. This is a theme that crops up quite commonly in Sand's writing.

Of course some of these ideas could, equally, be termed Romantic. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* Romanticism was characterised by the following: 'a deepened appreciation of the beauties of nature; a general exaltation of emotion over reason and of the senses over intellect; a turning in upon the self and a heightened examination of human personality and its moods and mental potentialities'.

It is Romanticism's emphasis on the self which makes it less obviously appropriate as a definition of a novel like *François le champi*. The emphasis in Sand's fiction is on *relationships* and the capacity of relationships to be transforming. The couple is the microcosm. The macrocosm is society and what follows from the example of the couple for social policy and politics more broadly.

In conventional literary historical terms, Romanticism was followed by Realism (Stendhal and Flaubert are France's major Realists). Idealism has been somewhat forgotten. Nor was Idealism exclusively a French phenomenon, even if the term isn't used of English nineteenth-century novels. The equivalent novels, within the English tradition, are generally known as Utopian - or Dystopian - novels. The works I would like briefly to describe have been largely forgotten but they remain very interesting indeed. (For a comprehensive overview of Utopian fiction, see www.utopianfiction.com on which some of my descriptions, below, are taken).

Le Voyage en Icarie (Travels in Icaria) [slide 6] by Étienne Cabet (1840) was very successful at the time. The novel depicts an ideal society in which an elected government has total control of not simply all economic activity, but also all social activity in a communitarian social movement termed "communisme". Within this model, however, there remained room for Christianity and the conventional family unit.

Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) [slide 7] remains part of the canon of English literature. Erewhon (an anagram of 'nowhere', the literal translation of 'utopia') is a remote kingdom, not yet charted on any map. The narrator has come across it on his travels and described what life is like. In many ways it can be likened to contemporary Western civilization - there is a monarchy, lawyers, judges, prisons, money, rich and poor - and initially the narrator assumed that everyone is contented. But it gradually becomes evident that all is not as it seems and that deception and duplicity is rife. In fact everything appears to have a double: there are two opposed religions, two economic systems, etc. Ill-health is treated as criminal and crime is treated with care and sympathy. Formerly advanced industrial expertise has been deliberately replaced by primitive machinery. Gradually the reader realises that Erewhon is simply an example of many Western countries - but all exaggerated. The book turns out not to be a Utopia, but its opposite, a Dystopia and sharp critique of contemporary mores.

A few years later, in 1881, Mary E. Bradley Lane, an American novelist, published

Mizora: World of Women, subtitled "A Prophecy" [slide 8]. This is the first overtly feminist Utopian novel. The plot is straightforward but no less compelling for that. A Russian noblewoman discovers an all-female Utopia at the centre of the earth, a haven of music, peace, universal education and beneficent, sophisticated technology. Mizora has no domesticated animals and the women eat a chemically-prepared artificial meat. This is Quorn, more than a century before it was produced.

In contrast, *A Crystal Age* by W. H. Hudson (1887) [slide 9], is about a young man who is transported into the future and arrived in a peaceful Utopia where everyone lives in harmony. He falls in love and ought to have found the ultimate contentment but finds that he cannot live in the pastoral and mystical society in which he finds himself. Interestingly, the society is organised along matriarchal lines.

News from Nowhere by William Morris (1890) [slide 10] plays on Butler's title, *Erewhon*. In it the protagonist wakes up to discover that he is in a post-revolutionary and post-industrial 21st Century England. Life is organised according to idealistic communist principles. There is no money, no private property and everyone is equal. Labour is divided out equally and is enjoyed, not seen as a chore. Modern technology and scientific discoveries have been abandoned and forgotten in favour of low-tech crafts and simple ways of doing things.

William Morris was a Utopian socialist, not unlike Sand's friend Leroux. All three were concerned to make a difference. In this respect they were not unlike the Austrian political economist Theodor Herzka [slide 11]. He wrote a novel, *Freiland (Freeland)*, published in 1890. More remarkably, he actually tried to establish an ideal community - in Africa. It did not work.

Two better-known novels with clear Utopian intent are by H.G. Wells [slide 12]. The first, *The Time Machine* (1895) tells of 'The Time Traveller'. He journeys 800,000 years into the future and finds an apparently gentle, fruitarian child-like species called the Eloi. But in a society without struggle, hardship or conflict and war, the human race has become weak and unimaginative. But it soon emerges that there is a second branch of 'humanity', the bestial cannibal Morlocks, who live underground. The Morlocks feed on the Eloi. In Wells' dystopia, it seems that

both the downtrodden working classes and the leisured aristocracy have lost their edge and reverted to sub-human levels of intelligence.

>Later re-published as *The Sleeper Awakes* [slide 13], first published as *When the Sleeper Wakes* (in 1899), Wells's dystopian novel is again set in the future, but this time after a 203-year sleep. As well as the prescient imagination of airplanes, TVs and moving walkways, Wells imagines a society two centuries after his own where the lower classes are de facto slaves and servants, most of the upper classes fritter life away in Pleasure Cities, and a tiny elite effectively rules the world, selfishly and ruthlessly.

Well we know that wealth globally is increasingly in the hands of ever-smaller numbers. A recent headline I saw announced that in the United States the top 1% control almost half the financial wealth. And Oxfam has cleverly timed a press release to coincide with the world economic forum at Davos which is currently taking place. According to Oxfam, 'inequality is rising: [the combined wealth of the richest 1 per cent will overtake that of the other 99 per cent of people next year](#) unless the current trend is checked.' (Oxfam website)

These Utopian novels, and other like them, were extremely popular in the nineteenth century and constitute the origins of what we loosely term Science Fiction. But Sand's novel is in many ways very different. It is set in contemporary rural France, rather than an imagined elsewhere, often in the far future, and it does not aim at prescience in technological terms, at least. The scale of most utopian and dystopian novels tends to be large. Sand's *François le champi* modest in scale and utopian in a very different sense. What it recommends, by implication, is a re-thinking of conventional relationships between individuals in communities. Charitable behaviour towards others is rewarded and every individual has the right to be helped to be integrated whatever their position at birth. François achieves this status by a combination of native ability, hard work and the respect of Madeleine. Millers held a highly respected social position in nineteenth-century rural France. So Sand's story demonstrates François' meritocratic trajectory from stigmatised child from outside society, to respected and useful citizen. But what is really intriguing is that this could be demonstrated without the quasi-incestuous ending. What does the provocative ending suggest? I think there is an ideological, a quasi-feminist, and an aesthetic answer.

Madeleine and François' relationship is highly unconventional, yet successful. The logic would seem to be that individuals can organise themselves in ways other than those prescribed by society – heterosexual love, marriage and the family. A feminist reading might suggest that Madeleine, unlike so many women, enjoys the fruits of her labour. François does not grow up and leave – or at least not permanently. He grows up and Madeleine, having devotedly brought the boy up, then lives in a blissful marriage to a principled, young, fit, able and devoted man. Aesthetically, everything comes full circle and ties up neatly. The couple meet, separate, and come together again. And there is symbolic symmetry in this too. They first meet by water (the *lavoir*), François learns that he is to be sent away by the same spring and François declares his love for Madeleine and asks her to marry him at the same spot. Water allows for cleansing and this is also part of the Christian tradition. When Madeleine first washes François this could be seen as his 'baptism'.

But how plausible is this 'perfect ending' and the Christian imagery which has accompanied it? And is Sand actually advocating this kind of quasi-incestuous union as a 'perfect model'? Let us start with the first question. In a sense we are not asked to consider how plausible the plot is, particularly the *dénouement*, because the story is framed by a conversation between two interlocutors and one then tells the other a story heard at a *veillée* (a late night social gathering). The story was told by a hemp beater with the local vicar's servant helping out, the former less educated, the latter more so, we are told. The question the two interlocutors discuss is the language in which the story will now be recounted as the hemp beater and servant spoke in their own language, which is described as 'naïve'. They then argue about the title of the story as one claims that 'champi' isn't a French word. The other speaker then claims that it is French, old French perhaps, but used by none other than Montaigne (one of the most influential philosophers of the [French Renaissance](#)). This is a way of suggesting that the local patois has validity and, by extension, the world view of its speakers is to be taken seriously too. The systematic suppression of local dialects and the promotion of modern French was not something that had universal approval. For Sand it threatened to eradicate local wisdom and mores. So the suggestion is that this story is folklore. The novel ends with one of the two interlocutors asking, 'l'histoire est donc vraie de tous points?' ['the story is true in every respect?']. And the following answer is given, 'Si elle ne l'est pas, elle le pourrait être..., et si vous ne me croyez, allez y voir.' [If it isn't, it could be..., and if you don't believe me, go and see.]

So what is the purpose of the double-framed narrative: two people taking about a story in turn told by two people? This adds a sense that the story's wisdom is both true and proverbial. Rather than advocating unconventional unions, Sand gives the impression of relaying a story which is both authentic and age-old. At the same time, by keeping stories like this in circulation the 'idea' of the protagonists' union remains in the public consciousness and suggests itself as an 'ideal'. To come to my second question, I do not think that Sand is advocating this kind of union but rather suggesting that no-one is ever 'lost' to society, irrespective of how they come into the world. And the story also emphasises the difference women can make.

One feature of the story that may strike you as peculiar which we haven't yet discussed is the implication that François' status as an illegitimate child can be presented as something fortunate, despite its stigma. Sand was

writing some seventy years before Sigmund Freud proposed the Oedipus Complex. Briefly, Freud suggested that there are complex relations between same sex parents and children and that if the 'complex' is not resolved, the child may suffer from neurosis, paedophilia or homosexuality. I doubt that Sand believed any such things, but growing up without the influence of a father was something she herself had experienced. And it may well be that she regarded this as having given her greater freedom to be herself.

And interestingly, in modern French literature from the nineteenth century on, the bastard often has a privileged status. Flora Tristan (a socialist writer and activist, sometimes considered one of the founders of modern feminism) made a great deal of her illegitimacy, Gérard de Nerval (one of the most essentially [Romantic of French poets](#)) cast himself as symbolically illegitimate because of his distance from his father, Charles Baudelaire whose father died when he was young cast himself similarly as symbolically illegitimate, and likewise Jean-Paul Sartre, whose father died when he was two years old. The writer Jean Genet was also born illegitimate. The suggestion is that without paternal influence the individual is more likely to be 'himself' or 'herself'.

But to return to Sand. Her François is a *tabula rasa* at the outset of the novel. He has not been influenced by either a mother or a father. Essentially brought up by the good Madeleine, he turns out as well as any mother might hope. Sand wanted to influence her contemporaries so as to promote a fairer society where the poor were given adequate assistance by the rich, and education was available to all. Nor was she simply a writer. She involved herself in the politics of the mid nineteenth-century, writing propaganda. She mixed with the notable writers and politicians of the day – de Tocqueville, Richard Monckton Milnes (the British politician), Merimée and Vigny. De Tocqueville's response to Sand was typical of many of his male contemporaries. He wrote, 'I had great prejudices against Mme Sand, because I detest women who write...' and so on. But he adds, 'Mme Sand painted a very detailed, and unusually vivid picture for me, of the state of the workers of Paris, their organisation, their numbers, their weapons, their preparations, their thoughts, their passions, their terrible intentions. I thought the picture was biased but it was not; what followed amply testifies.'

Ten days after de Tocqueville and Sand had met, violence broke out in Paris. Irishmen protested against British rule, and German and Belgian democrats protested, wanting to wrest power from their respective leaders. But it was affairs in Prussian Poland that had the most direct effect on what happened in Paris. On 13 May news of the Polish insurrection reached the French capital. The brutal suppression of the Poles by Prussian troops called for intervention. In the streets of Paris the people demanded French involvement, shouting, 'Long live Poland'. The ostensible reason for the march which grew steadily in numbers of participants, was to persuade France's leaders to send an army to Poland. But the 'mob', as Sand later termed it, pushed on to the Assembly. The railings were trampled down and the crowd burst into the amphitheatre. There was pandemonium. The National Guard was called in and there were numerous arrests; among those arrested was Sand's friend, Pierre Leroux.

To conclude, I would like to emphasise the degree to which the novel can contribute to the future. Many novels are autobiographical and historical. Satire, of course, is also, by implication, criticism with a purpose. But novels can also be Idealist or Utopian, proposing different ways of organising ourselves and living out our lives in society. Sand herself came up with a telling distinction in a letter of 1 April, 1845, to Jules Michelet, thanking him – belatedly – for having sent a number of his works. Michelet (1798 – 1874) [slide 14] was a French nationalist historian best known for his monumental *Histoire de France* (1833–67), published in nineteen large volumes. Michelet's method involved immersing his own personality into his narrative so as to attempt to resurrect the past. It is a work of remarkable historical synthesis and one with great dramatic power. Michelet abhorred the Middle Ages and celebrated the Enlightenment. Having paid Michelet appropriate compliments, Sand goes on to write:

J'admire votre talent, et en cela je fais comme tout le monde. Je trouve que vous avez mille fois raison mais je trouve que vous avez raison avec trop de monde, et pas assez avec quelques-uns. Vous me comprenez, ou plutôt vous me devinez. Je suis utopiste, vous êtes réformateur ce n'est pas la même nature d'esprit. Je trouve que vous dépensez trop de force et de génie à frapper sur trop peu de chose. Vous voulez réformer l'église et changer le prêtre, moi je ne veux ni de ces prêtres, ni cette église.

[Corr. Vol. VI, p.836]

I admire your talent and in this I am like everyone else. I believe that you are a thousand times right but I believe you are right in relation to too many people, and not sufficiently with some. You understand me, or rather you can guess what I mean. I am a utopian, you are a reformer and these are not the same casts of mind. I think you expend too much energy and genius attacking nothing much. You want to reform the church and change the priesthood, while I want nothing of priests nor of the church.

George Sand does not occupy an important place within the canon of French literature today. Her male contemporaries are much more widely read in schools and universities – Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert. To some extent this may be because Realism is seen to be superior to Idealism and the two also seem to be gendered – Realism is manly, Idealism effeminate. I hope I have made a case for Sand and in my next lecture I want to make a case for Edith Wharton, who was a great admirer of Sand.

So to conclude, a quotation from Sand:

"The world will know and understand me someday. But if that day does not arrive, it does not greatly matter. I

shall have opened the way for other women.”

— [George Sand](#)

And she did!

Thank you.

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