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## THE MOURNING OF ROMANTIC(IST) LOVE: GEORGE SAND AND ALFRED DE MUSSET

*for Zofia Krawiec*

They try to penetrate through us, analyze us, and approach us as their equals. Whenever a conflict sparks, our brutal pride of a human accustomed to being dominated resents their audacity.

(Louise Colet)<sup>1</sup>

**Two French nineteenth-century novels**, George Sand's *Elle et lui* (first published 1859) and Alfred de Musset's *Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (first published 1836), are interrelated in European literary history so strictly that they form a single cultural text. Yet, they remain nonsymmetrical segments: Musset's book is regarded as a brilliant 'testimony of its age,' marking a cultural breakdown. Sand's work is treated chiefly as a contributory literary document, a 'reply' to the literary challenge posed by Musset. In any case, this two-segment cultural text calls for a reevaluation of the importance of its constituents and for a minute analysis of the vectors of tensions related to the cultural criticism they have triggered. The criticism is connected to one of the significant phenomena of the modern condition, namely, 'Romantic(ist) love.'

The Romanticist age produced the conception of existence as a subjective project in which individuals gained the meaning of new agents of the symbolic order of the world. The properties of existence became elements of an agential existential project whose importance is negotiable. Romanticist literature is about the inner self in an intimate and political sense. A fundamental equality-related change takes place, which also assumes a sentimental or emotional emancipation accessible to sentient individuals.

<sup>1</sup> "Elles nous pénètrent, nous analysent, nous traitent de pair. Sitôt que quelque conflit s'engage, notre orgueil brutal d'homme habitué à la domination s'indigne de leur hardiesse" (L. Colet, *Lui. Roman contemporain* [1859], Paris 1864, pp. 133-4). All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine - A.A.

According to romanticist reasoning, love becomes the value that brings the upper hand over social convention and the domination order. Recognition of the decisive aspect of privacy sets in motion a series of social changes, one being the women's emancipation movement, essentially modern in its origins. All the same, Elisabeth A. Fay enumerates, in her study *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, four characteristics of romanticist writing, including imagination, individualism, introspection, and radical challenge (interrelated with the transgression gesture). As she remarks, primarily, the latter was the realm of female authors, which is not reflected in common knowledge on the period concerned. "Apart from the two main romanticist attitudes, sincerity and irony, there was a third one," observes she; "it was a critical attitude, actively and purposefully accepted by the writing women, to negotiate the main assumptions and topics of Romanticist thought and culture."<sup>2</sup> Fay encourages to read Romanticist texts, applying feminist critical tools to reevaluate the role of women in creating the age's significant concepts and notions. The 'Romantic(ist) love' concept occupies a unique position as the area of direct negotiation between the sexes/genders, not to say an area of special operation of male dominance. Regarding this subject matter, the George Sand-Alfred de Musset duet is one of the most valuable testimonies of its age.

**The woman imagined and female experience:  
the history of love in the West**

Sand and Musset use a wide array of Romantic(ist) cultural topoi in their works and proactively co-create some. The Romantic(ist) imagination has inherited one of the concepts peculiarly mystified in Western culture. Catherine Malabou, in her book *Le plaisir effacé. Clitoris et pensée*<sup>3</sup> analyzes Giorgio Agamben's essay on nymphs<sup>4</sup> as a specifically abstracted and crafted 'essence' of womanhood. For the Italian philosopher, the true nature of

<sup>2</sup> E.A. Fay, *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, Oxford 1998, pp. 10-1. Investigating British Romanticism, Fay argues that women engaged themselves in thinking about culture and society similarly profoundly as the period's male authors did. Reading the texts from a critical feminist perspective, we can reevaluate the role of women in Romanticism using the categories reserved for male Romanticists (cf. *ibidem*, p. 233).

<sup>3</sup> C. Malabou, *Le plaisir effacé. Clitoris et pensée*, Paris 2020. I am quoting the Polish version: C. Malabou, *Wymazana przyjemność. Klitoris i myślenie*, transl. A. Dwulit, Warszawa 2021.

<sup>4</sup> G. Agamben, *Nymphes*, trans. D. Loayza, Paris 2019. Quoted from: C. Malabou, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

the nymph as a woman consists in her being an image detached from the body. “What is the origin of the well-known caesura between the image of a woman (muse, nymph) and the real woman?” Agamben asks and replies, “This caesura, important for medieval poetry, has never ceased to govern the Western imagination, and it still haunts modern art.”<sup>5</sup> As an image, the nymph is best suited as an ideal “model of the object of love.”<sup>6</sup> “The beloved one whom her love takes everywhere with him, hidden in a jewel or the pouch, depicted in a portrait, hidden in a poem or the coat-of-arms, is desired as she has lost her body. Owing to this, the lover can internalize her and keep her in his thoughts”.<sup>7</sup>

Italian Renaissance has reinforced the medieval concept of love, which distributes the gender roles in the one-person theatre of man as the full-fledged subject and of woman as an idealized image tailored to the man’s needs. “A nymph is a woman who has become an idea.” The Renaissance solidified this fundamental ambivalent representation principle: “unity and, in parallel, lack of unity of the phantasm of a woman with the woman herself,” Malabou remarks. The Renaissance nymph is a quintessence of the idea of a woman without the natural body and real experience; “from then on, she is always in the process of division according to her two contradictory poles, too vivid and unanimated at the same time.”<sup>8</sup> Such nymph is developed upon the fundamental rule whereby „the [woman’s] image and living body cannot merge”; the concept of ‘love’ is responsible for reinforcing this division, whereas ‘love’ itself is created as a patriarchal literary construct.

In his classical study *L’Amour et l’Occident* (1939), the Swiss philosopher Denis de Rougemont observes that comprehending love has been confined to a ‘male-centric’ love story.<sup>9</sup> The Tristan and Isolde myth is still the basic topos, with passion conditioned by an obstacle, the trait of masculine rivalry, a tragic conflict in the woman who ‘dangerously’ has a brush with self-fulfillment and sexual satisfaction. The love-story roles are strictly determined and significantly restricted in the traditional dynamics entangled in the Christian religious imagination. Thereby, however, love narratives, as the source of myths and symbols, disclose the character of the gender con-

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 27–8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> D. de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. M. Belgion, Princeton 1983. Cf. A. Araszkievicz, *Rozmontujmy mit miłości*, Warsaw 2020, [https://teatrstudio.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/I\\_3U2\\_GaleriaStudio\\_Katalog\\_Net.pdf](https://teatrstudio.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/I_3U2_GaleriaStudio_Katalog_Net.pdf) (acc. 2023-09-09).

tract, revealing the structure of social order that is subjected to the male domination rule principle in the symbolic as well as economic and sexual aspects. These narratives thus provide material for reflection on love understood as a male projection of *women's bondage*.

The story of Hamlet and Ophelia is an exciting example of modern love anti-myth. Hamlet discloses the abuses of the legacy social and political order and tries to oppose them, thereby sacrificing his love. In a male amorous project, intimacy is never a stake on a par with dignity or ethicality. Intimacy is manipulable, abusable, and susceptible to moderation at choice, with diverse tricks and lies, and can become a sphere of abuse. For the love myth to be sustained, Ophelia must cultivate silence, which is finally enforced by her suicidal death. To rephrase, she has to sacrifice her life for the concept of a woman as an image (of a muse) to survive.

Enriched by the enhanced intensity of pursuance of 'dark' aspects of existence, Romanticism solidifies, or perhaps processes, the ambivalence of 'overly vivid and unanimated' woman-image while also introducing in the exploration of 'Romanticist/romantic love' the categorization into woman-angel, sublime (female) 'lover,' and 'little' woman or petticoat, 'domestic' woman in her traditional roles or as a sex worker. Such description is proposed by Józef Bachórz,<sup>10</sup> who derives from it an understanding of the emancipative Romantic(ist) love he calls 'Tristanic, as opposed to the 'fall' into carnal fusion. "The Romanticist conception of love enabled woman, in the most obvious way, to become a full-fledged and card-carrying human being, and no accidents of sex or gender could be powerful enough to deprive her of this humanness," states he.<sup>11</sup> Such understanding, however, reinforces the vision of a sexless/ genderless woman image, and the 'Romantic(ist) love' is still a domain of male fulfillment.

Marta Piwińska draws our attention to another element of the Romanticist love concept, seeing it as evolving in opposition to two traditions: on the one hand, the "rationalist hedonistic promise of the Enlightenment age, which advised to look for relative happiness in a disillusioned erotic trade-off,"<sup>12</sup> on the other, the institution of marriage as a corrupted symbol of inhibiting social arrangements. The idea of Romanticist love was meant to offer a sense of infinity, which would furnish the human existential dimension with additional meaning. Romanticist authors created an "idea of perfect and absolute love [...] which could be irreversibly damaged even by the

<sup>10</sup> J. Bachórz, *Romantyzm a romanse. Studia i szkice o prozie polskiej w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, Gdańsk 2005.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 135

<sup>12</sup> M. Piwińska, *Miłość romantyczna*, Kraków 1984, p. 524.

smallest possible compromise or flaw. Romanticist love was called angelic; it was with tenderness and amusement that its charm and grace have been described—the quality that, regrettably, disappears when confronted with real life.” Romanticist love, Piwińska argues, “should be unhappy or misfortunate, which means that it should lead to a disaster such as parting forever, insanity or death since it expresses rebellion against all and any so-far-known styles of human life.” And, it cannot possibly be fulfilled “as a more or less aggressive criticism of all the hitherto-known *styles of love*.”<sup>13</sup>

### Nonparallel testimonies

The Musset and Sand texts should be read as “a romance theme expressing criticism toward the society,” but their collision produces a critique of the construct of Romanticist love.” Marta Piwińska, in *The Dictionary of Polish Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, shares this intuition, seeking, in this particular work by Musset, the birth of a new type of Romantic protagonist. For him, love ceases to be a rebellious strategy that is conspicuously opposed to the disappointment with the traditional world. The defeat of such love is part of his revelation of “the helplessness of a romantic attitude toward reality.”<sup>14</sup> The lexicographic definition simultaneously grasps this helplessness-

<sup>13</sup> M. Piwińska, ‘Miłość,’ in A. Kowalczykowa, J. Bachórz (eds.), *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*, Wrocław 2002, p. 524.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*. It is worth quoting the relevant fragment here: “In *Confession d’un enfant du siècle*, Musset portrays a conflict between affection being experienced by the male protagonist in the romantic(ist) fashion and the affection of the female protagonist who loves him ‘normally.’ The confrontation of the two attitudes causes the former’s high expectations with respect for love, which is supposed to be the absolute and sanctity, turning the latter’s perception, representing the real world, into an expression of his psychical pathology; the female lover, tormented by jealousy, finally chooses a different partner. Musset’s novel directs our attention not so much on a romantic(ist) philosophy of love as to the male character’s psychology—and he epitomizes the romantic(ist) generation. *Confession* shows the origin of the generation’s attitudes and the inevitable conflict between the epoch’s morals and manners and the Romanticists’ love ideal. Contrary to German Romanticist works, the love shown in *Confession* is not one for its own sake: striving to attain fulfillment in a real relationship, it enters an inevitable conflict with reality. Musset’s romantic(ist) character loses his tragic dimension since love in this novel is depicted no more as a rebellious myth of a style that dramatically opposes the entire real world (as is the case with [Mickiewicz’s] *Dziady* [*Forefathers’ Eve*], Part IV, in Byron, Goethe, and German Romanticism), but rather, as a romantic(ist) attitude in its helplessness toward reality. This attitude is identified with daydreaming in Musset; half-consciously, this author assumes a critical stance toward the love myth pursued by the Romanticists.”

ness in a specific way, pointing out the male character's 'psychical pathology,' against which it juxtaposes the 'normal' affection of his lover. Interestingly, the 'pathological' versus the 'normal' contributes, in a sense, to the reception of the literary dialogue between Musset and Sand, setting a higher and more complex status of the male author's text.

In an introduction to his translation of *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński wrote, "This *Confession*, which allows us to look into the poet's soul in the most direct manner, happens to be one of the most significant documents of Romanticism."<sup>15</sup> Not only did it condition this author's entire output, but, owing to its perfectly fitting the epoch's climate, it addressed the central topic of its time—the one of love—and carried the aspect of a potential biographical scandal, thus earning for itself a unique place in the history of literature. Nowadays, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska writes similarly, calling Musset's work a 'masterpiece'<sup>16</sup>; instead of Boy, she identifies the innovative qualities of the Sand novel. "The novel appears astonishingly modern in the aspect of a penetrating description of its protagonist's emotional entanglement, as typical of relationships described today as co-dependent or violent."<sup>17</sup> Sand's character remains "an artist who is economically and spiritually independent on men"; "analyzing the emotions of her lover and her ones, she is capable of gaining considerable (self-)awareness as to the mechanisms directing their emotional life."<sup>18</sup> Even more importantly, through gaining the skill of foretelling violent cycles, she is capable of freeing herself single-handedly of the violence-based amorous dependence.

The texts by Musset and Sand refer to their meeting and the brief and temperamental relationship that evolved between them, which some literary historians describe as the 'Venetian episode.' In June 1833, the twenty-two-year-old poet, already then considered a great figure and promise of French verse, came across the twenty-nine-year-old Aurora Dudevant at a dinner hosted by the editor of *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the most important periodical of the era. Publishing her famous novels under a male pen name, Mrs. Dudevant was an estranged wife and mother of two. Her relationship with Musset turned into intimacy by late August. Due to the poet's erratic behavior, the relationship became pretty impulsive; nonetheless, the couple resolved to visit Italy together at the year's end. They traveled via

<sup>15</sup> T. Boy-Żeleński, 'Od tłumacza,' in A. de Musset, *Spowiedź dziecięcia wieku* [*Confession d'un enfant du siècle*], <https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/spowiedz-dziecięcia-wieku.html#s1> (acc. 2023-10-10).

<sup>16</sup> K. Nadana-Sokołowska, *George Sand – polskie spojrzenia*, Warszawa 2022, p. 254.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 258.

Genoa to Venice; during their journey, Aurora suffered from a high fever combined with severe chills and migraines. The young poet focused on his own *mal de l'être*, didn't know how to care for his partner, and opted to live large in Venice instead. He was losing large sums of money at cards, and George Sand had to pay off his debts. When Alfred started suffering from a similarly mysterious illness, she took care of him. The poet experienced feverish hallucinations for a long time; attacking his lover was a significant means of his ailment's expression. Sand eventually got involved in a love affair with Pietro Pagello, a young physician curing Alfred, and it was with Pietro that she would return to Paris (once Alfred recovered and departed) when this relationship ended.

In her autobiography *Histoire de ma vie*, Sand does not dwell extensively on her relationship with Musset; she had asked her partners for consent before describing her acquaintances with them, and Musset wouldn't have agreed. She would ignore the doctor as well. Hence, the French poet was only described as a fellow traveler, suffering from a mysterious 'Venetian' fever, in the background of Sand's description of Venice, the town she found boundlessly charming. This (in all probability, forced) discretion is inverse to the fame their relationship started enjoying once Musset published his novel in Paris.<sup>19</sup> The history of literature has to date been wrestling with the tension triggered by this fact, with the book turning into a notorious social and literary event—an important reason being the romantic encounter of two well-known artists, tempestuous and reported on as it happened. This relationship became a famous 'romantic episode'<sup>20</sup> and, ultimately, a matrix of the age's sensitivity and ways of being. Sand resolved to present her version of the events in a novelistic form only much later, in 1859,<sup>21</sup> two years after Musset's death. Alfred's brother, the writer Paul de Musset, immediately stood up for the poet: he wrote *Lui et Elle*, a novel of a lesser literary value,<sup>22</sup> portraying George Sand as a deceitful woman, a nymphomaniac who collected and destroyed her lovers like a sexual predator with perverse narcissistic inclinations. A reply came in the form of the novel *Lui. Roman contemporain*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> G. Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, éd. M. Reid, Paris 2004, p. 672.

<sup>20</sup> T. Boy-Żeleński, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> In the course of her three-year journey across Italy, Sand published regularly in *Revue de Deux Mondes*, letters written to her friends, Musset included, later republished collectively as *Lettres d'un voyageur* (1837)

<sup>22</sup> The novel was published in *Le Nouveau Monde*, the *Revue de deux Mondes's* rival journal.

<sup>23</sup> The novel was published serially from 23 August to 16 September 1859 in *Le Messager de Paris*; the entire text came out at Michel Lévy's in 1859.



was penned by Louise Colet, a noted Paris-based woman of letters who ran a salon and was once a partner of Alfred de Musset and Gustave Flaubert. The famous story of the romantic lovers is impersonated there by Albert de Lincel, a poet of genius who suffers from alcoholism and bitterness and never recovers from his devastating relationship with Antonia Black (alias George Sand). In a proto-feministic manner, the novel primarily shows the subversive fact that to achieve complete satisfaction and fulfillment; a woman needs several men from whom an 'ideal *him*' model could be formed. As French scholar Christine Genin argues, a *roman à clef* postulating a new ideal was, for Colet herself, a subversive means of affirmation female sexuality with no inhibitions or complexes and displaying the difficulty with which men accept female intellectuals.<sup>24</sup> Colet's work was repeatedly republished in her time; though forgotten by today, it is one of her few recently re-edited and republished books.

### **The *Child of the Century's* triumphant manliness**

*Confession d'un enfant du siècle* remains a monumental work in European literary history. The novel's character is doubtlessly reflected in literary history, establishing the nineteenth century as a highly misogynistic period. One of the novel's most iconic sentences describes a waltz, the most important dance of the time: "It is truly to possess a woman, in a certain sense, to hold her for a half hour in your arms, and to draw her on in the dance, palpitating despite herself, in such a way that it can not be positively asserted whether she is being protected or seduced."<sup>25</sup> Octave, the main protagonist, suffers from the 'disease of the age' being his severe individual and social disillusion that translates into the 'fall' into carnal debauchery. The novel's concept thoroughly projects the protagonist's anthropological portrait against the background of the age's political transformation. After Napoleon's fall, the nineteenth century had its public order re-established, paving the way for a rapid modern change. Like every moment of historical upheaval, it brings a sense of suspension and unsustainability. Musset's protagonist thoroughly situates his sensitivity in civilizational trends—which is neither unambiguously grief over the bygone era nor an expectation of a hope-bearing

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ch. Genin, 'Louise Colet, ni muse, ni bas bleu,' *Libération*, 4 Feb. 2021, [https://www.liberation.fr/culture/livres/louise-colet-ni-muse-ni-bas-bleu-20210204\\_GUFN-JUTVJVELXJYQMVMXE23471/](https://www.liberation.fr/culture/livres/louise-colet-ni-muse-ni-bas-bleu-20210204_GUFN-JUTVJVELXJYQMVMXE23471/) (acc. 2023-09-09).

<sup>25</sup> A. de Musset, *Confession of a Child of the Century*, with a Preface by H. de Bornier, New York 1977; cf. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3942/3942-h/3942-h.htm>; quoted from Chapter IV: 'Marco.'



tomorrow. Musset's character concentrates on his male subjectivity and performs his intimacy as the place where public discourse breaks down.

According to the authors of the three-volume *Histoire de la virilité*, the nineteenth century was the age of triumphant manhood/ virility.<sup>26</sup> The importance of manhood described as 'virtue' reached its climax so that the related system of norms and ideas/ notions becomes the fundamental interpretation of social order. It shaped the relations prevalent in the latter and formed the basis of the binding system of values. 'Manhood' (masculinity, virility) ceases to be the space of individual fulfillment and becomes a lens through which ideas of the world are let through and created. To those denied participation in the socially demanded patterns or benchmarks, it becomes the (super)imposed form of oppression and dominance. The said people could include homosexuals, proletarians, people colonized in remote regions, and, primarily, women. The Napoleonic model of manhood assumed man's fulfillment in terms of symbolic power and authority and in the corporeal space. Warnings were made against adverse effects of restraint and abstinence; to avoid them, "physicians recommend[ed] to the young man endangered with a solitary misdeed that they 'resumed dating women.'"<sup>27</sup>

The central protagonist in Musset, just as 'the man,' becomes the primary synonym of social change. The present time is revealed to him as a formation of the "half mummy and half foetus,"<sup>28</sup> created by the surge and fall of Napoleon. Musset reads the revolutionary change in the social order pessimistically since his disillusionment regards the benchmark of male subjectivity the change has resulted from. This is true concerning male fashion and behavior: "Let us not be deceived: that black outfit that the men of our time wear is a terrible symbol" of that the "Human reason has overthrown all illusions; but it bears in itself sorrow, so that it may be consoled."<sup>29</sup> The reason in question is. Male and one form of consolation is sexual fulfillment.

Those 'men of our time' refused to fulfill traditional roles related to the social matrimonial contract. They contemptuously turned their backs on the women—their would-be wives ("Men in taking leave of women whispered the word which wounds to the death: contempt")<sup>30</sup> and "plunged into

<sup>26</sup> A. Corbin, J.-J. Courtine, G. Vigarello (éd.), *Histoire de la virilité*, vol. 2: *Le triomphe de la virilité. Le XIXe siècle*, ed. by A. Corbin, Paris 2011. I am quoting the Polish version: *Historia męskości*, vol. 2: *XIX wiek. Triumf męskości*, ed. A. Corbin, transl. T. Stróżyński, Gdańsk 2020.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 313.

<sup>28</sup> A. de Musset, *op. cit.*, Chap. II „Reflections.’

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

the dissipation of wine and courtesans.”<sup>31</sup> These ‘courtesans’ are women deprived of any worthy subjectivity; their socially low position has been appropriately manufactured. The woman whom a man had denied the strong points of a love story and ‘noble’ treatment, and whom he might have approached as a thing in the intimate sense, would subsequently be found by him “after a night of orgy, pale and leaden, forever lost, with hunger on her lips and prostitution in her heart.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Musset’s romantic protagonist enters the field of romantic love, setting in motion the clichés of ‘vulgar debauchery’ and highlighting the sexualization of his behavior while at the same time adding the sexual aspect to the social principles of dignity and degradation related to the women he manages; there is a personal as well as a political dimension to it. In other words, the area of male power/authority and dominant position, albeit stylized into a civilizational complaint of the *Confession of a child of the century*, is challenged now.

Paul B. Preciado, the French transgender philosopher, shows in his study *Pornotopia*, based on his analysis of the *Playboy* empire, how, in the twentieth century, male intimacy became public domain not only as a position of (heteronormative) power (over women).<sup>33</sup> Performance of male intimacy in the *Playboy* paradigm has disclosed not so much its omnipotence but rather fragility, negotiability, and entanglement in stereotypes, which consequently has become an element subcutaneously contributing to social equality change. In Musset, the male romantic space is also an attempt at drawing attention to intimacy as a manifestation of the authority’s political position. As a laboratory where the ‘romantic(ist) love’ concept is generated, it is also a space for the generation of modern sexual/ gender-related stereotypes (and phantasms/ delusions).

The quoted *Dictionary of Polish Literature of the 19th Century* perceives Musset’s *Confession* as an attempt at cracking down on the ‘romantic(ist) love’ ideal as ‘the absolute and sanctity’ and brutally verifying the Romanticist ideals against ‘normal reality’ and social mores. *Romantic(ist) love* loses its romantic dimension since proving ‘impossible,’ it ceases to be a form of criticism of the world’s order, contributing to the criticism of romanticism. Octave, Musset’s protagonist, spins his story, in fact, around three women ‘falling in love,’ each of them repeatedly termed (being taken with) “the malady

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> P.B. Preciado, *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy’s Architecture and Biopolitics*, transl. B. Preciado, New York 2014. I am quoting the Polish version: P.B. Preciado, *Pornotopia. “Playboy”, architektura i biopolityka w czasach zimnej wojny*, transl. G. Piątek, Warszawa 2021.

of the age.”<sup>34</sup> The love affair with Madame Pierson (alias George Sand) has two prefigurations: a lone widow, who appears to have three lovers at a time, and Marco, a courtesan. Octave’s disillusionment is related to the emphasis of his affection, and with his excessive sexual excitation, he has problems controlling. Thinking about his first lover, Octave repeats, “My condition can be expressed in a few words: I can not love her, I can not love another, and I can not cease loving.”<sup>35</sup> He comments, “The great obstacle to my cure was my youth. Wherever I happened to be, whatever my occupation, I could think of nothing but women”.<sup>36</sup> The hypersexualization of his own experiences causes his restlessness and solidification of the concept of ‘romantic(ist) love’ as a space where women are (to be) controlled, in conjunction with their excessive objectification. The exaggerated focus on the personal performing of his sexuality produces in this character a series of activities turning into a destructive train of ideas. The mental path from an ‘idolized woman’ for whom he duels up to the statement “My mistress is no better” than “a girl from the streets”<sup>37</sup> or “my mistress was a shameless wretch” or to the sudden spotting of cadaveric lividness in the beloved body<sup>38</sup>, is very short. Woman in Musset is primarily an idea, an image broken into two poles of ‘chastity’ and ‘fall,’ related to the religious control of sexuality. As an idea, “a woman is mystified at the outset as an ambivalent phenomenon: I abhorred her, yet I idolized her.”<sup>39</sup>

The nineteenth-century triumph of manhood depicted in Musset is also a foundation for a modern misogyny project—that is, a social vision structured around the concept of women’s inferiority and suspiciousness towards them. Octave recounts his three attempts at ‘loving,’ three moments of intense physical infatuation, at which desire occurs as a total force, or even as a spiritual force, always a fatal force, in any case. The objects of such affection differ from one another: the first is a woman of the world, a lady of the society (ending up as a protagonist of a salon scandal); the second is an upper-crust courtesan; the third, George Sand’s *alter ego*, is a woman living in the countryside, a profound, quiet, and modest one. Each of these attempts leads to a fiasco since Octave assumes at the chief gauge of his involvement his proneness to ‘license,’ to which he always yields at the end

<sup>34</sup> A. de Musset, *op. cit.*, subtitle of Chap. III: ‘The Beginning of the Confessions.’. Cf. “I have to explain how I was first taken with the malady of the age.”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. VI: ‘Madame Levasseur.’

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. VIII: ‘The Search for Healing.’

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. IX: ‘Bacchus, the Consoler.’

<sup>38</sup> Cf. “Marco, the beautiful statue, was livid as death,” *ibidem*, Chap. IV. ‘Marco’.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. III: ‘The Beginning of the Confessions’.

of the day. In this case, Musset's character is the main constituent of the critique of the Romantic(ist) myths of love (and mourning).

### A homosocial sequence

The misogynistic imagination, the basis of which emerges on the pages of Musset's novel, is always homosocial. The concept of "homosociality" comes from the works of Eve Kossofsky-Sedgwick and was developed on the example of analysis of English literature from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> According to her findings, desire is depicted in particular works as a thoroughly mimetic phenomenon involving not merely a couple but a 'love triangle,' the male protagonist desires his female lover in the first place. This concept owes a lot to feminist, critical analysis of the principle of "exchange of women between men," described as an anthropological social foundation by Claude Levy-Strauss.<sup>41</sup> The male protagonist, fulfilling his desire, enters into a relationship with the other male protagonist, and the female heroine is only a pretext for this relationship.<sup>42</sup> This regularity reveals the fact, typical for the patriarchal order, that a man puts the desire to be with others above all else men, and the "homosociality" of this desire is not connected with the genuine homosexual desire (which is at the same time wholly repressed), but with the objectified status of women. In a symbolic sense, they are not partners in any of their social contracts: neither public nor intimate, or in other words – neither political nor erotic.

Musset's hero is forced to find a male partner in each of their love relationships with women. This compulsion leads him to be suspicious of his lovers and persistent search for acts of their betrayal. At the novel's beginning, Octave involuntarily participates in the scene of caressing his beloved under the table with his friend, so much in Bridget's case that his suspicions are paranoid. Octave's three love objects are shown in a metonymic sequence: each subsequent one does not replace the previous one but complements the impossibility of meeting any of them. Let us note that the actual meeting with Sand Musset placed a series of women in his novel – Brigid is in no way treated as a different, unique position, it is another po-

<sup>40</sup> E. Kossofsky-Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Men Homosocial Desire*, New York 1985.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. A. Araszkievicz, 'Poza zakazem kazirodztwa' in *Lektury inności. Antologia*, ed. M. Dąbrowski, R. Pruszczyński, Warszawa 2007.

<sup>42</sup> E. Kossofsky-Sedgwick, *Męskie pragnienie homospoteczne i polityka seksualności*, transl. A. Ostolski, *Krytyka Polityczna* 2005, No. 9/10. Cf. B. Warkocki, *Pamiętnik afektów z okresu dojrzewania. Gombrowicz – queer – Sedgwick*, Warszawa 2018.

sition number. Octave meets her in the countryside, where he seeks relaxation after his amorous torments. She appears to be an anti-type of his previous conquests. The novel portrays her as a decent, insular woman, well-educated, self-reliant, and resistant to the world's lightnesses. It is this relationship that becomes a novelistic screen for Octave's compulsively soaring misogynic obsession. After an extended phase of seeking a concretization of this relationship, at the peak of which the female character is ready to sacrifice her happiness for her peace of mind, both protagonists can finally meet on an intimate basis. Their love-based happiness only lasts two days, followed by the downfall and psychical and emotional decay of the Romantic hero, cast down into a state of neverending suspicions resulting from his beloved one's innocent coquettish 'lie.' She played for him a piece she had composed, keeping its authorship secret as she feared his criticism. As might have been expected, she is rescued from the spiral of torment by the appearance of another male protagonist—a sure Mr. Smith, Brigitte's friend. In a not-quite-realistic manner, Octave aims to tell himself that his suspicions are quite correct; for the lovers, it means their relationship enters into agony.

Octave pretty soon yields to thoughts like, "After all, I thought, that woman has yielded too easily,"<sup>43</sup> what was believed to be a great love was essentially a 'mayhem' which he finds abhorring. He devotes himself anew to his favorite way of discharging the tension and falls into "a kind of stagnant inertia, tempered with bitter joy," as "characteristic of debauchery."<sup>44</sup> 'Revel' and 'debauchery' are to be approached as figures of a particular project of manhood related to social-sexual dominance. There is only one way out at the end of this path: Octave tries to kill Brigitte. He attacks her in the night, in sleep, with a knife, but at last, he proves unable to fulfill his intent. The *Confession of a Child of the Century* becomes a confession of a would-be killer of a woman. The nineteenth-century manhood and its triumph come across their hidden meaning: the male dominance project is simply one of sexual violence. 'Romantic(ist) love' appears to be a male-centered cliché concentrated around the 'woman-image' concept that objectifies women and performs sexuality as a male-centered violence project. 'Romantic(ist) love' is a veiled myth of cultural gynocide. It is in the most primal manner that Musset denies a woman (a lover and muse) the right to be a woman (real and sexual).

<sup>43</sup> A. de Musset, *op. cit.*, Chap. I: 'The Thorns of Love.'

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. II: 'Uncertainty'.

### Intimacy as a feminist critical project

In Sand's *Elle et Lui*, the focus is distributed entirely differently. The protagonist, Thérèse Jaques, is a twenty-nine-year-old painter, extensively tested and badly hit by the patriarchal social order (a dishonest husband has deprived her of her parental rights and took away their child, who finally died). Her meeting with Laurent de Fauvel, an emerging portraitist, her five-year junior, is a life event for her. Not only does she remove away from the world, seeking relief, but she also rejects any contact with men so they no more threaten her with "outrage of [their] desires"<sup>45</sup>; quoting the literal description, "she had instinctively been reserved and distrustful to defend herself from the desires of other men."<sup>46</sup> From the beginning of this narrative, womanhood is a project that remains in the sphere of 'imaginary utopia,' withdrawn as it is from harmful and violence-imbued social relations (with men).

The story told by Sand is thoroughly a triangle, as the other male protagonist, forty-year-old Richard Palmer, a mature friend of her family, has an essential role in it, acting as a trigger of the other characters' amorous potential—it is his who encourages Laurent to reveal his emotions and feelings. The young character is portrayed in a way that powerfully alludes to Musset's story, often being described as an "unhappy creature."<sup>47</sup> This young man "had no experience in matters of the heart, for that is not acquired in a life of dissipation," and "he had become intensely curious to ascertain the cause of the anomaly: a young, intelligent, and lovely woman, absolutely free and living alone of her own free will."<sup>48</sup> All the same, Laurent falls in love with Thérèse, resulting from the similarities in their sensitivities, literary preferences, and a limitless number of common topics to talk about. However, the love-driven situation warms up long before fulfillment is achieved. Thérèse is put in a position to enter the love affair, despite her negative premonitions, for Laurent "loved her with a diabolical passion," elsewhere described as "violent," "invincible and fatal," or "wretched," threatening her "with a pitiable future."<sup>49</sup>

Laurent has been a lover under conditional laws from the very beginning. His love argument goes, "Consent to be loved by me, and do not tell me again that it is an insult to you," or, "I will not leave your feet until you have at

<sup>45</sup> G. Sand, *She & He [Elle et Lui]*, trans. G. Burnham Ives, Chicago 1978, [Chap.] II. Polish version: G. Sand, *Ona i on*, transl. I. Krzywicka, Warszawa 1934, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. IV.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. III.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. III, V, IX, resp.

least forgiven me for loving you.”<sup>50</sup> There is no affirmative or consensual consent. Thérèse quite soon realises that there is no “meritorious passion”<sup>51</sup>; she feels that “Laurent loved vice”.<sup>52</sup> When the relationship is eventually fulfilled, the lover’s mutual happiness, edscribed as “a sort of languor of the heart, a sort of rapturous fatigue, which was in effect the enfranchisement of love,” lasts seven days. Laurent quickly develops the infernal sinusoid of “adoration,” revulsion, and then again, “worship, ecstatic contemplation.”<sup>53</sup> Thérèse realizes that this painter is a sick man; his humourous turns and outbursts appear to her not simply a rarity of temper.

Sand’s ‘romantic lover’ is, therefore, a man living in a complete psychological alienation, unaware of his ailment. The lovers go to Italy to rescue their relationship, yet their romantic journey appears to end their ‘romantic love.’ Laurent disturbs his inner balance by repeatedly succumbing to his psychological destabilization. At moments of amorous blessedness, he would focus on the smallest trivialities, elevating them to the rank of painful and harmful arguments against his lover. An agent of his oppression, he is nonetheless performing his manliness founded upon violence. As already remarked, Sand soon recognizes in this character’s behavior a violence-related cyclicality, noting Thérèse’s apparent gradual distancing toward Laurent as an object of loving. Following the subsequent assaults of his hallucinatory visions, she reckons, “I could no longer endure your caresses; they should degrade me.”<sup>54</sup> At last, she finds her love for her lover incomprehensible: “She was not drawn on by her passions, for Laurent, besmirched by the debauchery into which he plunged anew to kill a love which he could not destroy by his will, had become a more disgusting object than a dead body to her.”<sup>55</sup>

Sand carries out a structural decomposition of her Romanticist protagonist, who suffers from a peculiar autoimmune sickness related to imagination and sexuality. Laurent cannot free himself from the confines of the custom of solving his own homosocial and misogynic tensions through ‘reveling.’ To an acquaintance he meets onboard the ship, he confesses that he could not choose “between love and libertinism.”<sup>56</sup> One of the pretexts is his maniacal jealousy, which tells him to boycott the possibility of developing his relationship with Thérèse. His problems, collapses, twists of hu-

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. IV.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. II.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. XIII.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. V.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. VII.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. XII.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. VIII.



mor, and proneness to compensatory sexual hyperactivity occupy so much space in the novel that not much of it is left for Thérèse. She slowly recedes into a sacrificial resignation. Laurent's hallucinations were about himself, immersed in fornication.

When Palmer visits the lovers in Italy, he finds their relationship entirely degraded. He brings into it a positive and constructive vision of masculinity, which nowise can be completed. Palmer declares his love for Thérèse as he is willing to rehabilitate her through marriage. A series of plot twists and imbroglios commences, in which Laurent, left by Thérèse, falls ill with fever. At the same time, she, together with Palmer, set off to save him (the lover says in a letter that he has taken poison, which finally turns out not to be confirmed). Healed, Laurent seems not to be aware of the critical condition of their relationship, still treating Thérèse as his lover. His behavior is performative, though; it somehow turns the plot so that Palmer develops unfounded suspicions about Thérèse, who happens to be falling out of love, so she repels him. Despite her short-lived rapprochement with Laurent, she will never love him—nor will she love Palmer, who represents masculinity as a dehumanized institution.

Thus, 'Romantic(ist) love' in Sand is an attempted negotiation of intimate fulfillment for a woman, an attempted affirmation of sexual infatuation, despite her awareness of all the underlying patriarchal determinants. Therefore, it is a project where a woman is thoroughly an intruder functioning in whimsical circumstances, with no possibility to genuinely renegotiate her position: "That love, which she had accepted with so much courage and grandeur of soul, had left a stain."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Sand shows the lover as a man who uses the love field of all possible gimmicks and tackles save for loyalty and a partner-like approach. The sphere of the intimate remains one of lawlessness, with no grounds or excuse whatsoever. Thérèse finally understands that Laurent "has made a vow to kill her."<sup>58</sup> This means only one thing for a woman and lover: withdrawal from social relations as an implementation of a social utopia is a form of survival. Thereby, however, intimacy turns into a critical project.

Thérèse becomes an 'artist of love'. She resorts to a sacrificial position concerning Laurent since her rage would not be socially respected. Her insubordination, specifically civil disobedience towards Palmer's expectations, bears traces of a passive revolt. The novel continually juxtaposes the concepts of 'love' versus 'art'; as she is told at the story's outset,

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. XI.

Nothing is so complicated as those intimacies in which the parties have exchanged promises not to attack each other when neither inspires a secret physical repulsion in the other. Artists, because of their independent lives and the nature of their occupations, which oblige them often to depart from social conventions, are more exposed to these perils than those who live by rule and whose imaginations are less active.<sup>59</sup>

The author thereby grants the female protagonist an alibi for a love adventure to be taken as part of a cognitive experiment typical of ‘high-tier’ artistic or intellectual activities. Yet, the intimate project inherent in this novel also gains a high status. After all, once Laurent has “killed that love” and “injured her so deeply,” she resolved to live on her own, “and that art would be her only passion.”<sup>60</sup> One can get the impression that the novelist does not deny the appreciation of intimacy while also declaring a will to continue her criticism of the intimacy project in art—which she does through her novel. As Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska observes, it is worth emphasizing that despite her “open relationship, [Thérèse] remains a righteous person”<sup>61</sup>: quite a progressive fact, given the period’s realities. This adds to the novel’s extremely modern purpose. Thérèse successfully survives a ‘romantic love,’ though she proposes to her former lover a ‘sisterly attachment.’ At the story’s end, the female protagonist miraculously regains her son, whom she believed to have been irretrievably lost; now, “the mother had killed the mistress beyond recall.”<sup>62</sup> The last paragraph is composed of her letter to Laurent, in which she forgives him “for not being able to love,” along with “that insatiable aspiration,” preventing him from “be[ing] engrossed by one woman.”<sup>63</sup> The final sentence of the letter and the novel evokes the figure of ‘women of tomorrow’—as if the statement “The women of the future, they who will gaze at your work from century to century,—they are your sisters and your sweethearts”<sup>64</sup> was targeted at them, rather than at her former lover.

### **Repressed femininity: masculinity as a costume**

What is a testament as part of the mourning after a Romanticist/romantic love? Who are the ‘women of tomorrow’? In Sand’s novel, the romantic female lover gives way to ‘maternity’ and ‘sisterhood’—perhaps because for a man to be capable of entering a relationship with a woman, he has to be

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. IV.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, Chap. XII.

<sup>61</sup> K. Nadana-Sokołowska, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

<sup>62</sup> G. Sand, *She & He*, Chap. XIV.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, XIV.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

fostered and educated and can only be accompanied along the process. Is this a task for the ‘women of tomorrow’? Or rather, would those ‘women of tomorrow’ have an opportunity to boundlessly fulfill their intimate as well as political subjectivity and empowerment, free of the confines superimposed by the figure of the male ‘Romantic(ist) lover’? In *Elle et Lui*, the model of being a female ‘Romantic(ist) lover’ ends up in the woman’s sexual and social castration; her marginalization in the imaginative utopia against the hetero norm is only reinforced as the story unfolds. ‘Romantic(ist) love’ is a pattern founded upon the suppression of women and a symbolic gynocide (hence the recurring motif of ‘killing’ the female lover). It is, moreover, a pattern that solidifies violence against women as a tool for controlling social tensions and as a means of maintaining the patriarchal order.

The outstanding achievement brought about by Sand’s novel is the skill of distributing a violence-driven love intrigue to its constituents. This includes the introduction of the category of mourning into the Romanticist topos of ‘romantic love’: thus, the myth of love is dismantled, the male lover deconstructed as a figure of violence-laden instability, whereas the female character’s introspection leads to her feeling uncomfortable in the role of a ‘lover.’ Mourning is to be understood as an ever-unaccomplished fact: ‘Romantic(ist) love’ is not impossible as an encounter, while it is not an offer to meet. It is an offer of a junior-ranked position, a relation of inferiority. Albeit Sand’s work has been attacked for its apparent structural flaws, its structural far-fetchedness should be seen as part of an effort to write new content.

The text under discussion has not been recorded in the history of literature as a constituent of the ‘Romantic(ist) love’ myth. However, it is an essential attempt at renegotiating its significance and meaning. Christine Planté observes in her *La petite sœur de Balzac. Essai sur la femme-auteur*<sup>65</sup> that nineteenth-century female authors often found themselves in a culturally ‘unassimilable’ position: women of that age frequently found it hard to “tell the story of their personality, individual evolution, since the social normativity admitted few individual varieties as far as women were concerned, unable to accept their stories.”<sup>66</sup>

In the Musset-Sand duo, the former is dominant in accessing symbolic authority, defining the intimate and the political. Sand’s role is that of a subaltern, the subordinate ‘other’<sup>67</sup>—and, thereby, the position of speak-

<sup>65</sup> Ch. Planté, *La Petite Sœur de Balzac. Essai sur la femme-auteur*, Paris 1989.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 234.

<sup>67</sup> I use the notion of ‘subaltern’ based on G.Ch. Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in P. Williams, L. Chrisman (eds. and introduced by), *Colonial Discourse and Post-*

ing from a subordinated position. Musset gives his experiences a form of a collective symbol of his generation's fate. In contrast, Sand fictionalizes her individual story, whose joint reception is not capable of accepting a more extensive interpretation, one that would make one obliged to develop a systemic view. Musset positions his male protagonist, a 'child of the century,' as a synonym of the epoch's fundamental experience; the female character is a metaphor for his 'betrayal by the ideals.' Sand's male protagonist brings about a sort of upheaval in the patriarchal narrative; in the female character, the textual effect reinforces her escape into an 'imaginary utopia.' Musset's novel sets the period's prevalent literary genre; Sand, as a subaltern, talks, in a sense, to a void, though the addressees seem to be the 'women of tomorrow'—that is, the generations to come, in which the gender question will be revisited (let us point out that it stems from a subaltern's position that their voice is inaudible, rather than that s/he does not speak).

On Polish soil, the regularity under discussion is confirmed by the symbolic position occupied in Polish culture by the translators of the respective novels—namely, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński and Irena Krzywicka. Both of them were involved in developing equality-oriented thinking in the interwar period of 1918–1939, and both had unconventional relationships, yet Boy-Żeleński's voice sounds much more potent in making Polish readers acquainted with the Musset-Sand duet. His preface to the Polish edition of *Confession of a Child of the Century* reinforces Alfred de Musset's position as a Romantist author. However, the Polish translator and essayist declares his 'sympathy' in those "susceptible life situations"<sup>68</sup> on Sand's part; he sees no cognitive turn in her novels. Regarding Krzywicka's decision to translate the Sand novel and her understanding of its significance, its purpose is not communicated, as no commentary is attached to the Polish edition of *Elle et Lui*.

Today, researchers may only speculate as to why Krzywicka chose this particular novel to be translated,<sup>69</sup> though, in an essay published by the *Wiadomości Literackie* weekly,<sup>70</sup> she portrays George Sand as a "figure whose significance as a cultural pattern is enormous" to her, she was a "writer and woman of genius" and a "revolutionary." Krzywicka defends Sand's work against specific patriarchal accusations of lust and promiscuity,<sup>71</sup> seeing in

*Colonial Theory. A Reader*, New York 1994, pp. 46–111. Polish version: G.Ch. Spivak, 'Czy podporządkowani inni mogą przemówić,' transl. E. Majewska, *Krytyka Polityczna* 2010, No. 24–25.

<sup>68</sup> T. Boy-Żeleński, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. K. Nadana-Sokołowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 258–63.

<sup>70</sup> I. Krzywicka, 'George Sand,' *Wiadomości Literackie* 1937, No. 9, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> The remark concerns two books by French authors reviewed by Krzywicka:

them a record of “an explosion of triumphant femininity.”<sup>72</sup> “She was doubtlessly the first woman who dared to be completely self-reliant and to be governed by the male laws,” wrote she admiringly; “the life of hers, in which she always remained faithful to herself, leaving no room for cowardice or trade-offs, was her genuine masterpiece,”<sup>73</sup> Krzywicka affirms the change brought about by George Sand’s output; it is quite a pity that she wrote no preface to her 1930s publication, and so the novel plus such a commentary could not be re-edited and republished in our time.

Sand’s memoirs show her overwhelming desire for a woman who “desired to be an artist” to be “intellectually burgeoning”<sup>74</sup>—not an easy path for a woman in the nineteenth century. Alfred de Musset was honored with the prestigious Académie française, one of the highest distinctions in France’s literary life; Sand was never to be granted such a privilege. Sand performs the ousting of women from nineteenth-century public space through her famous male costume and the pen name she assumes. At quite an early stage of her education, Sand put into practice what she terms ‘dreams of male virtues’ to which a woman may aspire. She feels neither “perfidious nor vain; neither talkative nor lazy” in her strivings.<sup>75</sup> She rejects any stigmatization of deviations from the role traditionally attached to women.

“Neither Aurora nor George,” wrote she of herself, “nor a lady, and, definitely, no *mister*.”<sup>76</sup> “She fabricates a new identity for herself, ignoring the gender difference,” argues Brigitte Diaz, French commentator of Sand’s work.<sup>77</sup> Not only does her menswear wreck the limitations of traditional femininity, but it primarily reveals the hidden truth about masculinity: the latter is a costume as well. For Sand, the significance of masculinity or manliness is negotiable and arbitrary—as opposed to Musset, who sees it as a metaphor for the world. This world reinforces mechanisms of exclusion.

*Confession of a Child of the Century* can be read today as a substructure of the toxic masculinity project, so typical of the modern age, embodied in the *fin de siècle*’s cultural scheme of misogyny or our contemporary *incel* (*involuntary celibacy*) culture. All these phenomena can be seen as a conti-

J. Davray, *Les Amants de Georges Sand*, Paris 1935; J. Charpentier, *George Sand*, Paris 1936. Both of them depict Sand’s intimate biography in terms of disciplined female sexuality.

<sup>72</sup> T. Boy-Żeleński, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>74</sup> G. Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>77</sup> B. Diaz, ‘Présentation,’ in G. Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, p. 40.

nulty: they promote the inferiority of women, cultural distrust towards them, and contempt for their sexuality.

Nonetheless, consuming the Sand text implies the recognition that female desire has never written the history of Western civilization as it remains mute within its space. Any attempt at revindication of women's rights seems to imply the threat of the breakdown of a revolution and redefinition of the order; therefore, love narratives, created in many a genre and style, are employed to discipline women. A classical definition of 'Romantic(ist) love' (such as the one in the abovementioned literary dictionary) only produces fascination with heterosexual kitsch. It romanticizes sexual violence as a basis of eroticism, which is inherent in the gender difference between the masculine and the feminine.<sup>78</sup> To a remarkable degree, culture is founded upon the preclusion of the integrity of the female experience, so female subjectivity/ empowerment in the love narrative remains a revolutionary project to be implanted. Without launching the mourning for Romantic(ist) love and recognizing the contribution of the subaltern (female authors, non-binary individuals) in the negotiation of cultural patterns, it is difficult to elaborate new visions for 'individuals of tomorrow': women, men, and all and any conceivable identities of 'neither ladies nor misters.'



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#### ABSTRACT

The concept of 'romantic love' is one of the most essential concepts of the romantic paradigm and its impact on modern times. Using the example of two novels by George Sand (*Elle et lui*, 1859) and Alfred de Musset (*Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, 1836), the text analyzes the cultural significance of both texts, their different, non-parallel statuses, and their impact on the thinking styles of the era. Sand's text, which renegotiates the concept of 'romantic love' and positions itself critically toward the de Musset text, deserves a new reading. It follows from it that 'romantic love' was created as a cliché affirming the fascination with heterosexual kitsch and romanticizing sexual violence as the basis of eroticism inscribed in the gender difference between masculinity and femininity. Musset's text tries to dismantle this myth and renegotiate its meanings.

#### KEYWORDS

George Sand, Alfred de Musset, sexuality, love, romanticism, masculinity, femininity

<sup>78</sup> Cf. P.B. Preciado, *Dysphoria mundi. Le son du monde qui s'écroule*, Paris 2022, p. 42.