Les Œuvres Bâtardes:
Gender, Sexuality, and Scandal in Nineteenth-Century French Women's Writing Across Genres

By

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Abstract

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Les Œuvres Bâtardes: Gender, Sexuality, and Scandal in Nineteenth-Century French Women's Writing offers an interdisciplinary consideration of three women of letters in nineteenth-century France. This study maps the novels of George Sand, the journalistic writing of Delphine de Girardin, and the poetry of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore in an exploration of the ways in which three very different authors push thematic and formal boundaries in their efforts to explore the nexus of gender and sexuality by engaging with or challenging their perceived social roles. Sand, Girardin, and Desbordes-Valmore employ varied techniques to negotiate legitimacy and inclusion in an environment that is openly hostile to women writers. Beginning with an investigation into the controversy surrounding George Sand's ill-received third novel *Lélia*, my analysis illustrates how questions of literary form, authorial gender, and women's sexuality are closely intertwined in the nineteenth-century French cultural landscape. I then examine Delphine de Girardin's journalistic *feuilleton*, the *Courrier de Paris,* demonstrating how Girardin's genre crossing and gender bending encourage us to question the relationship between gender and conceptions of modernity. Finally, turning to the works of the sole woman *poète maudit*, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, I interrogate the relationship between gender and poetry in the nineteenth century, revealing how the poet's unique manner of performing femininity complicate her position in the French literary canon.

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INTRODUCTION

What is an *œuvre bâtarde*? To refer to someone or something as "bastard" is to connote not only illegitimacy, but also hybridity, abstraction, intermediacy. An *oeuvre bâtard* is a work of art that is perceived in the multiple, caught between clashing forms and conflicting genres. My dissertation, *Les Œuvres Bâtardes: Gender, Sexuality, and Scandal in Nineteenth-Century French Women's Writing*, offers an interdisciplinary consideration of three women of letters in nineteenth-century France. My research examines the novels of George Sand, the poetry of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and the journalistic writing of Delphine de Girardin in an attempt to reconsider how we have come to understand nineteenth-century women's authorship in relation to gender and sexuality. In examining various genres – prose, poetry, and journalism – I investigate the ways in which these three very different authors push thematic and formal boundaries in their efforts to explore the nexus of gender and sexuality by engaging with or challenging their perceived social roles. I explore the ways in which Sand, Girardin, and Desbordes-Valmore negotiate legitimacy and inclusion in an environment that is openly hostile to women writers. My dissertation, which is perhaps a kind of *œuvre bâtarde* itself, positions itself in the context of studies on nineteenth-century women's writing, feminism, and gender and sexuality studies.

My research on George Sand is greatly informed by the work of Naomi Schor and Margaret Cohen. Naomi Schor's 1993 *George Sand and Idealism*, and Margaret Cohen's 1999 *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* are two paradigm-shifting studies that question the hierarchy of literary genre and the canonization – or decanonization – of women authors. In Schor's work, she argues that Sand is decanonized, not because of her gender, but because of the discrediting of idealism by the triumph of realism. Sand's idealism was at once political and aesthetic, and Schor asserts that Sand's choice to produce under the aesthetic mode of idealism functioned as a way to differentiate herself as a woman author. The choice also represented Sand's "refusal to reproduce mimetically and hence to legitimate a social order inimical to the disenfranchised, among them women" (54). Margaret Cohen explores a related topic: the confrontation of the sentimental novel and the realist novel. My intervention into George Sand studies builds upon Schor's and Cohen's work by delving deeper into Sand's deviations in form and literary genre.

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In my first chapter, "*Des choses que je ne savais pas:* The Hermeneutics of Impotence in George Sand's *Lélia*," I unpack the controversy surrounding Sand's ill-received third novel *Lélia*, first published in 1833 and condemned as indecent due to its portrayal of the heroine's sexual and emotional impotence, or

impuissance. My analysis illustrates how questions of literary form, authorial gender, and women's sexuality are closely intertwined in the nineteenth-century French cultural landscape. *Lélia* refuses to conform to one particular genre, flitting between philosophical meditation, confession, gothic tale, and bildungsroman. Contemporary critics thus struggled to place the novel within the existing dominant generic codes of the feminine sentimental social novel and the masculine realist novel. This disruption of literary genre prompted readers and critics to question Sand's own gender, since *Lélia* was published at an exceptional moment in Sand's career during which her identity as a woman author was not yet universal public knowledge. In turn, speculations of authorial gender then influenced readers' conceptualizations of the fictional heroine's sexuality. Moreover, I explore how Sand's response to the criticism of her novel, which culminated in the rewriting and republication of *Lélia* in 1839, reveals a great deal about her trajectory as an author and her process of learning the socially-imposed limits of writing as a woman in nineteenth-century France.

Sand rewrote *Lélia* in 1839 and made significant changes: she altered the sections concerning Lélia's ambiguous sexuality, while also making the novel more overtly feminist. In the 1839 version, Lélia's inability to engage in physical love is transformed into a metaphysical incapacity to love within patriarchal power structures; she thus unequivocally *chooses* to reject a sexual existence. Sand also reworks the end of the novel: instead of being murdered at the hands of the crazed monk Magnus, Lélia becomes the abbess of a convent and uses her position of (relative) power to denounce the injustices of a patriarchal society. Sand's rewriting of *Lélia* raises many questions that scholars have only superficially answered. What are we to make of the reworking of the novel to portray a more explicit – and perhaps tolerable – form of feminism? Why is it more acceptable to refuse sexual relations by choice than to have an uncontrollable bodily reaction to a sexual encounter? Sand's novel and its reception challenge our understanding of the status of gender, desire, sexuality, and the body in nineteenth-century literature and culture.

Contemporary critics have been drawn to this tension between physical and emotional love, and many have interpreted Lélia's "sexuality" as impotence. In Chapter 1, I unpack this critical labelling of Lélia as sexually impotent in an attempt to better understand the struggle of Sand's complicated heroine. I would argue that labelling Lélia's sexuality as impotence is too simple; such a classification ignores the ambiguities of Lélia's analysis of her very identity, sexual and otherwise. Lélia's confession questions the status of love, desire, and passion, and the role that these dominating forces play in the construction of identity. It is also important to take into account that for many of Sand's heroines, Lélia included, love and even desire often do not translate into sexual attraction. For the male love interests, this appeal to a love without sexual relations is troubling in that it renders the heroine incomprehensible. The heroines' indifference and even repulsion to physicality, removes her from the comprehensible patriarchal economic, political, and social structures of

dominance (such as reproduction and inheritance, for example). We might consider the disruption of such structures in Butler's terms of gender intelligibility, in which she states,

> 'Intelligible' genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the 'expression' or 'effect' of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (23)

In valorizing relationships devoid of sexual relations, Sand's heroines disrupt the coherence of biological sex, gender, and their intelligible expression via sexual practice. For the male lovers, the interruption of the natural progression of the relationship (in other words, when the heroine reveals that she is not sexually attracted to him), immediately renders the heroine unintelligible: she ceases to be female when she does not express sexually the normative expectations of her gender.

We might also be able to understand Lélia's sexuality in relation to Judith Butler's analysis of Foucault's work on Herculine Barbin, in which she writes that sexuality cannot be left in an ambivalent state. Sexuality must always be found, labelled, accounted for. Perhaps one could even consider the critical propulsion to label Lélia's sexuality (and define her situation as impotence), rather than to account for the multiplicity of her desire, as a way in which scholars struggle to reconcile the disjuncture of body, desire, and sexuality in this curious novel. And yet, it is precisely the ambivalence that allows for the creation of meaning for Lélia. Sand's portrayal of Lélia's atypical sexuality represents a misalignment between her heroine and the cultural norm, and the critical response to this misalignment reveals a deep-seated discomfort with a sexuality that is not rooted in physical desire.

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My second chapter, "Delphine de Girardin's Parisian Comedy: Journalism, Parody, and Writing the History of the Present," reconceptualizes Paris, "Capital of the Nineteenth-Century," not from the moody poetry of Baudelaire, but instead from the fabulously outlandish journalistic writing of Delphine de Girardin. Between 1836 and 1848, Girardin published a weekly column in her husband's daily journal *La Presse* under the pseudonym Vicomte de Launay. In this column, or *chronique,* called *Le Courrier de Paris*, the Vicomte comments on all aspects of contemporary life: governmental affairs, fashion, meetings of the Académie Française, high-society balls, and beyond. Since *La Presse* was one of the most widely-read and circulated journals in the mid-

nineteenth century, Girardin's column quickly became a staple of Parisian journalism. Indeed, Girardin arguably founds and standardizes this new genre of journalistic writing in which the present plays out before readers' eyes. Written in a humoristic style dripping with irony, Girardin transforms the mundane into the satirical sublime.

Building upon Marie-Eve Thérenty's work, I examine how Girardin pushes the boundaries of gender and genre, encouraging us to question how the concept modernity itself is inherently gendered in the nineteenth century. Although Girardin published hundreds of articles as the Vicomte de Launay, the medium of publication seems to have discouraged critical enquiry until quite recently. The letters' absolute lack of continuity, their essentially transitory nature, and their abrupt shifts in tone and style are all products of the genre of the *chronique,* which has remained generally outside of the realm of literary analysis. In my chapter, I closely analyze the form and novelty of Girardin's *Courrier* to produce a reading that places Girardin at the center of the urban Parisian universe, a woman writing modernity.

Understanding the role of humor in Girardin's *Courrier* and the potentially liberating or constricting effects that such humor has on the discussion of social concerns is another important facet of my chapter. Girardin's column was universally read and adored, except by the satirical press. One might expect satirical journals to be *confrères*; they make fun of the same people, after all. However, the *Charivari*, the leading satirical French newspaper in the nineteenth century, was one of the harshest and most consistent critics of the *Courrier*, and their negative take on Girardin's column seems to be solely based on the fact that it is written by a woman. My chapter explores the reception of Girardin's humor in various nineteenth-century publics, and how the perception of women's humor plays out in conceptualizations of gender and authorship.

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My final chapter, "*Ce que je n'ose écrire*: Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Writing Oneself," considers the relationship between gender and poetry by examining the works of the sole woman *poète maudit,* Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. I demonstrate how the poet's complicated position in the French literary canon can be traced to her unique manner of "performing" femininity with questions of gender and language in her poetry. On the one hand, Desbordes-Valmore is arguably one of the most celebrated nineteenth-century female poets, lauded by her contemporaries such as Baudelaire and Verlaine, as the embodiment of a feminine poetics. On the other hand, contemporary scholars have struggled with her exaltation of femininity, humility, and motherhood, attempting to understand her poetry outside of its heteronormative exterior. Understanding Desbordes-Valmore's reception – from the nineteenth century to the present – can help shed light on the social attitudes towards gender and authorship at each period in time. Such an analysis will also open up a space for a new consideration of her poetry. Desbordes-Valmore was overwhelmingly

praised for her poetic talent and embodiment of the eternal feminine in the mid-nineteenth century; she was criticized and labelled as antifeminist in the 1990s; how are we supposed to read her today?

My dissertation will expand upon previous studies by reengaging Desbordes-Valmore's poetry with feminist and gender theories. One connection that has yet to be sufficiently worked through is Desbordes-Valmore's manipulation of language to resist gendering her poems, which I attempt to understand through the lens of Hélène Cixous's writings on the linguistic oppression of women, such as her essay "Le Rire de la Méduse." In further analyzing Desbordes-Valmore's formal and lexical choices, we are able to consider her work beyond the boundaries of solely "women's writing." By mobilizing poetic language in a way that resists our conventional understanding of "feminine" poetics, Desbordes-Valmore demonstrates how a strict categorization of gender is of secondary importance to universalizing shared experience.

As Gretchen Schultz has demonstrated, many of Desbordes-Valmores poems reconfigure the lyric "I" in a manner that emphasizes the role of the poet as a subject, rather than confining them to the limits of a gendered speaker. In the poem "Son Image," for example, Desbordes-Valmore personifies "image" in a way that circumvents the need to assign a gender to the love object of the poem. Consider the opening lines:

Elle avait fui de mon âme offensée ;
Bien loin de moi je crus l'avoir chassée :
Toute tremblante, un jour, elle arriva,
Sa douce image, et dans mon cœur rentra

The reader of the poem discovers that the "Elle" of the opening line refers to "Sa douce image," rather than a human being. The same technique is used in the second stanza of the poem:

Pour me toucher il prit un air timide ;
Puis à mes pieds en pleurant, il tomba.
J'oubliai tout dès que l'Amour pleura. (25)

The reader again belatedly understands the referent of the pronoun "il" – L'Amour. This strategy gives Desbordes-Valmore more freedom in crafting poems in which she does not always have to be assigned the role of the female speaking subject, and the recipient of the poem remains ungendered as well. I would argue that a closer reading of Desbordes-Valmore's poetry reveals a meditation on and understanding of desire as a human, rather than specifically gendered, experience.

Although there has been much debate over Desbordes-Valmore's status as a feminist versus feminine poet, surprisingly few scholars have considered her poetry in relation to the theoretical notion of *écriture féminine.* Wendy Greenberg reads Desbordes-Valmore's "Lettre de femme" through the lens of Cixous's Rire de la Méduse, arguing that the poem functions as an example of the kind of *écriture féminine* that Cixous envisions in her essay. Greenberg notes several key

elements of the poem that she in turn traces in the works of other nineteenth-century female poets: the preponderance of communication verbs suggesting the act of writing, the use of feminine rhyme schemes, and thematic defiance of social conventions (109-110). In a similar vein, Aimé Boutin has analyzed Desbordes-Valmore's "writing of the body" as a form of *écriture féminine,* as the poet figures the body in her writing by symbolizing the maternal (125). I build upon these studies by reengaging Desbordes-Valmore's poetry with feminist and gender theories and specifying in what ways it corresponds to some of Cixous's aspirations.

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My dissertation elaborates much of the recent research that has been conducted in efforts to develop the French literary canon to be more inclusive of women authors. Where my research differs, however, is in the methodology of my approach: taking as a base the reconstruction of each of these authors' particular social positions as well as their reception in nineteenth-century French society allows for a reconsideration of their work when read today. In my George Sand chapter, for example, I demonstrate how nineteenth-century understandings of female sexuality, and particularly female sexual impotence, deeply influenced the ways in which readers reacted to Sand's *Lélia.* Establishing such a baseline then allows my research to complement or challenge modern scholarship that might engage in anachronistic interpretations of female sexuality, even if such interpretations serve the purpose of advancing empowering, feminist readings. Bourdieu writes that works of literature have the power to tell us everything twice: the actual work itself communicates a certain message, and the social world in which the work was produced transmits another message. Text and context are two translations of the same phrase (Bourdieu, 92). In *les Œuvres bâtardes,* I demonstrate all that we can gain by reading these three women authors in various contexts to better understand the risks they took, the sacrifices they made, and the boundaries they crossed.

CHAPTER 1
Des choses que je ne savais pas:
The Hermeneutics of Impotence in George Sand's *Lélia*

> Il y a un effet social de l'œuvre, qui est différentiel, qui n'est pas un effet omnibus, une œuvre n'exerçant pas le même effet sur tout le monde. Cet effet social différentiel peut être analysé à partir de la connaissance des principes de différenciation du public sur lequel s'exerce cet effet. Cet effet social contient des révélations sur l'œuvre d'art.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu[1]

When George Sand published her third novel *Lélia* in late July of 1833, readers and critics reacted to it in ways that the young author had not expected. To put it simply, people hated it. *Lélia* was: "un livre bâtard" (*La Revue des modes de Paris* 121); "affreux" (Desessarts 213); "un défi jeté à toutes les idées d'ordre et de morale" (*La Mode* 266); and "sentant la boue et la prostitution" (Feuillide 70). In this chapter, I try to make sense of these reactions by analyzing the root of the novel's controversy. Like her previous two novels, *Indiana* and *Valentine,* both published in 1832*, Lélia* features a strong female lead struggling to understand her place in the social world while reconciling feelings of love with independence. That is where the similarities between *Lélia* and Sand's first two novels end, however. *Indiana* and *Valentine* could be understood as archetypal sentimental social novels, as the genre is laid out by Margaret Cohen. Differing formally and thematically from previous representations of sentimentality, the sentimental social novel took explicit social and political positions, thus shifting readers' attention from the purely private sphere represented in sentimental love stories, to the public sphere in which questions of social justice were brought to life. Cohen explains that sentimental social novels typically express their underlying ideas through the comments of narrators, characters, and authorial personae, a formal development that stands as a major transformation of sentimentality: "With such explicit political and social position-taking, sentimental social novels focus the reader's attention on the public sphere, in contrast to the private emphasis in sentimental stories of love" (Cohen 129). Sand's *Indiana* and *Valentine*, for example, both explore women's dominated social position and question the institution of marriage as it related to gender and class.

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[1] Bourdieu, Pierre. Pierre. *Manet: Une révolution symbolique.* Seuil, 2013.

Rather than continue the sentimental social trend with her third novel, Sand takes an abrupt turn with *Lélia.* Lélia is neither trapped in a loveless marriage nor suffering an illicit passion that cannot be. Instead, the beautiful heroine is impotent, *impuissante*: mentally and physically unable (and unwilling) to have intimate relations with the love interest, called Sténio. This explicit portrayal of a non-normative female sexuality, combined with the startling formal deviations of the novel, provoked a predominantly negative reaction from critics.

There are three strands to this chapter, corresponding to the three elements that must be taken into account to understand the root of the scandal of *Lélia.* First, we must understand the reactions to the form of the novel. As I briefly mentioned earlier, one reviewer referred to *Lélia* as "un livre bâtard qui appartient à la fois au roman, au drame et au poème." Concern about the novel's form is a trend in the contemporary criticism, so understanding this confusion and frustration is a necessary first step towards making sense of other concerns about the novel. Considering the question of Sand's gender in relation to her third novel's reception is the second critical step in my analysis because contrary to what many modern Sand scholars have contended, contemporary reviews of the novel suggest that Sand's gender might not have been universal public knowledge at the time of *Lélia's* publication. It is important and worthwhile to trace how speculations regarding Sand's gender do and do not correspond with certain elements of critiques of the novel. Do concerns or questions about Sand's gender match other concerns, such as those about genre, or about the heroine's sexuality, for example?

Finally, understanding exactly what Sand meant when she described her heroine as *impuissante* is crucial in making sense of the novel's influence on various audiences. How did Sand's usage of *impuissance* differ from critics' interpretations of the term? What did the word and the concept mean to Sand, and what did it mean to the rest of the world, since, as we shall see, these two understandings appeared to be quite different. Sand reflects back on critics' reactions to *Lélia* in her autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie* (1855), writing,

> on alla jusqu'à interpréter dans un sens vicieux et obscène des passages écrits avec la plus grande candeur, et je me souviens que, pour comprendre ce que l'on m'accusait d'avoir voulu dire, je fus forcée de me faire expliquer des choses que je ne savais pas. (662)

What happens if, as twenty-first century readers of the text, we take Sand at her word and imagine that there was indeed something she did not know when she described Lélia as *impuissante*? Suppose we imagine that she did not have knowledge about this particular subject, that she did not know the medical implications or the cultural history of the term. In a similar vein, we also have to take critics at their word when they said that they could not believe that Sand was unaware of the repercussions that the creation of a sexually impotent heroine would have. As Félix Guillibert wrote in *La France littéraire* in January of 1834, "L'auteur eut à supporter de rudes attaques. – Sans doute, il s'y attendait;

on ne jette pas à la société une provocation pareille à Lélia sans en comprendre la portée, sans prévoir bien des récriminations" (94). Note that Guillibert signals the character of Lélia as the provocation, not the novel as a whole, which suggests that for him it was the portrayal of an impotent heroine that triggered negative reactions. Sand was unprepared for the intensity of the backlash against her novel, and in response she pushed back, arguing that the world had misunderstood. In this chapter, I attempt to make sense of the scandal of *Lélia* by unpacking in separate strands three elements that are in fact completely intertwined: the novel's form, the author's gender, and the heroine's sexuality.

Part I: *Lélia's* Form

"Ce n'est pas un roman, c'est autre chose," the critic for the *Journal des débats* wrote in September 1833 (C-R. 3). Indeed, this chimeric novel refuses to conform to one particular genre, flitting between philosophical meditation, confession, gothic tale, and bildungsroman. Critics were intensely divided over *Lélia*. On the one hand, they generally agreed that Sand merited praise for the novel's "poésie du style" (*La Mode* 266) and "prose merveilleuse" (Guillibert 94). On the other hand, the originality of *Lélia*'s form, especially in comparison to Sand's two previous novels, puzzled readers. The reviewer of the *Journal des débats,* for example, writes that in order to appreciate *Lélia,* the reader must forget *Indiana* and *Valentine*, which had been so well-received because of their veritable representation of reality: "Ne vous attendez pas cette fois à rencontrer sur votre chemin quelques-uns de ces personnages qui vous avaient paru si vrais, si vivans, si heureusement créés à l'image de tout ce que nous voyons dans le monde" (C-R. 3). Instead, the reader must be prepared for a much more atypical story and structure. This denial of the novel-form of *Lélia* seems to be a trend in its critical reception. Several reviews begin by questioning the novel's very form. "Mais qu'est-ce que *Lélia*?" writes the reviewer of the *Figaro* (1). Critics questioned whether Sand's work was a novel, a poem, a personal cry of despair, a philosophical treatise, or perhaps all of the above.

Instead of the traditional third person masculine narrator opening the novel, as is the case for many of the novels published in the 1830s, including a great deal of Balzac's works (and Sand's first two novels), *Lélia* begins with a kind of dissolved epistolarity: an unidentified voice questions an unknown interlocutor, "Qui es-tu? et pourquoi ton amour fait-il tant de mal?" (7). Margaret Cohen reminds us that genre is a social relation; it is a position that designates a shared set of codes: "The poetic record of the writer's and reader's expectations shaping a text, generic conventions convey crucial information about a text's position within the literary exchanges of its time and illuminate how it engages its audience (17). When a novel transgresses established generic codes, it thus takes a position. With *Lélia,* Sand put out into the world a novel that did not follow any of the dominant codes of the 1830s, which were the feminine sentimental social novel and the masculine realist novel. Naomi Schor also

analyzes the conflict around *Lélia*'s genre: on the one hand, the characters (as critics and Sand herself noted, but only later, years after the novel was first published) function as symbols, or types, each with their own specific set of principles, which was a characteristic of the sentimental novel. In other words, the heroine and her affliction are not meant to be read literally. On the other hand, when read within a realist horizon of expectations, Lélia's "graphic confession of sexual impotence and bleak howl of metaphysical despair […] constitute the major scandal of the work" (Schor 57).

Many of the contemporary reviews of *Lélia* attempt to place the novel within the existing generic traditions. Sainte-Beuve's critique in *Le National* demonstrates the extent to which authorial gender informed literary genre at the time. He begins his review of the novel by commenting on the "singulier mouvement moral et littéraire" that had been sweeping the nation: the call for women's emancipation and equality. Women, he explains, have been turning to literature to voice their demands for social change, resulting in the birth of a new socially-engaged literary genre. George Sand is one such author, and her first two novels exemplify this political and literary movement. Sainte-Beuve explains that with *Lélia,* however, critics and readers are in fact misreading the novel because of their preconceived notions about its genre: "on a reproché à l'écrivain l'abus du *genre intime*, comme s'il y avait le moindre rapport entre le genre intime et le ton presque partout dithyrambique, grandiose, et, ainsi qu'on l'a dit, symbolique, de ce poëme" (3).[2] But if *Lélia* does not fall into a clear literary genre as do its predecessors, where does it fall? Sainte-Beuve struggles to make sense of Sand's formal and generic decisions in her third novel. Whereas certain critics reproached Sand for abusing the *roman intime,* Sainte-Beuve reproaches her for failing to remain within the bounds of the "roman vraisemblable" (4). He discusses how the realistic content does not respect the boundaries of a realistic form, and this violation of generic boundaries gives the novel "un caractère mixte et fantastique qui ne satisfait pas" (4). He writes:

> Comme la donnée première de *Lélia* [l'impuissance d'aimer et de croire] est tout à fait réelle et a ses analogues dans la société où nous vivons, j'ai eu peine à ne pas regretter, malgré l'éclat prestigieux de cette forme nouvelle, que l'auteur ne se fût pas renfermé dans les limites du roman vraisemblable (4)

He then gives several examples: the relationship between Lélia and Sténio could have been more developed "dans le sens de la réalité," even the metaphysical

[2] Sainte-Beuve's use of the term *genre intime* reflects what Cohen refers to as the "discursive slippage of contemporary polemic" surrounding the emergence of the sentimental social novel. She points out that during the 1830s and 1840s the sentimental social novel was "identified with a range of terms, notably as the literature of ideas, the philosophical novel, and the social novel. Critics also called it the novel of private life [*roman intime*] and the novel of manners [*roman de moeurs*], designations long applied to the sentimental novel in a nomenclature that continued into the 1830s and 1840s. That critics used these terms, novel of private life and novel of manners, to quantify realist works as well indicates their profound uncertainty over what poetics would inherit sentimentality's literary mantle" (121-122).

conversations and the impassioned complaints against society might have worked had they been situated "dans des scènes plus particularisées" (4). It is especially interesting that Sainte-Beuve signals *impuissance* as the very element that is *tout à fait réelle* and exists in society, the element that readers will be able to recognize in this otherwise unfamiliar novel. Margaret Waller understands Sainte-Beuve's reaction to the novel in terms of "penetrability": because Sand did not conform to the cultural codes of femininity in writing, she produced an impenetrable novel (171). Indeed, Sainte-Beuve goes so far as to critique Sand's style in *Lélia* as too studied, too perfect, employing "formes trop savantes, trop arrêtées, qui n'ont jamais de défaillances gracieuses, de négligences irrégulières" (4). He writes that he would have preferred "une expression plus voisine du sentiment" (4); in other words, he would have preferred a more conventionally feminine work, in both form and content. In Sainte-Beuve's *Mes Poisons,* a collection of posthumous notes published in 1926, he reflects on his friendship with Sand, writing,

> Longtemps j'ai été à côté de celle qui écrivit *Lélia* comme à côté d'un abîme dont le bord était recouvert d'une végétation magnifique, riante, et, couché dans l'herbe haute, j'admirais. Mais un jour, à la fin, je me suis penché, et j'ai vu! *O quanta Charybdis*! (112)

Waller interprets this image as representative of the conventionally "female" form, the gaping abyss, thus representing not only the text, but the author herself (171-72). It is telling that Sainte-Beuve refers to Sand as "celle qui écrivit *Lélia*," as if it was this early work that defined Sand as an author and a person. In spite of Sand's 80+ publications throughout the nineteenth-century, she remains "celle qui écrivit *Lélia*"above all, this novel marking her with its complexity.

We can carry over this generic conflict to how readers understood the work and interpreted Lélia's affliction in particular. Did they understand her *impuissance* as erotic or metaphysical, as sexual impotence or as an unfulfilling quest for the "Absolute"? In the sections that follow, I analyze several contemporary reviews of Lélia, focusing on critics' discussions of the novel's form in relation to their treatment of the question of impotence. I would argue that the expectations and resulting interpretations of the form and the reaches of the novel influenced readers' understandings of the ways that Sand used *impuissance*.

Gustave Planche was one of the first critics to review *Lélia* in an August 15, 1833 article for the *Revue des deux mondes.* Planche begins his review by informing the reader of all that Sand's latest novel is not: "*Lélia* n'est pas le récit ingénieux d'une aventure ou le développement dramatique d'une passion" (353). This choice of negatives is fascinating, especially when one considers the actual plot of the novel, which features masked balls, episodes of descent into madness, sex, prostitution, and murder. Why is the plot or the "récit" of *Lélia* not to be understood as that which defines the novel? In a similar vein, why is the novel's main love story – the relationship between Lélia and Sténio – not to be labelled as

"le développement dramatique d'une passion"?[3] These plot lines are secondary in importance to something more abstract within the novel, something that Planche himself might even struggle to coherently define. *Lélia,* writes Planche, "C'est la pensée du siècle sur lui-même, c'est la plainte d'une société à l'agonie" (366). At the outset, Planche makes clear that for him, it is the philosophical and idealistic reaches of the novel that have the biggest impact on the reader. In employing the suggestive metaphor of *Lélia* as the cry of a society in agony, one could argue that Planche attempts to place the novel within the existing generic conventions of the sentimental social novel by eliciting reader recognition and identification. We will also see that Planche identifies women as the audience that will be most moved by *Lélia*'s message, another nod to the sentimental social novel tradition.

At the same time, however, Planche also anticipates criticism of the novel, particularly of certain formal aspects: "La critique entêtée dans les traditions littéraires reprochera, sans doute, à plusieurs chapitres de *Lélia* la diffusion et la prolixité; elle s'évertuera à démontrer que chaque personnage, au lieu de parler pour son interlocuteur, a souvent l'air de parler pour lui-même" (367). Sand's stylistic choices in which her characters seem to speak for and to themselves, both as subjects and listeners, perturbs Planche. Oration often has little to do with plot-advancing narration. The entire third part of the novel, for example, begins with an extended dialogue between Lélia and her courtesan sister Pulchérie, which sets the stage for Lélia's confession of her impotence. Rather than advance the plot of the novel, this dialogue serves to demonstrate the doubling of the two sisters, how each sister represents a different understanding of love. It seems that Planche tries to pinpoint a source of discomfort in the novel, namely the tenuous balance between reader identification and alienation, but perhaps on two different levels.

On the one hand, readers (and literary critics) will seek out familiarity in forms and literary traditions. *Lélia* both submits to and subverts such formal traditions, so the very foundation of familiarity based on genre is undermined.[4] On the other hand, the startlingly atypical heroine shocks readers; but why, exactly? Is it because this one of the first literary renderings of female impotence? Is it the shock of encountering a pathologized condition's literary representation? Is the failure of *Lélia* the impossibility of readers' identification with such a woman, or is it rather this literary representation of an unspoken "medical condition" provides the grounds for discomfortingly visceral reader identification?

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[3] Consider Naginski's argument that *Lélia* functions as an alternative literary form, the "invisible novel," whose significance "lies in its insistence on the growing seriousness of the novel, on its capacity to be more than pure entertainment, on its ability to compete on an equal basis with philosophical and lyrical forms for subtlety of meaning and complexity of argumentation, and, finally, on its right to demand a new and more sophisticated kind of reader" (113).

[4] See Naginski (1991), Schor, (1993), and Didier, and Pierre Reboul's"Préface" de *Lélia* for analyses of the novel's formal polyphony and generic indeterminacy.

Indeed, Planche chooses to conclude his analysis by zeroing in on women readers' reactions to *Lélia*, noting that it is not the philosophical reaches of the novel that will strike these particular readers: "Les femmes surtout, qui excellent dans l'observation et l'analyse des sentimens, ne consulteront pas, pour décider leurs sympathies, les systèmes littéraires ou philosophiques" (368). Because women excel in the sentimental realm rather than the literary or the philosophical, they will not preoccupy themselves with questions of form and genre. Instead, women readers will be struck by the parts of the novel in which they recognize themselves: "Elles noteront d'une main attentive tous les passages où elles auront trouvé l'expression et le souvenir de leur vie passée, le tableau de leurs souffrances" (368). This gesture towards readers' individual identification with the novel complicates the formal element of Planche's critique of *Lélia,* in which he notes that the characters often seem to speak for themselves rather than to an interlocutor. How and why is it that women readers will react so differently? Rather than verbosity, women readers will find expression, memory, and the literary evocation of their suffering.

It is not until the final paragraph of his lengthy review that Planche mentions the theme that will form the basis of *Lélia*'s *succès de scandale*: impotence. Surprisingly, Planche predicts a positive reaction to the heroine's affliction: women readers "auront des larmes et de la vénération pour l'impuissance qui se proclame, et qui révèle toutes ses misères" (368). Rather than shock or repulsion (which are the reactions of other critics to the voicing of this theme), Planche anticipates intense respect (*vénération*) for the representation of the heroine's impotence. The emphasis on the articulation of the affliction is crucial. Women readers will venerate the "l'impuissance qui se proclame," almost as if the voicing of the phenomenon becomes more important than the vehicle of its articulation (the character of Lélia). By emphasizing the enunciation of *l'impuissance*, one could argue that the veneration to which Planche refers could be for the act of speaking out as much as for the revelation of impotence. Indeed, Planche then more specifically references the scene of Lélia's confession, predicting that women readers "s'étonneront d'abord de la hardiesse de l'aveu, quelques-unes rougiront d'avoir été devinées, et seront presque irritées de l'indiscrétion" (368). The boldness of Lélia's confession is what will resonate with women readers, regardless of whether one chooses to interpret it as a confession of sexual impotence or one of metaphysical ennui. Planche's comments on women readers' reaction to Lélia's confession of *impuissance* reveal the need to more deeply analyze the social understanding of this term.

Other critics make clear their understanding of Lélia's affliction as sexual and therefore debased. In a review of the novel published in the *Bulletin de la société royale d'agriculture* in April 1834, the critic disagrees with other reviewers[5] on the fact that *Lélia* resembles *Indiana* and *Valentine.* He contends that Sand's first two novels confront ("s'attaque à") the social order. *Lélia*'s mission is completely different: "ici ce n'est point ou presque point à la société qu'on a

[5] Especially the critic writing for the *Journal des débats* (129).

voulu livrer la guerre, c'est à la nature qu'on s'en prend, c'est le cœur humain qu'on veut écraser ne pouvant pas le refondre" (130). The critic then uses a curious image to describe his overarching impression of the novel: sterility. He explains that the character of Lélia – her otherworldliness, her difference, her existence that differs from any other "créature humaine" – is what sours the novel and renders it "stérile." He writes, "Voilà, à mon sens, ce qui frappe de stérilité, si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi, un ouvrage où brille un talent supérieur, et où fourmillent des beautés du premier ordre" (131) Here we note again the recognition of Sand's talent as a writer and the beauty of the style in which she wrote *Lélia.*

The creation of her monstrous heroine, however, nullifies any possible redemption of the novel. The critic continues, "Quel intérêt en effet peut-on prendre à une femme [...] qui, bouffie d'un orgueil sans but et sans grandeur, se plaît à nourrir des chimères qui la tiennent toujours hors du monde réel, et en font un être complètement inutile à ses semblables" (131). Raising the question of utility is also fascinating, especially considered in relation to the critic's evocation of sterility. This crucial lexical choice indirectly pathologizes Lélia's affliction in a way that makes a non-medical, or non-sexual interpretation of the affliction nearly impossible. The novel is sterile and its heroine is *inutile*; these discursive choices function as a not so veiled commentary on Lélia's reproductive capacity. In part three of this chapter, I discuss the key differences between *impuissance* and *stérilité.* For the purposes of this section, the most important takeaway is that the reviewer does not view the novel as existing within the generic codes that *Indiana* and *Valentine* followed. Instead, Sand has written a disturbing account of an unrecognizable heroine, "espèce d'eunuque femelle," as the reviewer calls her (136).

Part II: Sand's Gender

The second important strand in making sense of the scandal of *Lélia*'s form is to consider the status of the author's gender. As I mentioned before, and as Margaret Cohen lays out, the sentimental social novel was associated with women's writing, while realist authors actively engaged in a masculinizing poetics and polemics (19-20). After analyzing the contemporary reviews of *Lélia,* I believe that the novel was published at an exceptional moment in which Sand's gender might not yet have been universal public knowledge. If this is indeed the case, the stakes of *Lélia*'s form are even higher. Were readers reading a twisted sentimental social novel by a woman author, or were they reading a failed realist novel by a male author? Was the portrayal of a sexually impotent heroine even more disturbing to readers because it was a woman who created her?

Many scholars have studied the development of George Sand's pseudonym in an attempt to analyze her quest for self-identity (Mallet 75, Naginski 53, Planté 106-107, Reid 110). In fact, the names J. Sand, G. Sand, and Georges Sand all circulated before the author settled on the now well-known

pseudonym. The first text that Sand published under this new name was none other than *Lélia*. Scholars have contended that public knowledge of Sand's gender was generally confirmed with the publication of *Lélia* in July of 1833. However, just over a year prior in May of 1832, when a mysterious G. Sand had emerged onto the literary scene with *Indiana*, all critics (except for those who knew Sand personally, of course) assumed that the author was a man. Sand herself even reflects on the initial confusion in *Histoire de ma vie,* noting that after the publication of *Indiana*, "les journaux parlèrent de M. *G. Sand* avec éloge, insinuant que la main d'une femme avait dû glisser çà et là pour révéler à l'auteur certaines délicatesses du cœur et de l'esprit, mais déclarant que le style et les appréciations avaient trop de virilité pour n'être pas d'un homme" (644). Scholars claim that this initial questioning of Sand's gender disappears with the publication of *Lélia* and the entry of George Sand onto the literary scene.

However, in analyzing reviews of the novel as they emerge in the daily press and in literary journals, we discover that the contemporaneous public "revelation" of Sand's gender does not appear to be so uniform. While I do not contest the understanding that Sand's gender became public knowledge *after* the publication of *Lélia,* I do wish to challenge the idea that the pseudonym was "completely transparent" with the publication of the novel in July of 1833 (Naginski 16). Several trends appear across the reviews of *Lélia* suggesting that the divergence of Sand's personal and literary identities was not yet undisputed public knowledge. Many reviews of *Lélia,* for example, speak of "Georges" Sand's latest novel, employing the traditionally masculine French spelling, although the author's name on the cover of the novel was in fact written as "George" Sand.[6] Some reviews refer to Sand as *monsieur,* suggesting that certain critics – as is the case in reviews of Sand's previous two novels – assumed a male author.[7] Other reviews make explicit reference to the debate over the author's gender (suggesting that it was still in fact under debate),[8] while several do not mention Sand's gender at all, leaving one to believe that they might have still been under the impression that George Sand was a man.[9]

If we take a step back to consider the timeline of Sand's emergence into the world of letters, the possibility of her continuing to conceal her gender even with the publication of two highly successful novels becomes not so unbelievable. She even notes in *Histoire de ma vie* that she had succeeded in maintaining anonymity through the publication of *Valentine* in November of 1832: "j'avais réussi à garder assez bien l'incognito pour que les journaux m'accordassent toujours le titre de *monsieur*" (653). We have to carefully trace the

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[6] The following reviews refer to the author of *Lélia* as Georges Sand: *Figaro,* 18 August 1833; *L'Europe littéraire,* 22 August 1833; *Le National* 29 September 1833; *La France littéraire,* September 1833; *L'Anti-Romantique,* 3 November 1833; *Journal des débats politiques et littéraire,* 29 November 1833; *La France littéraire,* January 1834; *La Revue des modes de Paris,* November 1834.

[7] See "M. Georges Sand," *L'Europe littéraire,* 22 August 1833; "M. G. Sand," *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires,* 1 September 1833; "*monsieur Georges Sand,*" *La France littéraire,* January 1834.

[8] See *L'Europe littéraire,* 22 August 1833; *La France littéraire,* January 1834

[9] See *Figaro,* 18 August 1833; *La France littéraire,* September 1833

"reception" of Sand's gender because it is also the reception of *Lélia*, and thus might help us to consider the critique of the novel under a new light.

One of the decisive moments in *Lélia*'s reception – and perhaps in Sand's career – was the publication of Capo de Feuillide's lengthy critique of the novel, which appeared in *L'Europe littéraire* on August 22, 1833. Feuillide, a little-known journalist, enjoyed his fifteen minutes of fame following the publication of his acerbic review and the drama that ensued, since it was this attack on *Lélia* that prompted Gustave Planche to challenge Feuillide to a duel. Feuillide's article thus merits a closer analysis, as does the duel itself, since it has in many ways become emblematic of the reception of *Lélia* as a whole: everyone agrees that it made quite a splash, but no one fully understands why. Few scholars have dug deeper into the context of the duel. Why did it happen? Was Gustave Planche personally offended by Feuillide's article, or was his challenging of the critic an effort to defend Sand's honor?

In Feuillide's analysis, he responds to previous critiques in which reviewers speak of the symbolism of each of the characters, specifically Lélia's symbolic function as doubt and frustrated desire.[10] Feuillide contests these interpretations and even addresses Planche's article directly when he asks, "savez-vous ce que c'est que Lélia, sous quelques nuages d'ascétisme et de symboles qu'ait voulu la voiler je ne sais plus quel critique?" (70). Scholars believe that it is this slighting of Planche that prompted him to challenge Feuillide to a duel. In a letter to Sand, Planche explains that Feuillide's comments insulted him personally, and that it is in his name only that he challenged the critic to a duel. He writes to Sand, "vous voyez que c'est en mon nom que je le provoque, – Je déclarerai sur le terrain, si vous voulez, que vous me refusez le droit de prendre votre défense" (Letter [26 August 1833] 411). The ultimately unexciting duel took place in the bois de Boulogne on August 27, with neither party sustaining injuries. When the *Figaro* reported on the event in the following day's paper, the reporter dryly noted that, "Après un coup de feu échangé de part et d'autre, M. Planche s'est déclaré satisfait" (3). The tongue-in-cheek word choice of *se satisfaire*, particularly in relation to the pronounced lack of satisfaction occurring for the characters of *Lélia*, does not go unnoticed.

Understanding the context of the Planche-Feuillide duel can help clarify several particularly murky factors surrounding *Lélia*'s publication. First, in studying her correspondence during this stressful period, it becomes clear that Sand herself wanted no part in this fragile male ego-fueled duel. She wrote in a letter to Roger de Beauvoir, just days after the duel took place, "Gustave Planche est un grand sot" (Letter [31 August 1833] 414). One of the great sources of drama surrounding the publication of *Lélia* – one of the reasons why the novel's *succès de scandal* grew exponentially following its initial release – happened entirely out of Sand's control and resulted in consequences that had serious

[10] The review in the *Figaro*, for example, attempts to reduce all the characters to symbols: "Rien n'est plus facile à dire que le sujet de *Lélia.* Lélia est le désir, privé de ce qui le satisfait; Sténio, le désir, avec la faculté sans la possession; Pulchérie, la matière toujours en travail de jouir" (2).

implications on Sand's public image. In a letter to Sainte-Beuve, Sand confided in her personal friend and confidant that, contrary to the rumors put into circulation by Planche's challenging of Feuillide, she and Planche were not lovers, and it was important to her that people were aware of that.[11] The publicity of the duel forced Sand into the spotlight in a way that she had not experienced before. In the same letter to Sainte-Beuve, she wrote, "je vous prie de voir que je suis dans une situation tout à fait exceptionnelle et que je suis forcée de mettre désormais ma vie privée au grand jour" (Letter [25 August 1833] 409). Although *Lélia* is only Sand's third published novel, it marks a turning point in her literary career. After *Lélia,* Sand's publications are no longer the only thing the public is interested in; her personal life will henceforth take center stage as well.

Secondly, following the publication of the novel and the first negative reviews that appeared, Sand solicited support from her many literary connections: journal editors and contributors, critics, other authors. She recognized the role of public opinion in shaping the career of an author. In the same letter to Sainte-Beuve, for example, she urges him respond to Feuillide's attack: "On m'a dit de votre part que vous répondriez à *l'Europe littéraire* dans *la revue* et dans *le National*. Faites-le donc puisque votre cœur vous le conseille, je ne vous remercie pas, mais vous savez qu'en pareille occasion mes paroles et ma vie seraient à votre service" (Letter [25 August 1833] 407).[12] She also sought support from one of the contributors to the *Journal des débats,* Victor Charlier, "Voyons, soyons humain. Les petits journaux qui m'attaquant grossièrement ont peu de poumons. Vous avez dans le *journal des débats* une grande voix que vous pouvez élever en ma faveur. Ne voulez-vous pas le faire et bien vite?" (Letter [August 1833] 413). When Sand sent these letters seeking support in late August of 1833, only a handful of articles about *Lélia* had been published, and all except for Planche's glowing review had a pointedly reproving tone.[13] It seems important that Sand's reaction to these negative reviews is to seek out more support, more publicity, more opinion, and specifically from people who knew her and who could defend her character. In the same letter to Charlier, Sand singles out the element of the critiques that most disturbed her, and asks Charlier to address these accusations directly: "Blâmez mes doutes, blâmez mon style, blâmez ma mauvaise humeur mais défendez-moi contre ces imputations *d'impudeur* que je

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[11] Sand emphasizes, "Il m'importe beaucoup maintenant qu'on sache qu'il ne l'est pas, de même qu'il m'est parfaitement indifférent qu'on croie qu'il l'a été." (Letter [25 August 1833] 408). It appears that this desire to clarify her personal situation is also bound up in her budding romance with Alfred de Musset – she did not want people to think that she had two lovers at the same time.

[12] Curiously, Sainte-Beuve's review did not appear until over a month later on 29 September 1833.

[13] In the "petits journaux" there were two unflattering reviews published: "Lélia. Par Georges Sand," *Figaro*, 18 août 1833 and a review in the *Quotidienne* in August (at the BnF). The *Figaro* also published a second article that could be described more as a personal attack on Sand's character than a review of her recent novel, "Il ou Elle. Énigme," *Figaro*, 24 août, 1833.

ne mérite pas" (Letter [August 1833] 413). Sand objected the most to accusations of the indecency of the novel. Indeed, it is curious that many critics were so scandalized by this novel in which the heroine does not, in fact, sleep with her lover. How and why exactly did critics interpret the novel as so shockingly indecent?

The initial *Figaro* review that appeared on August 18, 1833 might serve as a helpful example of how the novel was viewed by some as licentious. At the end of the article, the critic employs an extended literary reference to eighteenth-century playwright and epigrammatist Alexis Piron as a way of summarizing his concluding thoughts on the novel:

> Vous avez lu, mes amis, les œuvres de l'auteur de *la Métromanie,* vous connaissez ses poésies légères et badines; parmi celles-là vous en savez une qui l'exclut des rangs de l'Académie, cette poésie est, je crois, une ode, dont la dédicace même ne peut se dire tout haut. Eh! bien, *Lélia,* c'est cette ode à mots couverts. (2)

The "poésies légères badines" to which the journalist refers is none other than the satirical erotic poem that Piron wrote in his youth, *Ode à Priape.* The poem is obscene, even by modern standards; the following excerpt is representative of the poem as a whole:

> Que l'or, que l'honneur vous chatouille,
> Sots avares, vains conquérants;
> Vivent les plaisirs de la couille!
> Et foutre des biens et des rangs! (13)

The ode earned Piron an infamous reputation, so much so that his admission to the Académie Française was rejected because of it. Although Piron and his ode may seem to be rather obscure references today, they resonated quite vividly with nineteenth-century audiences. His collected works were published throughout the century, and the *Ode à Priape* was a well-known cultural reference. In a review of an 1892 staging of Piron's play *Métromanie,* for example, the critic alludes to the ode's celebrity: "Une ode fameuse, et dont tout le monde a entendu parler, bien que peu de gens l'aient lue" ("Chronique Théâtrale" 1). Sainte-Beuve also highlighted Piron in one of his *Causeries de lundi,* writing that the infamous poem knew an instant success and eclipsed all of the future work of its author (414).

Returning to the *Figaro* review: the critic compares *Lélia* to Piron's *Ode à Priape,* but where the ode is explicit in its vulgarity, *Lélia*'s obscenity is veiled, "*Lélia,* c'est cette ode à mots couverts." Suggesting that *Lélia* thematically mirrored Piron's poem could only have increased the public's sense of scandal towards Sand's novel, and in turn accusations of *impudeur*. However, much like the poem, "dont tout le monde a entendu parler, bien que peu de gens l'aient lue," *Lélia*'s reputation as the century's new *Ode* contributed to a certain delineation of readers' expectations regarding the novel. Readers did not open

Lélia because they were passively interested in reading Sand's latest novel. One could argue that the frenzy of criticism contributed to a decidedly intentionalist reading of the novel: readers were reading for scandal. Or, readers were not reading at all; they were instead pairing their understanding of impotence to the term that Sand used, without reading Sand. It is curiously similar to the way in which Sand perceived the misinterpretations of her novel when she wrote to Charlier, "Les gens qui m'injurient ne m'ont pas lu" (Letter [August 1833] 413).

The question of Sand's gender at the time of *Lélia*'s publication is also complicated because there are some reviews in which the journalist indicates that they might be aware that Sand is a woman, but refuses to acknowledge this information for ideological reasons. Feuillide's article is one such example. He writes,

> On avait dit jusqu'ici que M. Georges Sand servait de pseudonyme à une femme qui, sous ce nom, avait publié deux romans qui ne sont pas sans mérite. Mais il n'est plus permis de le croire aujourd'hui. *Lélia* n'est pas, ne peut pas être l'œuvre d'une femme: un homme seul a pu le publier. Et à ce compte je tiens pour certain qu'*Indiana, Valentine,* comme *Lélia,* appartiennent à M. Sand, qui, pour se rendre la critique moins rude, aura laissé dire qu'il servait de symbole à une femme. C'est une mystification dont, pour l'honneur des femmes, depuis la publication de *Lélia* il n'est plus permis d'être dupe. (72)

After referencing the rumor of Sand's female gender, Feuillide firmly declares the falsity of the rumor on the grounds that a woman would have been incapable of writing a book such as *Lélia.* Instead, the author himself must be circulating these rumors for the cowardly reason of softening criticism of the novel. How can a novel itself reveal the gender of its author? This is essentially Feuillide's argument: after reading and analyzing *Lélia,* there is simply no possible way that a woman could have written it. His analysis suggests that there are certain intrinsic, gendered elements that novels communicate, regardless of whether their author intended to impart such signals. For Feuillide, the novel *Lélia*, and perhaps more precisely, the candid expression of the heroine's psychological and physiological states, are all evidence of a male author.

That being said, one could also interpret Feuillide's assertion that *Lélia* "ne peut pas être l'oeuvre d'une femme" in another manner: rather than claiming that *Lélia* was written by a man, Feuillide suggests instead (without realizing it) that a woman must have assumed a male gender to write it, or perhaps more accurately to *publish* it. Indeed, it is the verb "publier" and not "écrire" that Feuillide chooses to contrast with the impossibility of a woman's writing of the novel. In this respect, the publication of the text could be viewed as a female usurpation of the phallus. This brings me to the final section of the chapter: was Sand truly unaware of the outcry that she would provoke when she put *Lélia* out into the world because there were *des choses qu'elle ne savait pas*?

Part III: Lélia's Sexuality

As the above survey of contemporary criticism has demonstrated, most critics, with varying levels of intensity, were disturbed by Sand's heroine. They interpreted Lélia as not only blasphemous, but obscene, with the root of her obscenity stemming from what critics understood as an inability to love. As Alfred Desessarts wrote in *La France littéraire* in September of 1833, "elle n'est plus femme, du jour où elle a nié l'élément de son sexe" (214). Curiously, it is to these accusations of the indecency of the novel that Sand objected most vehemently. At the same time, however, in the republished 1839 edition, Sand either reworked or deleted entirely the parts of the novel that focused most heavily on, or that could be interpreted as revealing, Lélia's sexual impotence. Lélia's confession of impotence takes place in the third part of the novel, and it was this particular section that most shocked critics and readers. Before analyzing part three, I focus on key scenes preceding the confession that shed light on Lélia's sexuality and her understanding of romantic love. These scenes help to clarify the confession of part three as well as put into question Sand's usage of the term *impuissance* in relation to her heroine. The first time that Sand uses the adjective "impuissante" in reference to Lélia, for example, follows a brief, but decisive scene that delineates for the first time Lélia's physical interactions with Sténio. Whereas Lélia's confession in part three focuses heavily on her retrospective analysis of her youth and development, this particular scene in part two, chapter 24, illustrates how Lélia's sexuality actually manifests in her intimate relations with others. Because the scene quite explicitly demonstrates Lélia's responses to physical intimacy, Sand made significant edits in the 1839 edition in an attempt to eliminate the restrictive interpretation of the heroine's sexuality.

I think this scene is so important precisely because it is a relatively brief, minor moment that critics did not necessarily single out in their reviews of the novel as indecent. Compared to Lélia's confession of part three and the scene in which Lélia tricks Sténio into having sex with Pulchérie, this passage is rather chaste. The fact that Sand reworked the chapter so subtly reveals more clearly to the reader the ways that Sand interpreted the public as understanding Lélia's affliction. In other words, although no critic denounced this specific scene, Sand internalized the pattern. In the section that follows, I analyze the original scene as it appears in the 1833 version. Following this analysis, I use a table to compare the 1833 version with the changes that Sand made in the 1839 edition. The table clearly demonstrates Sand's self-censoring and encourages us to question the motivations for even the minutest of adjustments.

As the two lounge on the terrace one spring night, Sténio singing and playing the harp, Lélia bestows upon him a rare moment of intimacy: she passes her fingers through his perfumed hair and kisses his head. These "terribles caresses" (89), as the narrator describes them, are almost too much for Sténio to bear; he has to physically resist Lélia in order to regain control of his wits and

implore her to tell him how she actually feels about him. Although this conversation may seem to simply repeat the typical exchanges between Lélia and Sténio, – Sténio begs Lélia for her love, is rebuffed, then accuses Lélia of being heartless – this particular conversation emphasizes more directly the delicate play between love as choice and love as capability.

Sténio interprets Lélia's caresses as a signal that she finally loves him and is ready to physically demonstrate her love: "dis-moi que tu m'aimes enfin!" (89). Lélia retorts rather cheekily that she has already acknowledged her love for Sténio several times. Although the two use only variations of the verb "aimer," there appears to be another conversation lurking below the surface, one that questions physical love versus emotional, or spiritual love, and the possibility of one existing without the other. Sténio chooses his words carefully, reminding Lélia of a past discussion they had shared, "Vous m'avez promis d'essayer d'aimer," to which Lélia coldly replies, "je n'ai pas promis de réussir" (90). Sténio appeals not to Lélia's promise to love him, but to simply *try* to love. It seems that Lélia picks up on this careful choice of words with her rebuke. Sténio tries one more iteration of his previous pleas: "Mais espères-tu que tu pourras m'aimer enfin?" (90) The progression of Sténio's pleas, from love, to attempts at love, to simply hopefulness of the possibility of love, might suggest a certain dawning of comprehension on the part of Sténio. If it is clear that Lélia cannot, at the moment, love Sténio as he understands it, does she even hope to?

This version of Sténio's plea strikes a chord with Lélia and she once again embraces him, almost in an attempt to demonstrate her desire to follow through on her promise, to attempt to love Sténio in a way that he understands. However, desire and physicality must only be on Lélia's terms. As soon as Sténio returns Lélia's caresses, she brusquely rejects him. This powerplay of embrace occurs twice: "Alors Lélia l'embrassa de nouveau et, comme il n'osait plus lui rendre ses caresses, elle l'en accabla jusqu'à l'enivrer; puis elle mit sa main sur la bouche et le repoussa, lorsqu'elle le sentit se ranimer et frissonner de plaisir" (91). As soon as physical intimacy is returned, Lélia retreats. In Pierre Reboul's edition, he struggles to interpret this scene, asking in the notes, "pourquoi Lélia recule-t-elle devant ce qu'elle a provoqué? pourquoi provoque-t-elle ce devant quoi elle sait qu'elle reculera?" (91). Understanding the subtext of Lélia and Sténio's preceding conversation might help to shed light on such questions.

This scene's importance also becomes clear with Sand's first use of the term *impuissante* in reference to Lélia: "l'ambitieuse et impuissante créature, trouvant son cœur moins ardent que son cerveau, et ses facultés au-dessous de ses rêves, se découragea encore une fois de la vie" (93). Note that the descriptor qualifies not *femme,* but *créature*, suggesting that an impotent woman is no longer a woman at all. The dichotomy between mind and body is complicated: rather than understanding Lélia's affliction as a purely physical reaction to intimacy (or lack thereof), this passage suggests that other forces are at play. Lélia's mind is more passionate than her heart; in other words, what is going on in her head does not align with her romantic desires. And yet her "facultés" – are these both

mental and physical? – do not live up to her imagination. In this citation, "coeur" parallels "facultés," while "cerveau" parallels "rêves." Romantic love aligns with inability to reciprocate such feelings and actions, while the mind remains unchecked in its power and domination of Lélia's state of existing in the world.

This failed romantic exchange between Lélia and Sténio becomes even more puzzling when we consider Sand's changes to the chapter in the 1839 version, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Chapter 24 edits

	1833 edition	1839 edition
1	« [Sténio] avait reçu des lèvres froides de Lélia **son premier baiser de femme. »** (89)	« [Sténio] avait reçu des lèvres froides de Lélia **le premier baiser de l'amour. »** (120)
2	« [Sténio] avait besoin de parler pour échapper **à ces terribles caresses**, à cet excès de bonheur » (89)	« [Sténio] avait besoin de parler pour échapper à cet excès de bonheur » (120)
3	« [Sténio] se crut près de mourir en sentant **le froid du désespoir** et de la honte étrangler » (90)	« [Sténio] se crut près de mourir en sentant le froid de la honte étrangler » (121)
4	« Alors Lélia l'embrassa de nouveau et, comme **il n'osait plus lui rendre ses caresses, elle l'en accabla jusqu'à l'enivrer; puis elle mit sa main sur la bouche et le repoussa, lorsqu'elle le sentit se ranimer et frissonner de plaisir.** **« Vipère ! » s'écria-t-il »** (91)	« Alors Lélia l'embrassa de nouveau et, comme **il essayait de lui rendre ses caresses, elle lui dit en le repoussant : « Prends garde, ne risquons pas nos trésors, ne les confions pas aux caprices de la mer.** **– Soyez maudite ! s'écria-t-il […] » »** (121)
5	« il me semble que je suis plus jeune et **plus ardente** que toi » (Lélia speaking) (91)	« il me semble que je suis plus jeune et **plus confiante** que toi » (Lélia speaking) (122)
6	« quand tu me demandes plus qu'il n'est en moi **de sentir**, je perds l'espoir » (Lélia speaking) (91)	« quand tu demandes plus qu'il n'est en moi **d'oser**, je perds l'espoir » (Lélia speaking) (121)
7	« Eh bien ! **vous êtes un sot** ! » (Lélia speaking) (92)	« Eh bien ! **vous n'aimez pas** ! » (Lélia speaking) (122)

8	« puis **l'ambitieuse et impuissante créature, trouvant son cœur moins ardent que son cerveau, et ses facultés au-dessous de ses rêves**, se découragea encore une fois de la vie » (93)	« puis**, trouvant sans doute son cœur moins ardent que son cerveau, et ses espérances plus faibles que ses rêves**, se découragea encore une fois de la vie » (122)

The changes that Sand implements represent consistent attempts to desexualize the scene, as examples 1 and 2 demonstrate. Sand also appears to deemphasize Lélia's physical reactions to Sténio's attempts at affection, such as in example 4. Whereas the 1833 version describes a Lélia who is in control of her actions, who tests the boundaries of her capabilities not with speech, but with touch, the 1839 edition portrays a less physical and more verbal Lélia. The 1839 Lélia lacks the physical curiosity of her 1833 self: rather than using her body to play with Sténio's desires, she explicitly warns him of her limits, "Prends garde, ne risquons pas nos trésors," she cautions.

Indeed, the dialogue between Lélia and Sténio in the 1839 version also serves to soften the two characters, perhaps in an attempt to make readers more sympathetic to their unusual relationship. The atmosphere of the scene changes drastically if we compare Sténio's reaction to the rebuff. Consider the harsh denouncing of Lélia as a "Vipère!" in the 1833 edition, as compared to the less sexualized and slightly more sophisticated insult, "Soyez maudite!" in the 1839 version. Sténio's reaction to Lélia in turn transforms the reader's response to her and their perception of her. In example 8, the difference between the two texts is striking. Sand deletes the description of the heroine as an "ambitieuse et impuissante créature," and once again, Lélia's physical affliction is abstracted: it is no longer Lélia's "facultés" that are weaker than her dreams, but her "espérances." These changes reflect Sand's desire to "correct" the misreadings of Lélia and the misinterpretations of her sexuality. In the following section, I analyze the third part of the novel in which Lélia confesses her metaphysical ennui and her sexual impotence. I then compare the ways in which Sand writes impotence in the novel with nineteenth-century medical and legal understandings of the condition. Understanding what impotence meant to Sand as well as what it meant to readers is necessary to uncover the root of the scandal of the novel.

Lélia addresses her confession to her sister Pulchérie, who also happens to be a famous courtesan. This doubling is important, since it encourages the reader to focus even more on the sexualities of the two women in dialogue – one who uses her body for a living, and one who finds herself to be without the senses necessary to engage in sex. For Lélia, her development was reversed: she speaks about her precocious adolescence in which "tout devenait amour et poésie autour de moi et, dans mon sein, chaque jour faisait éclore la puissance d'aimer" (165). In a desire to cultivate this power (*puissance*) to love, Lélia immerses herself in the development of her emotional and mental faculties, so much so that she

tells Pulchérie, "un poète était un dieu pour moi, la terre était ma mère et les étoiles mes soeurs" (165). However, once Lélia was forced to become a social being, or as she refers to it, "entrer dans la vie active" (166), she inevitably met with existential disappointment, with disgust at how reality failed to compare to the world that she had imagined with her "plénitude de facultés" (166).

When a man comes into Lélia's life, she approaches the relationship with the same fervor that she had had during her own personal development: "Alors un homme vint et je l'aimai. Je l'aimai du même amour dont j'avais aimé Dieu et les cieux, et le soleil et la mer" (166). This straightforward declaration of love is surprising considering its narrative proximity to the conversation in which Sténio interrogates Lélia about her capability of loving (chapter 24). Once again, Lélia demonstrates that she is able to love, but perhaps not in the way that a patriarchy expects of a woman. However, in the patriarchal society in which Lélia exists, a woman has but one destiny and thus one outlet for her passions: to love.[14] Lélia directs all her energy into loving this man, only to suffer a rude awakening, as she describes, "Hélas! cet homme n'avait pas vécu des mêmes idées. Il connaissait d'autres plaisirs, d'autres extases; il eût voulu les partager avec moi" (166). Sexual desire and intimacy were not a part of Lélia's education and yet they are arguably the elements of heterosexual romantic love that provide the most meaning for such partnerships in the nineteenth century. Evelyn Ender analyzes Sténio's maxim, "Là où il n'y a pas d'amour, il n'y a pas de femme" (Sand 47), arguing that the woman is understood through and defined by her body: "à la femme, il ne suffit pas d'être ou d'exister, il faut encore qu'elle se sache, se perçoive, s'éprouve en tant que femme. Or s'éprouver comme femme, c'est savoir aimer, c'est-à-dire répondre à la séduction, se savoir séduite ou séduisante" (Ender 236). Lélia is unconscious of her sexualized body, and this lack of self-awareness makes her *impuissante,* and thus "pas une femme."

Nigel Harkness considers Lélia's pathology in a more positive light, writing that in *Lélia,* Sand "contests and renegotiates a narrative contract" in which masculine desire is central, but disrupted in an attempt to free the heroine (121). In the following sections, I analyze Sand's disruption of the heterosexual codes of desire while also exploring the more ambivalent valences of desire in the *Lélia* of 1833. Harkness focuses a great deal on the rewritten 1839 version because in this version, Sand more clearly imagines a heroine who not only resists desire, but also "redefines it other than as libidinal drive" (121). In the original 1833 edition, we know that the physical repercussions of Lélia's condition play a far greater role than in the edited 1839 version. How does the suppression of the corporeal, the material serve to create a more sympathetic and more overtly feminist heroine?

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[14] Consider Lélia's reflection on gendered destiny: "homme, j'eusse aimé les combats, l'odeur du sang, les étreintes du danger; peut-être l'ambition de régner par l'intelligence, de dominer les autres hommes par des paroles puissantes, m'eût-elle souri aux jours de ma jeunesse. Femme, je n'avais qu'une destinée noble sur la terre, c'était d'aimer" (170).

In the following passage, we observe the moment that critics signal as Lélia's explicit avowal of sexual impotence. Faced with her lover's expectations of physical love, Lélia finds herself, for the first time in her life, powerless to reciprocate her lover's desires and incapable of responding to them in a comprehensible way. She cites her precocious development as the source of her inability:

> Mais moi, nourrie d'une manne céleste, moi dont le corps était appauvri par les contemplations austères du mysticisme, le sang fatigué par l'immobilité de l'étude, je ne sentis point la jeunesse enfoncer ses aiguillons dans ma chair. J'oubliai d'être jeune, et la nature oublia de m'éveiller. Mes rêves avaient été trop sublimes; je ne pouvais plus redescendre aux appétits grossiers de la matière. Un divorce complet s'était opéré à mon insu entre le corps et l'esprit. (166)

The vocabulary that Lélia uses to describe her affliction is strikingly dual, pitting the sublime realm of intelligence and imagination against the grotesque existence, and failure, of the body and the physical senses. In Lélia's case, her mind overpowered her body, making her unable to respond physically to what we can imagine were sexual advances. Lélia's agency is also ambivalent in this description. She seems to attribute her condition equally to her own decisions as well as the failure of her body to follow the normative path to sexual awakening: she forgot to be young, but at the same time, nature forgot to awaken her. If this is the case, that Lélia is not entirely "to blame" for her condition, then why are readers so unsympathetic? Why is she viewed as an unnatural abhorrence if it is nature itself that failed to shape her?

Moreover, the above avowal is not shockingly original: it fits quite neatly into the genre of nineteenth-century French *mal du siècle* narrative confession, exemplified by Chateaubriand's *René*, published in 1802. Caroline Warman draws attention to the specifically literary aspect of the *mal du siècle* that strikes a generation of young people (men). She notes Chateaubriand's framing of *René,* explaining his understanding that "these young men have read more than they have experienced and [...] their imaginative life has therefore overtaken their real life" (Warman 202). When read within the frame of the *mal du siècle,* Lélia's avowal seems to follow a well-trodden literary precedent. What makes Lélia different (and monstrous and grotesque and terrifying) to readers is her gender and sexuality. Warman demonstrates how *René*'s masking of taboo sexuality with melancholy and illness served as a model for other nineteenth-century writers, such as Custine, looking to express socially unacceptable sexual desire, and in Custine's case, same-sex desire: "By heavily emphasizing the epic, even sublime, nature of his anguish, and by identifying himself as René, he creates a non-sinful, unpornographic, unthreatening version of the sexual misfit which is also admirable, even desirable" (205). Lélia, however, is a woman, a woman who does not identify with the patriarchal sexual mores of her time. In my later analysis of medical discussions of impotence, I will demonstrate how misunderstanding of female sexuality led to strikingly different interpretations of

manifestations of *impuissance* in women. This will help us to understand the shock of the character of Lélia and her expulsion from the exclusive club of *mal du siècle*-stricken noble figures.

Sand removes the above passage entirely from the 1839 text. In Béatrice Didier's notes in the 1839 edition, she hypothesizes that Sand cut the passage "peut-être parce qu'elle l'a jugé trop autobiographique, mais surtout pour éviter l'interprétation étroitement sexuelle de l'impuissance de Lélia"(227). Sand did not anticipate readers' reactions to her atypical heroine, just as Lélia had failed to anticipate the expectations of the female body. She thus makes all attempts to desexualize Lélia's illness in the 1839 version.

And what role does desire play for Lélia? With her "corps [...] appauvri" and her "sang fatigué," one might expect desire to be absent from Lélia's psychological repertoire. However, this is far from the case. Desire serves to complicate Lélia's affliction even further. She explains:

> Le désir chez moi était une ardeur de l'âme qui paralysait la puissance des sens avant de l'avoir éveillée; c'était une fureur sauvage, qui s'emparait de mon cerveau et qui s'y concentrait exclusivement. Mon sang se glaçait, impuissant et pauvre, durant l'essor immense de ma volonté. (174)

Although Lélia describes her desire as suppressing or paralyzing her physical senses, what she describes is also an extremely visceral reaction. Desire, taking the form of "une fureur sauvage," connoting both passion and violence, controls Lélia's mind and renders her body powerless to follow through any attempt to assuage the desires. What's more, how are we supposed to understand the role of Lélia's will in this reaction? In this description, desire seems to be most aligned with "volonté." Desire – irrational, uncontrollable want, – aligning here with will.

Lélia's actual confession of impotence is thus much less straightforward than contemporary critics and even modern scholars make it out to be. Rather than trying to tease through the nuances, particularities, and contradictions of Lélia's sexuality, many modern scholars almost too quickly label it as impotence, and then use their particular understanding of the term to advance a greater argument about the novel. Isabelle Naginski, for example, writes of Lélia's "espousal of frigidity both as sexual and existential code" (125). This understanding of Lélia's affliction seems to collapse the moral and the physical in an overly simplifying manner. Moreover, claiming that the heroine "espouses" her frigidity assigns a high level of agency to Lélia, although we have discovered that her control over her condition is ambiguous. Béatrice Didier takes a slightly different position, writing that Lélia represents "la jouissance impossible" (634). As I will demonstrate through my analysis of medical texts, orgasm is *never* considered in discussions of female impotence, and assuming so suggests a misunderstanding of nineteenth-century definitions of the phenomenon. Finally, François Kerlouégan writes that Lélia "est victime, on le sait, d'impuissance, de frigidité" (154). How do we know that these two afflictions are the same,

especially when the terms *frigide* or *frigidité* are conspicuously absent from the novel?[15]

One of the few scholars to address the complexity of Lélia's affliction is Evelyn Ender, who emphasizes the aspect of Lélia as a desiring female subject capable of experiencing, if not engaging in, physical passion: "Il existe bien dans *Lélia* des passages où la femme échappe à cette frigidité pour se montrer en sujet désirant: dans le rêve de Pulchérie par exemple, ou dans les réflexions sur le désir et l'amour auxquelles se livre Lélia elle-même, et surtout dans sa confession" (231). When we limit interpretations of Lélia's "illness" to solely those of sexual frigidity and impotence (even if such interpretations serve the purpose of advancing an empowering, feminist reading), we are in fact engaging in the same kind of reductive reading as Sand's contemporary critics.

We also have to keep in mind Sand's response to the negative reactions to her novel, exemplified by her autobiographical reflections, "on alla jusqu'à interpréter dans un sens vicieux et obscène des passages écrits avec la plus grande candeur." Or, as Sand wrote in the letter to Charlier, "défendez-moi contre ces imputations d'*impudeur* que je ne mérite pas. […] Les gens qui m'injurient ne m'ont pas lu" (Letter [August 1833] 413). Modern readers of *Lélia* are faced with a very complicated version of "he said, she said," that becomes "they all said impotent" and "she said, well that's not what I meant." To try to make sense of these conflicting views surrounding this scandal of impotence, we must first understand what *impuissance* actually meant to nineteenth-century readers of *Lélia.* If readers misinterpreted Sand's intentions, then from where exactly were they drawing their knowledge? What did Sand's readers know about female impotence and how did they learn it? Discussions of female impotence are in fact circulating in nineteenth-century France before the *Lélia* bomb drops in 1833. There are a handful of major domains in which these discussions appear: medicine, law, and mixed in with the two, religion. In the following sections I explore the ways in which this issue plays out in these different domains.

Medical Texts:

Female impotence does in fact appear in nineteenth-century medical texts, but usually in small quantities and buried deep in the lengthy discussions of male impotence, an ailment that is a bit more straightforward for doctors at the time. In these discussions of impotence, however, the vocabulary is shifting and terms are used interchangeably in a problematic way. In Alain Corbin's historical study of orgasm, *L'Harmonie des plaisirs,* he lays out the swirling vocabulary of impotence in the nineteenth century:

> 1. *Impuissance:* the inability to carry out coitus, whether or not the victim feels desire. This type of problem is only clearly defined for men and

[15] The terms *frigide* and *frigidité* do not appear once in either edition (1833 and 1839).

rarely concerns or features women. Instead, the term most often used to describe female impotence is sterility.

2. *Stérilité:* the inability to procreate and/or reproduce, regardless of the aptitude for coitus.

3. *Anaphrodisie:* the absence of desire. (238-39)

Based on these definitions, someone who is sterile is not necessarily impotent, but someone who is impotent is most likely sterile because of their inability to engage in or complete the sexual act. Nevertheless, in the majority of the medical texts consulted, the doctors, although sometimes prefacing their discussions with clear definitions for each term, eventually lapse into an indiscriminately synonymous usage of all three. Surprisingly, the term *frigidité* is not very common; if it is mentioned, it is mainly used to describe a temperament. A woman or man could be described as suffering from a *frigidité du tempéramant*, which could then render them impotent (Descourtilz 313). It is absolutely essential to underline that especially for women, impotence, sterility, and anaphrodisia were only considered in relation to reproduction. Successful coitus for women resulted in conception. Therefore, female desire, pleasure, and orgasm were not a part of these discussions. If they were, it was to warn against the dangers of too much desire and pleasure in causing impotence. I will discuss the perceived effects of desire on sexual drive later in this section.

Another trend among the medical texts that brings us back to *Lélia* is the understanding that impotence can be produced by "des causes physiques et morales," moral referring to psychological, and including pathologies such as depression and melancholy (Descourtilz 19).

Physician Michel-Étienne Descourtilz lays out a list of such moral causes in his 1831 study of impotence and sterility, noting:

1. Toutes les affections de l'âme;
2. Les méditations profondes et soutenues;
3. L'exaltation de l'imagination;
4. L'excessive vivacité des désirs, ou l'excès de l'amour même (19)

It is almost as if the doctor had examined Lélia before writing the list! Sand's heroine appears to suffer from everything that Descourtilz indicates as a cause of impotence, from her "contemplations austères" to her "rêves [...] trop sublimes" (*Lélia* 166). Descourtilz's medical description also bears a striking resemblance to notions of a nineteenth-century *mal du siècle.* This lexical connection between the *mal du siècle* and medical discourse on impotence and sterility is not new. Andrew Counter, for example, draws attention to the similarities between the two lexicons in order to demonstrate that doctors approached these sexual pathologies as social problems (95). However, Lélia's case is unique in that it

features a woman who readers understand as suffering from sexual impotence as well as from the *mal du siècle*. Based on doctors' analyses of impotence, it is clear that their understandings of female impotence operate on a completely different level than those of male impotence.

Descourtilz's analysis of the influence of melancholy, which came to be understood as the pathologized form of the *mal du siècle* (Counter 94) might help to shed light on just how confusing Lélia was to readers:

> La *Mélancolie,* cette espèce de délire ou de rêverie accompagnée de crainte et de chagrins, souvent sans raison apparente, attaque particulièrement les hommes; les femmes, dans ce cas, sont donc rarement, par constitution, susceptibles d'anaphrodisie, car leurs organes sont le plus généralement disposés à l'acte vénérien, ou au moins elles peuvent l'exercer, quoique quelquefois sans désirs, et bercées dans une molle indifférence. (1-2)

Descourtilz's description is a case in which the misuse of vocabulary has interesting consequences. Melancholy usually strikes men, sapping away their sexual desire, and replacing it with existential woe. Melancholy thus leads to anaphrodisia, or lack of desire, which then leads to impotence, or inability to engage in coitus. Rather than explaining this progression, Descourtilz jumps to the effects of melancholy on women: because women are physically passive receptacles, they are rarely susceptible to anaphrodisia. To phrase it differently, because women have vaginas rather than penises, they are rarely without sexual desire. Such a statement, especially in the early nineteenth-century, would certainly shock readers. It seems clear that Descourtilz most likely meant that women rarely suffer from impotence because unlike men's sexual organs, theirs are formed in such a way that coitus is possible whether or not the woman desires it. According to this logic, a woman's physical responses to desire or lack of desire are entirely the same in that they are unaffected by psychological factors. This conclusion seems ethically obtuse, even taking into account the cultural norms of Descourtilz's historical moment.

In comparing Descourtilz's medical analysis of a woman's psychological and physical response to desire with an excerpt from Lélia's confession, we see the jarring disjunction between the two vastly different understandings of female desire. In the 1833 version, Lélia describes a scene in which her lover lay beside her, asleep:

> Mon cœur palpitait violemment près de lui; les flots ardents de mon sang agité me montaient au visage; puis d'insupportables frémissements passaient dans mes membres. Il me semblait ressentir le trouble de l'amour physique et les désordres croissants d'un désir matériel. J'étais violemment tentée de l'éveiller, de l'enlacer dans mes bras et d'appeler ses caresses dont je n'avais pas su profiter encore. Mais je résistais à ces menteuses sollicitations de ma souffrance, car je savais bien que qu'il n'était pas en lui de la calmer (174-75)

Lélia experiences an intense physical reaction to the desire she feels - her heart, her blood, even her extremities respond to this "désir matériel." One might also

notice that this particular reaction is quite unlike the earlier description of desire in the confession. In the previously analyzed scene, Lélia describes her desire as paralyzing her physical senses and icing over her blood (174). The two reactions are practically opposites. The difference lies in the role of the lover. In the preceding citation, the lover expects a response from Lélia. He anticipates her reciprocation of his sexual advances. In the second citation, the lover is asleep, unconscious of Lélia's desire and her struggle to control the desire. We can draw a connection to the scene in chapter 24 in which Lélia can only embrace Sténio if he remains motionless and does not himself engage in the intimacy (91).

Although Lélia consistently refers to her affliction as a kind of powerlessness, what she describes in fact functions as a form of subversive power. Her body craves physical intimacy, and yet she resists these cravings because she knows that it is not within her lover's power to satisfy them. In comparing Sand's passages detailing the play of desire with the medical discourse, one has to ask, is it Lélia's "inability to love" that so frightens readers, or is it rather her knowledge and control over her own body that make her such a formidable character? Whereas Descourtilz claims that desire in women is irrelevant because of their physical makeup, Lélia reveals an extremely nuanced understanding of the relationship between sexual desire and bodily response.

What did it mean, then, for readers to encounter a melancholic heroine who cannot have sex, and recognizes this inability, but at the same time, resists her body's (and mind's) cravings of physical desire because she also recognizes that "l'amour physique" will not satiate her needs? What did it mean to readers? To many it was obscene, disturbing, and *contre la nature*. To return to one of the guiding questions of this chapter, how do we as modern readers make sense of Sand's hermeneutic backtracking, of her deep sense of being misunderstood? How did the word and the concept of *impuissance* mean something totally different for readers and critics of *Lélia* than for Sand herself? All we can truly know about what Sand meant or what she did not mean is that she had an idiosyncratic understanding of female impotence, and perhaps female sexuality as a whole. In *Lélia,* she attempted to relay the experience of a woman who feels sexual desire that she does not entirely understand, but she knows that this desire cannot be satisfied by traditional heterosexual sex with a man. Sand wrote out of a practical knowledge of human relations about what she knew, and then the world informed her that its understanding of human relations was vastly different, as the contemporary criticism and alleged "expert" medical analyses demonstrate.

The following example, excerpted from François Dumont's 1830 medical dissertation, helps to clarify the scandal of *Lélia* and its unexpected effect on readers. According to the medical texts, one of the physical causes of female impotence, along with total absence of genitals, was an abnormally long clitoris, or "Longueur démesurée du clitoris." Dumont explains:

> Ce vice de conformation n'est point par lui-même une cause de stérilité ou d'impuissance; cependant il occasione quelquefois la stérilité chez les

> femmes libidineuses, en donnant une direction fâcheuse au moral […]. Celles qui possèdent de semblables vices de conformation ont, pour la plupart, peu de penchans pour les hommes; elles préfèrent les plaisirs solitaires ou pris avec d'autres femmes avec lesquelles elles exercent un simulacre de coït, dans lequel elles jouent le rôle destiné à l'homme (64-65)

Dumont supports his medical expertise with a case study about a Roman woman whose husband surprised her having sex with her female slave. In his indignation, the husband cut off his wife's clitoris, "et rendit à la fécondité celle que huit ans de mariage avait reconnue stérile" (65). This example seems to parallel what is happening with Lélia and the reaction to her. Lélia will not have sex with Sténio, and critics call her obscene, an abomination. In the above example, a woman's clitoris is forcibly removed and she is cured of sterility because non-heterosexual pleasure no longer distracts from or prevents procreation. Removing the source of specifically female pleasure "cures" the woman of her impotence. This example demonstrates the absolute disjuncture between understandings of impotence and the female body. Consider the way in which another nineteenth-century doctor refers to the clitoris: "l'organe analogue à celui de l'homme, dont on ne connaît pas encore les usages (le clitoris)" (Fodéré 357). Whereas Dumont's anecdote seemed to point to an understanding of the clitoris as a site of female pleasure, Fodéré appears to be totally ignorant of its function.

It is not until 1855 with the publication of Félix Roubaud's *Traité de l'impuissance,* that doctors began to consider female desire and pleasure separately from reproduction and to specifically pathologize (and subsequently attempt to treat) the absence of female sexual pleasure (Corbin 192). It makes sense that Lélia's confession was so shocking because it appeared at a time when female pleasure and desire were not considered in the discussions of *impuissance,* perhaps because doctors (and most, but not all, novel readers) did not understand the function of the clitoris. It is quite possible that there might have been unofficial knowledge out there in the world about female pleasure, and this unofficial knowledge shaped reactions to *Lélia*, but could never be mentioned explicitly in the public discourse around the novel.

Legal Texts:

The second most relevant nineteenth-century primary sources that mention the phenomenon of female impotence are legal texts dealing with divorce and marriage nullification. The first illuminating text that I will analyze is a newspaper article that recounts a dramatic court case featuring impotence in the marriage bed. The article appeared in the July 20, 1828 edition of *La Semaine.* The journalist describes the results of a recent trial in which François Fressange attempted to nullify his marriage to Marie Gaudeboeuf on the grounds of her impotence. Her genital makeup "offrait plutôt les apparences du sexe masculin que celles du sexe féminin," and they were thus unable to consummate the

marriage. Gaudeboeuf allegedly even consulted a doctor, whose examination confirmed that the presence of an obstruction ("l'obstacle rencontré par le mari" (2)) made consummation of the marriage impossible.[16] Here we have a purported instance of a genital malformation as the cause of female impotence, as the medical texts by Descourtilz and Dumont illustrated as well. Emphasis on Gaudeboeuf's genitals - and specifically her "vice de conformation" as doctors would label it - is critical because impotence as defined by the law is more straightforward than medically-defined impotence. Whereas medical definitions of impotence included physiological and psychological manifestations of the affliction, legal understandings of impotence are simplified. Only outward, physical manifestations of impotence are accepted in the legal domain. Since Gaudeboeuf did appear to suffer from such genital malformations, ruling should have been in Fressange's favor.

However, in an unexpected final judgment, the court refused Fressange's request to nullify his marriage to Gaudeboeuf. The judges' reasoning was threefold: first, they stated that the Civil Code did not explicitly include impotence as grounds for nullification of marriage. Second, the judges appealed to case law in order to expand upon their ruling, but not in the manner that one might expect. The journalist explains, "Ils ont dit: que le législateur, qui connaissait bien l'ancienne jurisprudence et le scandale que faisaient naître les procès en nullité de mariage pour cause d'impuissance, avait voulu mettre un terme à de pareilles demandes tout-à-fait contraires aux bonnes mœurs" (2). Although this citing of the Civil Code may seem to function as clear-cut support of the judges' ruling, it is in fact quite problematic, especially when followed by appeals to the "ancienne jurisprudence." Impotence, both male and female, as grounds for the nullification of marriage has a surprisingly long history in France.

From the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, impotence trials were fairly commonplace, public affairs. According to the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* published in 1812, the accused spouse would be brought before a tribunal and forced to prove their virility in front of a jury (Marc 224). This process, referred to as *congrès*, was not only highly ineffective because of the intense anxiety and embarrassment that the accused suffered, making them unable to "perform" in front of an audience; it also favored women, who "étant toujours passives, devaient moins redouter cette épreuve" (Fodéré, "Les lois éclairées" 232). We observe the same language of passivity regarding women's sexuality. This system was abolished in 1677 with the nullification of the marriage of the Marquis de Langey, who, after having been declared impotent by the tribunal, went on to father seven children in his second marriage (Descourtilz 281).

Descourtilz includes information about the legal implications of impotence in his study and displays the same ignorance of female sexuality

[16] Fressange used his wife's medical consultation as evidence in his favor, but no official medical documents were presented at the trial (2).

when he comments on the inefficacy of these impotence trials that unfairly targeted men, declaring "l'homme seul, trouvé anaphrodite, serait déclaré impuissant, parce que la femme paraît toujours disposée, qu'elle le soit ou non!" (287-88). The woman always appears "disposée", able to engage in coitus, able to conceive a child. Whether or not she actually is able to engage in heterosexual sex is irrelevant – "qu'elle le soit ou non!". This example parallels the incoherence that plays out in *Lélia* between the appearance of a perfect woman and the reality of her complexity. Everything about Lélia supports the notion that she should be able to conform to society's expectations of womanhood (sex and eventually motherhood). She is so unusual because although she (physically, at least) appears "disposée," she remains firmly *impassive*, which, according to experts, never happens.

In Descourtilz's lengthy chapter on impotence considered from the point of view of legal medicine, he argues that because impotence prevents the propagation of the human race, it must be viewed as a legal issue that merits the dissolution of a marriage (276). Descourtilz bases his arguments on the work of François-Emmanuel Fodéré, a nineteenth-century physician who is today considered a pioneer of legal medicine (Biéder 99). According to Fodéré, the Civil Code stipulates that impotence falls under the category of general conditions that can serve as grounds for the nullification of marriage because in certain cases, the spouse's medical condition violates Article 146 of the Civil Code, "qu'il n'y a pas de mariage lorsqu'il n'y a pas de consentement" ("Traité" 352). If the spouse's impotence or sterility is known but undisclosed before the marriage, then the marriage is subject to nullification under Article 180 of the Code, "Lorsqu'il y a eu erreur dans la personne, le mariage ne peut être attaqué que par celui des deux époux qui a été introduit en erreur" ("Code civil" 46). Although the Code does not literally cite impotence as grounds for nullification, Fodéré – and many other legal experts[17] – interpret Article 180 as implicitly encompassing the medical condition, since impotence opposes the primary objective of marriage, "l'union des sexes," and constitutes an "erreur sur la personne" ("Traité" 354). In fact, recognizing impotence as valid cause for marriage nullification has an important moral and social function in separating spouses who are not getting their needs met, thereby preventing adultery, "libertinage," and "mauvaises moeurs" (Fodéré, "Traité" 355).

According to Joseph Briand's *Manuel complet de médecine légale,* under the early case law, impotence was valid grounds for nullification of marriage. However, such cases had to be tried before ecclesiastical rather than secular judges: "les institutions canoniques, qui regardaient l'union de deux époux inhabiles à remplir les devoirs conjugaux comme une profanation du sacrement de mariage, et leur *prescrivaient* d'en demander la dissolution" (98). To return to the case of Fressange and Gaudeboeuf, the judges who ruled against Fressange's demand for marriage nullification reference these past examples and their desire

[17] Fodéré writes, "Je suis glorieux de m'être rencontré, sur cette matière, du même avis que plusieurs jurisconsultes éclairés" (362).

to avoid the scandal that such cases inevitably produce. They refuse Fressange's demand and hope to use their ruling as an example to prevent future couples from seeking similar arrangements, which are "contraires aux bonnes moeurs." The judges' final reason for refusing the nullification demand is as follows:

> Il s'est enfin fondé sur l'impossibilité qu'il y aurait de visiter la femme, si elle s'y refusait. Dans ce cas, sans doute, il faudrait admettre la prétention de l'époux, et reconnaître qu'il y a réellement l'impuissance. Mais cette manière de décider entraînerait un grave inconvénient, puisque ce serait un moyen de faire prononcer une espèce de divorce par consentement mutuel. (2)

In other words, if the court was to determine, after a medical examination or refusal thereof, that Gaudeboeuf was legitimately impotent, then they would have to honor Fressange's demand for marriage nullification. The fallout of such a ruling, however, would pave the way for a kind of divorce "par consentement mutuel," which legally existed in France before the enactment of the Napoleonic Code.

The legal nullification of the marriage between Fressange and Gaudeboeuf would have such influential ramifications because the Civil Code was founded on the belief that social and political order fundamentally depend on familial order (Niort 142). The ruling is so interesting – even the journalist comments, "Ce jugement est très-remarquable" (2) – because the judges explicitly place greater weight on the public reaction and potential repercussions of the ruling than on the personal case between Fressange and Gaudeboeuf. Once again, the issue of impotence grows beyond the scope of its origin – fear of scandal and of repetition takes precedence. Speculation about the repercussions of the trial and the ruling prevent the judges from considering solely the facts in front of them.

Part IV: Conclusion: Rewriting *Lélia*

Lélia is the only novel in Sand's oeuvre that she rewrote and republished, making significant adjustments (Naginski 106). In the new version, published in 1839, she deleted all the mentions of *impuissance* that critics understood as sexual impotence. The theme is still present, but it has an abstract and nonsexual meaning, extending, for example, into the religious sphere, on which Sand concentrates more in the new version. As Nigel Harkness explains, "Lélia's sexual frigidity is transformed into an inability to love within patriarchal power structures, a metaphysical incapacity which culminates in the ultimate denial of sexual existence" (124). Instead of Lélia's murder at the hands of the crazed monk Magnus, the novel ends with a very different kind of demise. After serving as the abbess of the Camaldules convent for several years, Lélia is excommunicated from the church based on false accusations[18] and exiled to a ruined monastery where she dies a year later.

[18] "Lélia fut accusée [...] par deux de ses religieuses qui l'avaient toujours haïe à cause de son amour pour la justice, et qui espéraient prendre sa place" (155).

Sand realized that people were interpreting her novel in a manner that was creating monumental scandal. In response, she claimed that people were not reading her novel as she had intended; to be more precise, they were not reading the term *impuissance* as she had meant it to be understood. She responded to criticism of *Lélia* in the preface to her short story *Le Secrétaire intime,* which appeared in the *Revue des deux mondes* in March of 1834. In the preface, she expresses the necessity of addressing some of the critiques of *Lelia,* even though, "d'ordinaire il est d'assez mauvais goût d'expliquer au lecteur ce qu'on a voulu faire" (i). In Sand's defense of *Lélia,* in which she engages in some serious reputation management, she attempts two strategies to explain what she actually wanted to express in her novel: she uses chaste abstraction to illustrate concepts that critics had found immoral in the novel, and she downplays her influence as a writer, specifically a woman writer. What critics had referred to in the novel as Lélia's impotence, Sand describes in the preface as superior "Reason" facing material reality: "En présence des joies auxquelles elle ne saurait descendre, il est permis à la Raison de s'attrister sur l'atmosphère inhabitée où elle s'est réfugiée. Il n'y a dans cette tristesse résignée rien qui ressemble à l'apologie du libertinage" (ix). Rather than explicitly challenging critiques of the impudicity of the novel, Sand uses abstract images to confirm her heroine's physical and psychological state, but in a valorizing way. With her retroactive censoring, Sand demonstrates how she sees the subject matter of *Lélia* from a new perspective, but only because it is possible that she had no idea that these alternate perspectives and interpretations existed in the first place.

Sand then reflects on the consequences of the *Lélia* backlash in terms of her audience, "Quoiqu'il [l'auteur] n'ait pas l'intention de moraliser son siècle, il comprend très-bien qu'on ne peut impunément effleurer même par la poésie les questions qui intéressent l'humanité toute entière" (x). Sand discovered that certain topics were off limits, but she still needed a way to be able to write with freedom. As modern readers, we know that *Lélia* was just the beginning of Sand's prolific and socially-engaged career, which makes the final paragraph of the preface seem even more ironic:

> C'est pourquoi ses livres, quelle que soit la destinée qui les attend, [...] ne seront jamais dignes de la haine ou de la discussion; car il [l'auteur] ne plaidera jamais au profit d'un système. Il est de ceux pour qui sentir vaut mieux que savoir. Il peut avoir tort, mais du moins il est sincère. (xiii)

Sand alludes to the genre of women's writing in which sentimentality was the dominant theme, just as Gustave Planche had written in his review of *Lélia* that it is women who "excellent dans l'observation et l'analyse des sentimens" (368). In downplaying the capacity of her writing to function as social commentary or even to effect change, Sand sets the stage for her future literary output, which explores provocative themes and experiments with alternative social structures in unexpected settings, such as in her *roman champêtres* series.

The publication of *Lélia* and the backlash that ensued had long-lasting effects on Sand's career. None of her subsequent novels explore women's

sexuality with the same rawness as *Lélia.* When she published the second version in 1839, the literary world had moved on and was no longer interested in the struggles of this more chaste, more religious heroine. Even Sand's censoring of all indications of Lélia's sexual impotence seems to have been relatively futile in terms of redeeming this "failed" novel. In his retrospective survey published in 1839, *Du Travail intellectuel en France, depuis 1815 jusqu'à 1837,* critic Amédée Duquesnel reflects on "la critique quotidienne qui se fit prude ce jour-là," noting that "ce qui a révolté nos austères feuilletonistes, c'est le profond dédain de Lélia pour les joies sensuelles et son impuissance à les sentir. Nous n'avons jamais compris cette indignation ridicule" (187). Duquesnel has no qualms about pinpointing Lélia's sexuality as the source of critics' negative reception of Sand's third novel. Just a handful of years later, on the eve of a new decade, Sand's troubled heroine was no longer troubling.

The negative reception of *Lélia* in 1833 demonstrates that the social context in which Sand published the novel was just as important as the content of the novel itself. Bourdieu notes that the social world, "quand il s'agit d'œuvres d'art ou de littérature, nous dit tout deux fois: il nous dit les choses à la fois dans les œuvres et dans le monde social au sein duquel elles ont été produites. Il ne faut pas se priver […] de ce qui est dans le contexte" (92). *Lélia* touched a nerve in the social world of 1830s France for several reasons: its hybrid form, its misgendered author, its impotent heroine. Understanding the context of the scandal allows us to read the novel on different levels. Teasing through these levels of interpretation reveals a great deal about how this particular world understood and received women's authorship and sexuality. Sand noted (rather disingenuously) in the preface to the *Secretaire intime* that her works are unworthy of being taken seriously. If we map this claim on to *Lélia*, we might also entertain the possibility that there might have been some part of Sand, whether conscious or not, that *did* intend to imagine a character that existed outside of the binary understanding of gender. Through Lélia's atypical sexuality, Sand created a character that expressed her fears and desires outside of the narrowly-defined sphere of heterosexuality.

CHAPTER 2:

Delphine de Girardin's Parisian Comedy: Journalism, Parody, and Writing the History of the Present

> La double position de femme et de journaliste a quelque chose d'étrange qui arrête et choque tout d'abord l'esprit le moins timoré.
>
> Lagevenais, *Revue des Deux Mondes*

Walter Benjamin writes that with Baudelaire, "Paris becomes for the first time the subject of lyric poetry" (21). Indeed, we have most often come to associate the nineteenth-century city's tumultuous transition to modernity with the work of the great, tortured poet. We think of the man of the crowd, of the anonymous passerby, of the exiled poet crying out, "Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie / N'a bougé!" (*Les Fleurs du mal* 126). But what if we took a moment to consider modernity from a different angle? What if, for nineteenth-century denizens of Paris, it was not only moody poetry that captured their everyday lives, but also cheeky one-liners about fashion, such as, "Le regard ment, le sourire est perfide; la parure ne trompe jamais" (Girardin, *Lettres parisiennes* 213)? What if their questions were answered, their curiosity fueled, their daily life so perfectly captured, all by a fictional aristocratic *feuilletoniste*? In this chapter, I will introduce you to the fabulously outlandish vicomte Charles de Launay.

Between 1836 and 1848, Delphine de Girardin published a weekly column in her husband, Émile de Girardin's, daily journal *La Presse* under the pseudonym the vicomte Charles de Launay. In this column, or *chronique,* called *le Courrier de Paris,* the vicomte comments on all aspects of contemporary life: governmental affairs, fashion, meetings of the Académie Française, high-society balls, and beyond. Since *La Presse* was one of the most widely-read and circulated journals in the mid-nineteenth century, Girardin's column quickly became a staple of Parisian journalism (Finch 130). Indeed, Girardin arguably founds and standardizes this new genre of journalistic writing in which the present plays out before readers' eyes. José Luis Diaz argues that Girardin's *Courrier* marks a pivotal shift in the relationship between journalism and the epistolary form. Before the *Courrier,* the letter form's role in newspapers was primarily tied to "le registre d'une fidélité archaïsante à la presse ancienne […] et aux élégances de la communication mondaine" (6). After Girardin, the *Courrier*'s letter form,

conversational tone, and privileging of "niaseries vivaces"[19] become the foundations of the new genre.

Girardin produced a vast corpus with the *Courrier de Paris* that is a meditation on daily life in a global city in the throes of immense change. Her experimentations with the journalistic form, such as her privileging of the instantaneous, the fragmented, and the sublimely banal, bring to mind a contemplation of Parisian nineteenth-century modernity that we have most often come to associate with and understand through other (primarily male) authors and poets, such as Baudelaire. Through Girardin's vicomte, we are able to uncover an alternative narrative, a certain perspective on gender and literary form that sheds light on nineteenth-century considerations of the complicated relationship between women and writing. In my first chapter I examined the reception of George Sand's third novel to demonstrate how certain formal and generic choices affected *Lélia*'s readership, and what these effects revealed about the intertwining of gender, sexuality, and authorship in 1830s France. Sand's disruption of genre in *Lélia* and the questioning of her own gender prompted readers and critics to conceptualize female sexuality – both within and beyond the text – in unexpected and often contradictory ways.

In this chapter, I will start from a similar position with Girardin by analyzing and understanding the unique form of the *chronique* and how it (and Girardin herself) was received. How does the genre of the *chronique*, as well as the way in which Girardin shapes her gender impersonation to the genre, allow her discussion of gender and sexuality to differ from Sand's? What does humor allow Girardin to do that Sand's "sincerity" did not, and that Sand perhaps realized with her ironic retraction of her novels' value in the preface to the *Secrétaire intime*?[20] Cheryl Morgan, one of the preeminent scholars of Girardin, has written extensively about humor in her novelistic production, which preceded her journalism, as well as her own form of literary *flânerie* that appears in the *chroniques* ("Alone of All Her Sex?" 91). In my chapter, I hope to combine these two domains to analyze the relationship between Girardin's humor and the unique form of the *chronique*, and to understand the liberating or constricting effects that such humor has on the discussion of social concerns.

Part I: The Era of *courriérisme* and the Founding of a Genre

The opening lines of very first column, published September 28, 1836, set the tone for the *Courrier*, as Girardin writes, "Il n'est rien de bien extraordinaire cette semaine: une révolution en Portugal, une apparition de république en

[19] A term that the vicomte himself uses in the October 27, 1837 column to describe the style and content of the *Courrier*. He notes that his readers prefer "de petites phrases légères, des périodes écourtées, un commérage rapide, un style sautillant, des niaiseries vivaces, des mensonges courants" (197).

[20] "ses livres, quelle que soit la destinée qui les attend, [...] ne seront jamais dignes de la haine ou de la discussion" (xiii). "Le Secrétaire intime." Paris: Revue des deux mondes, 1834.

Espagne, une nomination de ministres à Paris, une baisse considérable à la Bourse, un ballet nouveau à l'Opéra, et deux capotes de satin blanc aux Tuileries" (9). International political upheaval is placed on the same scale as the scandal of wearing white satin too early in the season. Girardin's seamless interweaving of politics, economics, art, and fashion not only makes readers laugh, but also encourages them to reflect on the multiplicity of modern life. What might seem to be unrelated events and disparate bits and pieces of information are imbricated in Girardin's *Courrier* to produce a singular, yet multi-faceted text. A major part of this chapter is thus devoted to more deeply analyzing the heterogenous form of the *chronique.* Building upon the work of Marie-Ève Thérenty and Allain Vaillant, I explore how Girardin's journalistic writing fits into the existing sphere, but also paves the way for a new style of contemporary commentary.

The *Courrier* resonated with its vast readership at the time of its publication, but we have only started to privilege it today as a rich source of data and a unique perspective on nineteenth-century social life.[21] Although Girardin published hundreds of articles as the vicomte de Launay, the medium of publication seems to have discouraged critical enquiry. The letters' absolute lack of continuity, their essentially transitory nature, their abrupt shifts in tone and style are all products of the genre of the *chronique,* which has remained generally outside of the realm of literary analysis. However, Thérenty has demonstrated that in the nineteenth century and up to the beginning of the twentieth century, the distinction between "journalism" and "literature" was as nebulous as the relationship between the two domains was paradoxical. She explains that various journalistic genres such as the *chronique,* the *feuilleton,* and even certain elements of the *faits divers* reporting, "s'inspire[nt] largement d'une poétique littéraire fondée sur la conversation, la fiction et l'écriture intime alors même qu'un des lieux communs de la Littérature à la même époque est de stigmatiser le journal comme écriture commerciale, industrielle et clichéique" ("L'écho dérouté" 129). Moreover, many of the major canonized authors of the time engaged in journalistic writing, and many "journalists" in fact had literary ambitions, since entering the world of the press was viewed as an effective way to begin to make a name for oneself in the *champs littéraire* (Saminadayar-Perrin 102). What happens when we question this distinction that separates literature from journalism, and instead read Girardin's texts for what they are: formally and stylistically complex portraits that vividly portray Paris on its way to "modernity"?

It is not only the formal aspects of the *Courrier* that make it challenging to dissect, it is also the tone that Girardin employs in the letters. The letters are written in an incredibly ironic manner, so much so that it is sometimes difficult to discern the level of sincerity regarding particular matters. Girardin's social commentary is at times sarcastic, clever, and even bitter, but it is nearly always

[21] Cheryl Morgan (1994), Marie-Ève Thérenty (2001), and Catherine Nesci (2007) have been at the forefront of bringing Girardin back into the critical spotlight.

humorous. I believe this element of humor, combined with Girardin's primary status as a journalist, has contributed to the letters' lack of critical attention. As Joyce Johnston reveals in her study *Women Dramatists, Humor, and the French Stage,* humor in nineteenth-century literary studies generally seems to exist in a critical void. The scholars that have examined humor in the nineteenth century have focused on solely male writers such as Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert (14). Humor, however, far from trivializing the *Courrier*, often masks the quite serious subjects that Girardin addresses in her social commentary. In the column from March 23, 1844, Girardin reflects on the absence of women in the Académie Française. Rather than explicitly critiquing this gendered discrimination, the vicomte adopts an ironic tone, explaining,

> Pourquoi leur reconnaître un privilège quand on leur a dénié tous les droits? Une femme, en France, ne peut être duchesse ou comtesse qu'en épousant un duc ou un comte; eh bien, elle ne doit être académicienne qu'en épousant un académicien. Toute dignité personnelle est interdite aux femmes dans ce beau pays de la chevalerie; elles ne doivent briller que par reflets (205).

Although Girardin's reflection is indeed filtered through the Vicomte's sarcastic lens, the message that Girardin succeeds in expressing is provocative. She plays on the fact that the French language and social customs are interwoven in such a way that precludes women from both. The feminized "académicienne" did not exist as a codified form in the nineteenth century, precisely because there were no women in the Académie. By using humor as a strategy to comment on controversial subjects, Girardin is able to reach a wide audience. I would like to delve deeper into Girardin's negotiation of humor and earnest social analysis, and particularly the ways in which the specific genre of the *chronique* creates a unique space in which Girardin is able to exist without the derogatory label assigned to many women authors in the nineteenth century, that of *bas-bleu*.[22]

I also hope to understand Girardin's legacy and her overlooked position in French literary history. She published several poetry collections, six novels, eight short stories, and eight plays that were successful during her lifetime, and she occupied an influential social position in literary society (Corriere 69). Although Margaret Cohen classified Girardin as an "exception" to the gendered sentimental genre (she is often touted as the only woman realist author of the nineteenth century), few of her texts attained the canonical status of those of her male colleagues (120). Cheryl Morgan suggests that Girardin's overlooked position can be understood in some ways as a result of the inability to classify

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[22] The expression *bas-bleu*, derived from the English "bluestocking" was a derogatory, yet prevalent term for women authors in nineteenth-century France. The *bas-bleu,* like the *flâneur* and the *grisette*, became a favorite subject of the popular typological sketches, and over the course of the century, authors such as Frédéric Soulié, Jules Janin, and Barbey d'Aurevilly all cultivated the textual – and social – creation that was the *bas-bleu.* To be a woman author was to be a *bas-bleu*, a talentless writer of frivolity, "[une] aventurière en haillons qui écrit et vend des livres, parce qu'elle n'a plus rien à vendre et plus rien à faire de son corps" (230), as Janin writes in his 1842 typology. For a detailed analysis of the *bas-bleu,* see Christine Planté's *Petite soeur de Balzac* (1989).

her works within typical generic codes: Girardin's novels are trapped between a representation of "an historical social real" and parody (93).[23] If we think back to the backlash that Sand's *Lélia* faced in response to the novel's generic ambiguity, we can better understand the complex positioning of Giradin's *oeuvre* in the canon.

In fact, Girardin was born into literary celebrity thanks to her mother, author and *salonnière* Sophie Gay. At the very early age of 17, Girardin began to earn her own renown when she competed in a poetry competition organized by the Académie Française. According to Henri Malo's 1925 study of Sophie Gay and her daughter, *Une Muse et sa mère*, after Delphine's performance in the *concours*, "Toute la presse retentit son nom. Le *Journal des Débats*, la *Quotidienne* publient son éloge. Le *Moniteur* dit que le lecture de ses vers a produit un effet difficile à décrire […]'" (Malo 170). She published her first two poetry collections in 1824 and 1825, to high praise in the press. It is during this period that Girardin took on the persona (or at least had the role bestowed upon her) of the *Muse de la patrie*; she was a living, breathing *Corinne* in the eyes of the public.[24] As Girardin gained celebrity, her mother also focused more intensely on cultivating her daughter's precocious talent and growing fame by assigning an image to the already legendary poetic voice. In 1824 Gay commissioned artist Louis Hersent to paint what is today the most well-known portrait of Girardin, which was featured in the Salon of 1825 (see fig. 1) (Malo 201).

Marie-Claude Schapira draws attention to the careful choice of dress and color in the painting, arguing that it is a calculated decision meant to mirror Madame de Staël's description of Corinne arriving at the Capital on a chariot pulled by four white horses: "vêtue comme la Sibylle du Dominiquin […]; sa robe était blanche; une draperie bleue se rattachait au-dessous de son sein, et son costume était très pittoresque sans s'écarter cependant assez des usages reçus

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[23] In Morgan's article, "Alone of All Her Sex," in which she analyzes Girardin's brand of humor, she focuses her analysis on Girardin's short stories and novels. Similarly, Cohen privileges Girardin's short stories *Le Lorgnon* and *La Canne de Monsieur de Balzac* in formulating her argument for Girardin's realism, noting that the most important realist code in her works is detailed description (120). Whereas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Girardin was most celebrated for her *Courrier*, today, many critics tend to gravitate towards forms that are perhaps more digestible, more appropriate for literary analysis than is the *chronique*. Interestingly, Cohen concludes her note on Girardin by referencing another nineteenth-century scholar's work. She writes, "Whether Girardin's most important realist writings are in fact her journalism on Parisian life in *La Presse* is a question Waller addresses in her forthcoming book on fashion journalism and the invention of the realist narrator" (120). It appears that this forthcoming book may have slightly changed direction between the publication of Morgan's article and today: Waller's third book is still forthcoming, titled *Napoleon's Closet: The Emperor, the Priest, and Male Fashion*.

[24] The January 16, 1834 edition of the *Figaro* references the almost symbolic status of Girardin's early poetic career, writing, "La première période de la vie poétique de Mme de Girardin restera toujours comme un monument littéraires, comme un type original dont aucun peuple de l'antiquité ne nous avait légué le modèle. […] À Mme de Girardin appartiennent ces inspirations de patriotisme, colorées par toutes les délicatesses de sentimens que renferme le coeur d'une femme." (3) https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k268019s

Fig 1. Delphine Gay, madame Emile de Girardin en 1824. By Louis Hersent. https://art.rmngp.fr/en/library/artworks/louis-hersent_delphine-gay-madame-emile-de-girardin-1804-1855-en-1824_huile-sur-toile_1824.

pour que l'ont put y trouver de l'affectation" (Schapira 2). Girardin thus quickly became known in salon and literary circles not only for her gifts, but also for her beauty. Authors such as Lamartine, Gauthier, and Marie d'Agoult commented on the beauty of the young "Muse" in their correspondence, all similarly describing a tall, strong, blond woman with aquiline features.[25] In Paul de

[25] Painter and critic Étienne-Jean Delécluze's description of Girardin exemplifies the trends of the circulating images of the young poet. After he met Girardin in person and saw her portrait at the

Molènes's 1842 article "Simples essais d'histoire littéraires: Les femmes poètes," he reminisces about Girardin's rise to fame, and focuses heavily on her appearance, "Le nom de Delphine fut à la mode. Une jeune fille avec de blonds cheveux, des yeux limpides et une taille élancée, se présente au public pour jouer le rôle de Muse" (67). Girardin thus occupied a unique and privileged role in the male-dominated literary sphere, and this role allowed her to maintain close relationships with the major players of the Parisian literary scene. Corresponding regularly with Lamartine, Balzac, and Hugo, among others, Girardin benefited from these great figures' mentoring, without being the object of constant romantic intrigues such as George Sand and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore.[26] Girardin's literary *confrères* offered the budding author advice, and it is this advice that may in fact prefigure her future effacement from the canon. Both Lamartine and Balzac had a similar critique of Girardin's writing style, which seemed to be an outgrowth of her character: to these two authors, Girardin was simply not serious enough. In an essay written after Girardin's death, Lamartine praises Girardin's intelligence and beauty, noting that she had only one fault: "elle riait trop" (Séché 60).

In fact, Lamartine's criticism of Girardin's *excès d'esprit* is an oft-repeated critique. In 1841, after the *Courrier*'s success had long since been solidified, Lamartine advised Girardin in a letter to pursue more "noble" literary aspirations, writing,

> À votre place, je ferais un grand livre de philosophie humaine ou mondaine dans le genre de *l'Allemagne,* de madame de Staël. Vous êtes à sa hauteur maintenant, plus la poésie. Prenez votre sérieux tout à fait; ne touchez plus que dans le journal la corde semi-sérieuse de l'esprit. La gaieté est amusante, mais au fond c'est une jolie grimace (549).

In order to attain true literary fame and respect, Girardin must privilege more "serious" topics and genres. By doing so, Girardin might have the opportunity to attain the same level of respect as Madame de Staël, whom Lamartine cites as a model of a "serious" woman author. Girardin must also reserve her humor for a particular genre, the press. The intersection of gender, genre, and seriousness thus proves to be quite complex: there are correct and incorrect ways of being serious as a woman author, just as there are appropriate and inappropriate venues for humor and sincerity.

Salon of 1825, Delécluze wrote, "Comme poète, sa figure est très remarquable, par la puissance de son regard et l'air de profonde intelligence que décèlent tous les mouvements de sa physionomie. Comme femme, elle manque d'une certain faiblesse gracieuse qui plaît dans son sexe et qui flatte si doucement l'orgueil naturel de l'homme: il aime à jouer le rôle de protecteur. Au total, c'est une fort belle personne. Elle est grande, bien faite, ses cheveux blonds se marient bien avec l'éclat de son teint, et elle joint à beaucoup de grâce dans ses mouvements un air de simplicité et de bonhomie même" (Malo 203). Note that although Girardin is described as classically beautiful, her physical appearance nonetheless communicates an element of unfemininity in its lack of "faiblesse gracieuse."

[26] Girardin's only (known) love affair was with fellow poet Alfred de Vigny before her marriage to Emile de Girardin (Corriere 69).

Balzac also offers similar advice to Girardin after the publication of her satirical short story, *La Canne de Monsieur de Balzac* (1836). He encourages Girardin to treat more serious topics if she wishes to be esteemed as a writer – and to distance herself from other women writers. In an 1836 letter to Girardin, Balzac compliments but also critiques the author (who has not yet transformed into the vicomte) while drawing attention to her strengths, writing, "Vous avez une immense portée dans le détail dont vous n'usez pas pour l'ensemble. Vous êtes au moins aussi forte en prose qu'en poésie, ce qui, dans notre époque, n'a été donné qu'à Victor Hugo" (Séché 220). Balzac's note about Girardin's gift for attention to detail is curious. We know that one of the characteristics of Girardin's journalistic writing that makes her columns so successful is precisely her talent of acute observation. Balzac, before Girardin even begins writing as the vicomte, suggests that Girardin should extend this talent to all areas – or genres – of her literary production. Moreover, Balzac comments on the rarity of Girardin's strengths in both prose and poetry, comparing her skill to that of Victor Hugo. Balzac then advises Girardin to employ her "avantages" to the fullest by embarking on a more serious literary project: "Faites un grand, un beau livre. […] Je me mets à vos genoux pour que vous daigniez nous écrasez" (220). At this point, Balzac's comparison of Girardin to other male authors becomes even more surprising; he does not merely want Girardin to reach the level of literary respect and mastery as Hugo (and Balzac himself), he wants her to surpass them.

Balzac then details the style of Girardin's future masterpiece that will assure her success, writing, "Soyez, dans l'exécution, tour à tour poétique et moqueuse; mais ayez un style égal, et vous franchirez cette désolante distance qu'il est convenu de mettre entre les deux sexes (littérairement parlant), car je suis de ceux qui trouve que ni Mme de Staël ni Mme GS ne l'ont effacée (220)." Balzac suggests that Girardin must fuse together her eye for detail and penchant for playful mockery with her gift for poetry. Differing from Lamartine's advice, Balzac sees the value of extending certain characteristics of Girardin's witty humor to other genres, in this case, her hypothetical *grand, beau livre*. In doing so, Girardin would be able to effectively write and produce at the level of male authors, thus eliminating the distance that has been created between the literary production of men and women. Although Balzac's reductive analysis of the gendered literary landscape is indeed misogynistic, his urging of Girardin to go beyond what Madame de Staël and George Sand had done is interesting. Unlike Lamartine's, Balzac's advice seems to suggest less of a restraining of humor than a redirection of it.

We might think of Sand's *Lélia* as a comparatively "failed" example of women's authorship and seriousness. In *Lélia,* Sand had tackled "les questions qui intéressent l'humanité toute entière" (*Le Secrétaire intime* x), but in a manner that rubbed people the wrong way: the solemn consideration of her heroine's sexuality and melancholia deeply disturbed readers and critics. It seems that for women authors, one of the only acceptable ways to approach certain topics is by way of humor. In Sand's response to *Lélia*'s attackers, for example, she somewhat

disingenuously downplays her influence as an author by privileging sentiment and sincerity over truths that might be interpreted as social commentary. She writes that the author of *Lélia* "est de ceux pour qui sentir vaut mieux que savoir. Il peut avoir tort, mais du moins il est sincère" (*Le Secrétaire intime* xiii). It is by way of this disingenuous claim of not being knowledgeable about certain subjects that Sand is able to voice her discontent while still being taken seriously as an author. We need to thus take the suggestions to the young Girardin (such as Lamartine's "Prenez votre sérieux tout à fait") with a grain of salt. Even if she wished to take their suggestions to heart and embark on a grand work of philosophy, the topics that she would be able to treat and the manner in which she would be able to treat them would be highly constrained.

Girardin never did write that *grand livre* that her mentors so encouraged. Instead, she delved into the world of journalism, a world in which her unique style – "écriture expérimentale," as Nesci refers to it (202) – and humor helped propel her to a more transitory fame. In this chapter, I will explore in greater depth the complex dance between genres that Girardin navigated throughout her career, and how understanding contemporary critiques of her work can help shed light on the relationship between gender and literary genre under the July Monarchy.

Part II. The Vicomte's *Faux Flânerie*

Catherine Nesci has demonstrated the ways in which Girardin reconstructs the figure of the primarily masculine-identified *flâneur* into the new *flâneuse* (113). Indeed, as a woman writing under the masculine (and noble) pseudonym, Girardin operates from a privileged position in which she can comment on both public and private affairs, effortlessly blending the two spheres from her androgynous position. Girardin's position of power and social influence becomes even more interesting with the understanding that her readers knew she was the vicomte relatively soon after she began writing the column in September of 1836.[27] We can thus read the *Courrier* doubly: through the lens of the vicomte, which Girardin so carefully crafted and perfected, but also as inseparable from Girardin's own opinions and commentary. In rare cases, such as the anecdote described below, we can even follow the process that transforms Girardin's observations into the vicomte's social commentary.

The feuilleton section of the September 5, 1864 edition of the *Bulletin des Tribunaux,* features a brief recounting of journalist Frédéric Thomas's "Impressions de vacances," during which he visits the Montmartre cemetery to pay respects to M. Romiguières' and Madame de Girardin's graves. At Girardin's tomb, Thomas stumbles upon another pious admirer of Girardin, a military officer wearing the "la rosette de la Légion d'honneur" (563). The two converse,

[27] Although it is quite possible that other journals as well as readers in general knew about the vicomte's identity even before, the earliest indication in the press that I could find is an article appearing in the *Charivari* on December 1836.

and the officer tells Thomas a story "si romanesque et si originale" that the journalist cannot resist passing it on to his readers. The rest of the brief article consists entirely of the officer's recounted anecdote in which he describes how he came to be a devoted admirer of Girardin. He begins the story with a suggestive preamble:

> Je n'ai jamais eu l'honneur d'être connu de madame de Girardin: je n'ai même jamais eu l'honneur de lui parler. Elle ne m'a jamais vu qu'une seule fois dans une foule, sans savoir mon nom, sans savoir autre chose sinon que j'étais un soldat mêlé à beaucoup d'autres. Et pourtant, malgré tout cela, je regarde madame de Girardin comme la protectrice à qui je dois la décoration que je porte et la position où je me suis élevé. (564)

In this introduction, the officer assumes the position of an anonymous face in the crowd, a perspective that readers do not normally encounter in nineteenth-century panoramic literature. As Nesci explains, it is most often the figure of

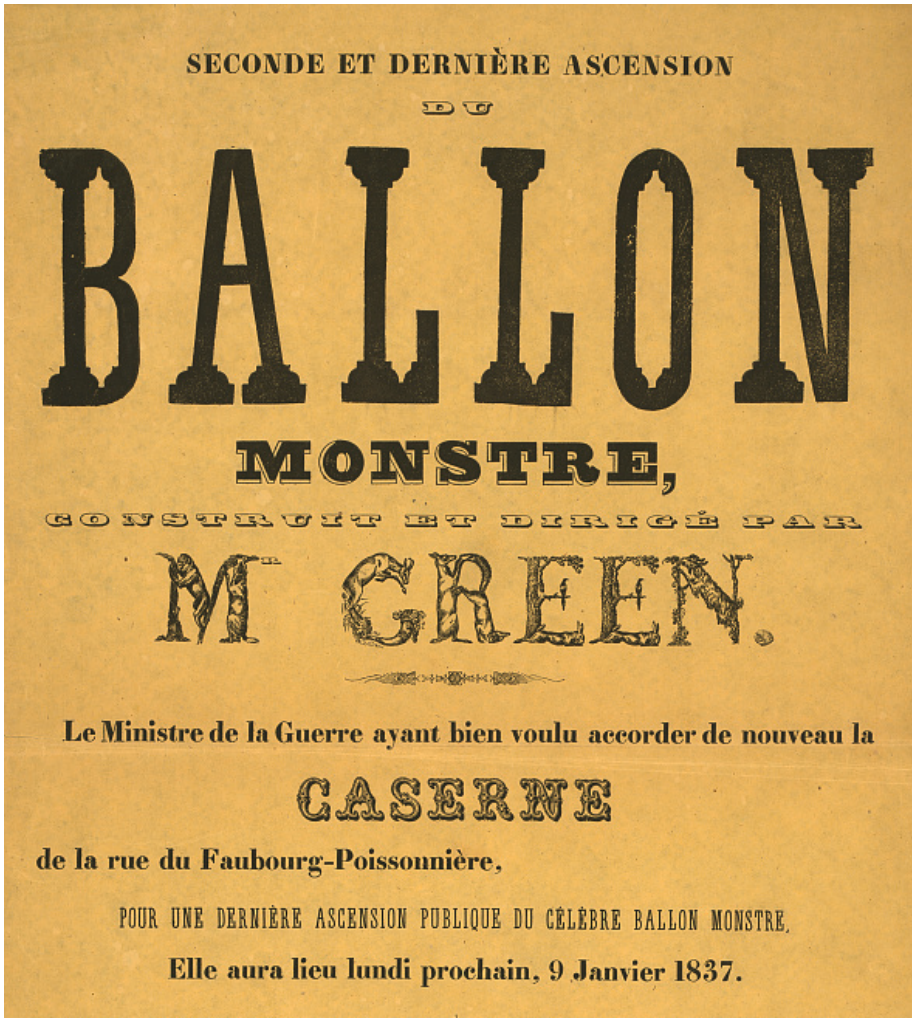


Fig. 2. Advertisement for Charles Green's hot air balloon; "Seconde et dernière ascension du ballon Monstre, construit et dirigé par Mr. Green, 9 janvier"; *Library of Congress*, www.loc.gov/item/2002724897/.

Balzac's "flâneur artiste" who takes the center stage (171). The officer then launches into his story, taking the journalist back 30 years to January 1837, when a large crowd gathered in Paris to watch the ascension of Charles Green's famous "Ballon Monstre," a giant hot air balloon. Figure 2 features an advertisement that attests to the spectacle and verifies the anecdote of the officer, who was a young soldier at the time and had to temporarily leave his lodgings at Faubourg-Poissonnière so that "une multitude d'élégants curieux" could have a better view of the balloon (Thomas 564).

From his provisional lodging, the young soldier, who was also a voracious reader of the *Courrier de Paris*, spotted Girardin perched at his very window and was so overcome with excitement that he called out her name, "Madame de Girardin": "Mon exclamation était plus ridicule qu'irrévérencieuse. On se retourna. Madame de Girardin m'entendit; elle rougit, et disparut un moment de la fenêtre" (564). Although at first the officer was worried that he had embarrassed Girardin, all his worries were dispelled three days later when he read Girardin's interpretation of the scene in the *Courrier*.

Indeed, Girardin recounts the exchange between her and the soldier in the January 12, 1837 edition of the *Courrier,* but from the perspective of the vicomte de Launay, of course:

> Les soldats de la caserne retournèrent dans *leurs appartements*; l'un d'eux nous avait fort amusés un moment avant l'ascension: 'Tiens! tiens! s'était-il écrié, une dame à ma fenêtre! dans ma petite chambre!' Et sa joie était si vive, qu'elle était fort plaisante. (69)

Here we have a rare occurrence in which we are able to identify the ways in which Girardin, "masked" observer of the present, transforms her observations into those of the vicomte. According to the officer, he had called out Girardin's name in excitement at seeing her watching the spectacle from his window. Writing as the vicomte, Girardin must refashion the interaction. The soldier's excitement now stems merely from seeing a lady at his window, rather than recognizing a celebrated author of whom he is a great fan. Girardin also fills in the missing pieces of the puzzle: whereas the soldier was initially worried that he had distressed Girardin, the vicomte's retelling transforms the embarrassing shout into a humorous, reciprocal exchange.

This anecdote demonstrates how Girardin approaches writing the present in a truly unique way. We can read Girardin's *Courrier* as an example of the urban *flâneur* (or rather *flâneuse*) observing and connecting with the crowd, but for once, we have the crowd's response, the reply of the unknown in the form of the officer's narrative, which he continues for journalist Thomas after reading the passage from the *Courrier.* He describes the feeling of reading about himself in the paper, explaining, "j'étais heureux et j'étais fier. Elle m'avait vu, elle m'avait entendu. Ce journal, que je tenais là, sous mes yeux, en était le vivant et l'irrécusable témoignage" (565). The anonymous passerby is not a mere passive trope for Girardin, a blank face on which to project her own fantasies. They are a

living, breathing subject that demands to be not only observed, but listened to, communicated with. The officer's simple statement, "elle m'avait vu, elle m'avait entendu," in fact attests to the force of Girardin's column and her ability to truly capture urban life in a way that reverberates through the city and endures throughout the century.

Capturing the present in such a manner is far from an easy task, and Girardin comments on the difficulty in the April 27, 1844 edition of the *Courrier.* Comparing her work to that of the historian, the vicomte explains: "Les historiens sont bien heureux: l'histoire du passé, ce n'est rien à écrire, avec un peu d'imagination, on peut s'en tirer; mais l'histoire du présent, voilà ce qui est difficile à faire. Voir et comprendre en même temps, ce n'est pas commode" (242-243). Girardin compares her work as a *feuilletoniste* to that of the historian. Although the comparison is indeed meant to be humorous – historians have it so easy; all they need is a bit of imagination! – Girardin's designation of her work as "l'histoire du présent" is telling. Just because the *Courrier* comments on subjects that are considered unworthy of an *haut de page* position does not mean that the column isn't engaging in meaningful work. In fact, the future work of the historian becomes impossible if no one painstakingly records the present in all its fragmentation and multiplicity. And this is precisely what Girardin attempts with the *Courrier*: "voir et comprendre en même temps." Girardin's efforts to engage with the city – as the story about Green's balloon and the soldier illustrates – set her column apart from other examples of panoramic literature that are circulating at the time.

Girardin's humorous representation of the plight of the flâneur, for example, demonstrates how her images of the city differ from the romanticized portraits found elsewhere. Balzac's glorification of the *flâneur artiste* in his *Physiologie du mariage* (1829) is often cited as an exemplary description of the figure that has become so symbolic of the July Monarchy:

> Oh! errer dans Paris! adorable et délicieuse existence! Flâner est une science, c'est la gastronomie de l'œil. Se promener, c'est végéter; flâner, c'est vivre. […] Flâner, c'est jouir, c'est recueillir des traits d'esprit, c'est admirer de sublimes tableaux de malheur, d'amour, de joie, des portraits gracieux ou grotesques; c'est plonger ses regards au fond de milles existences (362)

For Balzac, the flâneur is a privileged figure, a gifted observer "qui collectionne et déchiffre les signes disparates de la ville afin de retrouver une totalité, voire une unité, à travers la perception du multiple et du divers que lui offre sa vision piétonnière," as Nesci writes (171). Girardin's take on the flâneur acknowledges this idealized image, but chooses instead to focus on how the urban landscape has changed in a way that makes the poetic stroll entirely impossible. In the June 21, 1837 edition of the *Courrier*, Girardin undertakes her own study of the flâneur with a question, "Qu'est-il devenu, cet être aimé des dieux, chéri du poète, béni du pauvre, cet inconnu que chacun veut séduire, cet indifférent qui vous apporte l'espérance malgré lui, cet être indéfini qu'on appelle le PASSANT?" (187). What

has happened to this figure? According to Girardin, the flâneur no longer exists in Paris because the art of wandering the streets and observing the crowds has been made impossible by an intense overcrowding of the sidewalks. Whereas for Balzac's flâneur, "flâner, c'est vivre," for the *passant* in Girardin's Paris, "marcher, c'est combattre" (188).

Girardin's *passant* is covered in dust from rugs being shaken out; he is whacked in the chest by a hanging slab of meat; he stumbles over the chair of an elderly maker of *cure-dents*; he finds himself lost in the midst of layers of new fabrics for sale. Finally fed up with the barrage of obstacles, the *passant* decides to pay for a carriage to reach his destination, leading Girardin to conclude, "il n'y a plus de passants, il y a des *voyageurs*" (191). The narration of the comic journey differs from other literature of *flânerie* in that the reader actually becomes the flâneur. Girardin addresses the reader as "vous," bombarding them with the very images, sounds, and smells that the *passant* encounters. Take for example the altercation with the toothpick seller: after having just dodged two giant boxes being assembled in the middle of the sidewalk by an *emballeur,* the flâneur becomes frustrated with the constant delays and thus increases his pace, when suddenly, "Pan! vous vous heurtez contre une chaise! une chaise au coin de la rue, sur le trottoir. – Comment prévoir cela? à qui appartient cette chaise? quelle est cette femme qui a établi son domicile au coin de la rue, sur une chaise de paille?" (189). The series of questions captures the surprise of the flâneur and the absurdity of the situation, which only continues to grow with the vicomte's cheeky sense of humor as she describes the owner of the sidewalk dwelling: "C'est une marchande de cure-dents; elle est en grand deuil, et cela depuis cinq ans. Son désespoir est toujours le même; il a lassé la pitié du quartier. Nous lui conseillons de déménager et de porter sa chaise dans une rue où sa douleur sera plus nouvelle." (189). The magic of the vicomte's descriptions lies in their ability to bring the mundane to life. Readers are able to recognize and identify with the subjects represented in the *Courrier*, and this identification creates a sense of reciprocity that rarely exists between the reader and a journalistic text.

In Barbey d'Aurevilly's 1860 review of Girardin's collected works, published after her death in 1855, he emphasizes her unusual talent for forging a connection with her readers of the *Courrier*. He writes, "[elle] a le don des grands conteurs sur place, car des lettres, cela s'écrit comme cela se causerait. C'est de la causerie qui passe par les yeux au lieu de passer par les oreilles" (3-4). The visual and auditory effects of the vicomte's style create an illusion for the reader, convincing them of a shared intimacy. Saminadayar-Perrin reminds us that for nineteenth-century journalists working after the July Monarchy, the press served as a space to reignite and reexplore the lost art of conversation, which had reigned during the Ancien Régime (169). For many journalists, the press functioned as "une forme de communication littéraire privée, intime, fondée sur la proximité et la connivance" (171). Girardin's invention of the anachronistic Vicomte de Launay and his *causeries* in the *Courrier de Paris* both resuscitates and modernizes the art of conversation inspired by the Salon (172).

The notion of transcription might also be useful in analyzing Barbey's comparison of the *Courrier* to conversations between friends. Girardin takes in the present and then produces a faithful account that has nevertheless been processed. However, Girardin's power lies in her ability to reproduce her observations in a manner that makes them accessible to audiences, a manner that encourages reader recognition and identification. The vicomte's commentary on the daguerreotype can be read as a fascinating foil to Girardin's process as a journalist. In the January 12, 1839 column, the vicomte presents his thoughts on the invention that had taken Parisian society by storm. Louis Daguerre, the inventor of this first successful form of photography, had initially presented his invention to the Académie des sciences on January 9, 1839. The vicomte writes that in the days following the announcement, salon pseudo-savants pounced on the opportunity to attempt to mansplain the "secret" of the daguerreotype using "les quelques mots d'une science quelconque que l'on a retenus au hasard" (389). Each savant postures himself as an expert on the mechanisms of the daguerreotype according to his past personal experiences: he whose uncle is a physicist, for example, explains the magic of the daguerreotype as a purely physical phenomenon; he who was once in love with a chemist's daughter posits the discovery as chemical; finally, he who has bad eyesight reduces the discovery to a simple optical illusion (390). With the biting comedy so familiar to the vicomte's commentaries, he demonstrates how salon members are unable to reason beyond their own individual formation, even concerning a topic in which they have little personal investment. I will show in the following section how Girardin attempts to distance herself from these kinds of value judgements in her critiques of literary works.

In the meantime, though, how does the vicomte understand the magic of the daguerreotype? He writes, "voilà ce que nous avons compris: la découverte, c'est le moyen de fixer l'image; ainsi vous obtenez par le reflet un portrait fidèle" (390). We can also read this description through the lens of Girardin's writing of the *Courrier*: the vicomte is the apparatus that allows Girardin to capture and develop the images that she herself has absorbed as the observer of Parisian life. She reproduces each scene faithfully, but nevertheless as a replication of the original that takes a new form as the vicomte's creation. The vicomte uses the Pont des Arts as an example subject in explaining the process of capturing an image using the daguerreotype. However, the vicomte instead chooses to detail the procedure gone awry, writing, "vous tenez votre pont des Arts, bien, vous êtes content, point du tout; un mari et sa femme passent sur le pont, et sans le savoir ils effacent votre dessin. Prenez donc garde, monsieur; vous gênez l'artiste qui est là-haut à sa fenêtre" (390). This description emphasizes the precarity of what it means to "fixer l'image," and in the vicomte's case, to seize and reproduce the sublime pandemonium of urban life. At any moment, the story that you thought you had captured can be completely transformed by an unknown passing face.

It is also important to note the spatial positioning of the artist, "là-haut à sa fenêtre." In the *Courrier* that I discussed earlier in the chapter, the vicomte had also taken an elevated position in recounting the anecdote for his readers. In the 1837 example in which the vicomte describes the joy of one of the soldiers at seeing a lady in his window (the lady being none other than Girardin herself), the reader understands that the vicomte is one of the "élégant" spectators who have access to the soldiers' quarters in order to have a better view of the spectacle. In the 1839 daguerreotype example, the vicomte's status has been transformed: he has become the viewpoint of the artist who observes from his lofty window. It is also possible to read into the gendering of the artist that Girardin embodies: although the artist is separated and protected thanks to his elevated, interior positioning, he is nevertheless beholden to and must adapt to the ambulant passerby below him. Both Girardin and the artist she describes are rendered stationary by their realities, by the practicing of their artforms. However, both are also made mobile by the fiction of these artforms.[28]

Part III. Writing as a Critic, Critiqued as a Woman

Girardin's complicated position as both commentator and subject also allows her to consider the genre of criticism from a unique point of view. In the column published on November 3, 1837, Girardin addresses critics of the *Courrier* and contests their critiques. The subject of the analysis, however, is not a particular work of art, but rather readers' interpretations of the vicomte's own artistic or literary critiques. Girardin explains how it is impossible to judge a work without having that judgement questioned by readers who constantly seek to assign a preexisting motive. Dialoguing with an unknown interlocutor, Girardin demonstrates the difficulty of separating her own artistic critique (which she boldly refers to as "la vérité") from personal judgment. She writes:

> Si nous faisons l'éloge de quelqu'un: – Ah! nous dit-on, monsieur un tel est donc votre ami? – Non, je ne le connais pas. – Si nous hasardons une critique: – Ah! dit-on, vous en voulez donc bien à cette personne-là? – Moi! au contraire, je lui trouve beaucoup de talent. – Eh bien! vous avez dit que son dernier ouvrage était mauvais, pourquoi cela? – Parce que j'ai trouvé que son dernier ouvrage était mauvais. (272)

Girardin and her readers have entirely different understandings of the act of critique. For Girardin, critique is about evaluation. For her readers, critique is about networking and creating literary alliances. Girardin disproves of the impulse to assign an often accusatory reasoning behind every critic's opinion. She instead places herself at the center of unbiased judgment, cheekily proclaiming that the vicomte de Launay speaks the truth and nothing but the

[28] Thérenty explains that although Girardin belongs to the class of "flâneurs," her flânerie is more imaginary than based on concrete reporting, "Comme la décrivent ses contemporains, elle ne sort pas, elle écrit en déshabillé blanc à son secrétaire dans son salon-jardin, faux espace extérieur comme sa chronique" (23-24).

truth, "il [le vicomte] n'est ni pour ni contre vous; il approuve ce qui est bien, il blâme ce qui est mal, sans s'inquiéter du plaisir ou du chagrin que cela peut vous faire" (272). I would argue that it is Girardin's impersonation of the vicomte that allows her to so adamantly posit the nonbiased nature of his artistic critiques. In no other space, not even Girardin's own literary salon, is she as free to comment on contemporary culture as she is as the vicomte. Her transformation into this fictional male caricature of herself allows for more freedom in expressing ideas and opinions that would be interpreted differently if the name assigned to such opinions was that of a woman.

In another critique of contemporary literary criticism, or as she refers to it, "cette grande fureur des journalistes contre le monde" (134), Girardin uses none other than George Sand to demonstrate the ways in which critics' attitudes towards certain writers are hypocritically unjust. She cites journalist M. le comte Walsh's recently-published study of Sand's works as an example. In the preface to his work, Walsh lays out the reason for his intense study of Sand's *oeuvre*: "Auteur de *Jacques* et de *Lélia,* je veux mettre à nu le scandale et la dégradante immoralité de vos doctrines désolantes, et de vos négations sauvages" (vj). Even without reading Walsh's analysis, we might assume that he reproaches Sand for reasons similar to those of other critics of *Lélia*, such as the heroine's metaphysical doubt and sexual frustration. Luckily for us, Girardin did read Walsh's study and reports on it in her column. In Girardin's analysis of Walsh's critique of Sand, she pinpoints the same frustration that I outlined in the previous chapter, namely that Sand wrote an abominable novel, but in a truly beautiful manner. The vicomte writes,

> M. Walsh, reprochant à l'éloquent ennemi de la société le fatal emploi qu'il fait de son génie, semble lui dire: Quel dommage que parlant ainsi tu dises cela! Mais que ces reproches sont injustes, et que ces nobles conseils sont inutiles! George Sand est-il donc coupable de ses inspirations? Est-ce sa faute si son âme est désenchantée? (135).

Girardin's response to Walsh's attack is curious on several levels, firstly in the fact that rather than directly citing Walsh's criticisms, Girardin chooses instead to reinterpret them and put her own words into his mouth. The vicomte writes that Walsh *seems* to say to Sand, "Quel dommage que parlant ainsi tu dises cela!" What a shame that in writing so beautifully, Sand expressed such disturbing ideas. Could we not also read the exclamation doubly, as Girardin seeing herself reflected in Walsh's critique? As much as Girardin is praised for her wit and captivating style, – remember that Balzac had considered her skill in both prose and poetry as a potential path to literary glory – she is just as often critiqued for wasting her talents in a genre deemed as frivolous. What a shame that Girardin should enchant readers with such style but choose to privilege topics such as ladies' fashion and society balls. Girardin chose a different route than Sand, a route that we might compare to that of Desbordes-Valmore, as I will demonstrate in my third chapter. Girardin's choices – namely, her decisions to operate in a less-esteemed genre and under a fictional character – preclude her from much of

the criticism that she might have received as a woman author. Desbordes-Valmore, on the other hand, chose to write so intensely and performatively as a woman that she could never be reproached for attempting to be anything else. Although through different means and to very different results, both Girardin and Desbordes-Valmore escaped the kind of attacks that Sand was subject to following the publication of *Lélia.*

In the vicomte's analysis, we might also interpret Girardin's defense of Sand as a veiled critique of the social landscape in which women are expected to celebrate rather than condemn the shackles that bind them. At the outset, Girardin reveals her support for Sand when the vicomte refers to Sand cheekily as the *eloquent* enemy of society and notes that *Lélia* serves as an example of when a woman takes a step too far in a social world that is not yet prepared for her. The vicomte claims that Walsh reproaches Sand for "le fatal emploi qu'il [Sand] fait de son génie." However, Walsh specifically states in the preface to his study that, far from understanding Sand's talents as "génie," "je ne puis me résoudre à ne voir, dans George Sand, rien de plus qu'un incomparable artiste" (vij). Girardin's own attribution of genius to Sand, then, demonstrates an intense respect for her fellow author and a concern for her reputation.

The vicomte's justification of Sand's choices points to a sophisticated understanding of the structures of domination under which women authors must operate. Girardin questions the source of artistic inspiration; who is to be held responsible, the artist herself or the milieu in which she functions, the milieu that has molded her and from which her ideas germinate? Girardin pushes back against Walsh's attack, claiming:

> Un poète n'est réellement poète que parce qu'il chante ce qu'il éprouve, et il n'est pas responsable de ses impressions. Il peut corriger son style, mais il ne peut pas changer sa pensée; sa pensée…il ne la choisit pas, il la produit, c'est un fruit de son cœur, qu'il a tout au plus le droit de cultiver; un grand poète est l'expression de son époque; maudissez l'époque qui le fait naître, si ces œuvres révoltent vos esprits, mais ne vous en prenez pas au poète (135-136).

At first glance, Girardin seems to suggest that the poet should not be held responsible for what they do and say because it is society that produces their thought. We have to remember, however, that Sand is the artist in question here. In *Lélia* and its aftermath, Sand is explicitly critical of the structures of domination that constrain and censor women's self-expression.

Just as England saw Byron gain celebrity, France sees their own poet rise, but with a very different, socially-engaged agenda. Girardin explains to her readers, "Ne lui [à Sand] reprochez point de haïr la société; reprochez à la société d'être arrivée au point d'inspirer avec raison cette haine, et d'avoir mérité le succès de ses ennemis" (136). For Girardin, Sand's polemical novels and "controversial" world views are not only justified, but also productive in that they are doing a service to the polity of which they are a part.

We might read Girardin's analysis through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of dispositions, or ways of thinking that are consciously and subconsciously acquired through other human beings and through one's environment, which is comprised of systems of learned structures, such as masculine/feminine and high/low (82). The dispositionalist theory thus entails reconstructing both a technical habitus and an ethical habitus, or, "un système de dispositions, de principes de préférences, qui fonctionne à l'état pratique, dans la pratique, sans passer nécessairement par la conscience" (82-83). There are therefore many layers to a dispositionalist critique of art, which combines the technical and the social. In Girardin's critique of Walsh's study of Sand, she touches on both the technical and social aspects in her argument for a different reading of the author when she proclaims that the poet "peut corriger son style, mais il ne peut pas changer sa pensée" (135). The emphasis on style is interesting because it is this element that critics universally praise in Sand's works; the messages of these works, on the other hand, inspire more varied reactions. Moreover, just because a poet can or might modify their style does not mean that they necessarily have to. Towards the end of the critique, Girardin seamlessly unites the poet's style and philosophy with the following metaphor, "l'aigle que le chasseur vient de blesser n'est pas responsable de ses cris" (136). In other words, the context in which a work is produced has just as much meaning as the work itself.

When Girardin says that an artist "ne peut pas changer sa pensée," I believe that she is suggesting that the artist's set of dispositions is going to come through in what they write regardless of what they do. Girardin and Sand are disposed differently. They are both voices that reveal society's structures of masculine domination to itself, but not exactly in the same way. We might think of what Bourdieu has to say about an artist's disposition:

> One might say that we are *disposed* because we are *exposed*. It is because the body is (to unequal degrees) exposed and endangered in the world, faced with the risk of emotion, lesion, suffering, sometimes death, and therefore obliged to take the world seriously (and nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depths of our organic being) that it is able to acquire dispositions that are themselves an openness to the world, that is, to the very structure of the social world of which they are the incorporated form. (62)

Although it is true that Girardin perhaps uses Sand as an example of a larger question concerning the relationship between the artist and their society, it is difficult to not also read her defense as a critique of women authors' demeaned position in the literary world. Girardin had already explicitly commented on the forced self-effacement of the woman author in the preface to her 1836 satirical novella *La Canne de M. de Balzac*, published just a year after Balzac's *Père Goriot.* In the preface Giradin lists all the parts of the story that the editors advised her to remove: a political chapter that was too *piquant*, a love scene that was too *tendre*, a satirical poem that was too *mordant*, and an elegy that was too *intime*. After listing these editorial cuts, Girardin ironically concludes, "L'Auteur les a

sacrifiées…mais il est resté avec cette conviction: Qu'une femme qui vit dans le monde ne doit pas écrire, puisqu'on ne lui permet de publier un livre qu'autant qu'il est parfaitement insignifiant" (137-138). Girardin claims that the editorial sacrifices she made forced her to eliminate the satire, the depth, and the character of her work, resulting in a story that looked quite different from the one she had intended. As she explains, what was once a novel has been reduced to mere pages:

> Il y avait dans ce roman…
> – Mais ce n'est pas un roman.
> – Dans cet ouvrage…
> – Mais ce n'est pas un ouvrage.
> – Dans ce livre…
> – C'est encore moins un livre.
> – Dans ces pages enfin… (137)

Girardin suggests that women writers are pushed towards insignificance by the men that rule the publishing world. One could even read deeper into her observations to argue that the short story she produces is in fact no longer hers: it has been so modified by the editors that it no longer represents her own thought. All singularity has been stripped away by this selective censorship of the female voice.

Keeping this preface in mind, Girardin's defense of Sand in the *Courrier* becomes even more powerful. Sand, a woman who had succeeded in publishing several novels that moved certain readers and shocked others, does not deserve to be blamed or hated for her doctrines, for these beliefs are formed by the society in which she exists. She should rather be admired for her ability to translate these grievances so candidly and without the contamination of the trivializing male editorial pen.

Girardin also expresses support for women authors (and possibly George Sand in particular) in the June 21, 1839 edition of the *Courrier.* The vicomte launches into a discussion of why certain banalities of French conversation must be updated. He explains one such "banalité mensongère" as the following belief: "*Il s'est fait bien des ennemis,* dit la foule naïve. – Comment cela? – En faisant telle chose, en écrivant tel livre. – Folie! Je vous prouverai, moi, que s'il avait fait, que s'il avait écrit tout le contraire, il aurait eu les mêmes ennemis." (476). The vicomte explains why this understanding is absurd by listing various examples of how relationships, particularly relationships in which one member considers the other his enemy, are never the fault of one player only. He argues that one cannot attempt to understand public opinion because there will nearly always be an underlying source of conflict; for example, "un homme d'un beau caractère a pour ennemis naturels tous ceux qui ont de vilains souvenirs à se reprocher" (477). The vicomte's next example to illustrate his argument features women authors, who were often at the receiving end of the conversational banality about creating their own enemies.

> Toute femme d'esprit qui a composé à elle seule d'importants ouvrages, vigoureusement écrits, savamment charpentés, dont le nom est une illustration, dont le talent est une fortune, a pour ennemis naturels tous les Molières de petits théâtres, travailleurs obstinés, à la moustache noire, à la voix forte, aux bras nerveux, aux regards enflammés, nourris de mets succulents, abreuvés de vins capiteux, qui s'unissent par demi-douzaine et s'enferment avec importance pour écrire ensemble un petit vaudeville qui est sifflé. En vain cette femme voudrait traiter ces hommes-là comme des frères, en vain elle s'abaisserait jusqu'à fumer leurs cigares, jusqu'à boire du punch dans leurs verres, ces hommes forts ne pardonneront jamais à cette faible femme sa supériorité et son génie, parce que cette supériorité et ce génie sont la satire de leur impuissance et de leur misère (478-479).

Girardin exposes the gendered hypocrisy of the literary field, vividly illustrating a scenario that she believed often played out during the July Monarchy. For talented women writers, such as George Sand (if we are to so interpret the allusion to cigar-smoking), their enemies are far from their own creation. Instead, their enemies are the talentless writers who view women's authorial success, no matter how merited, as a direct attack on their own lack of talent. Girardin's conception of women's genius as a satire of men's powerlessness is fascinating, particularly if we consider the comment in relation to the preponderance of satirical images of women writers that were circulating at the time. Honoré Daumier's 40-part *Bas-Bleus* caricature series, which appeared in the *Charivari* from January to August of 1 844, for example, has become infamous for its ruthless portrayal of literary women.[29] Figure 3 represents one of Daumier's caricatures from the *Bas bleu* series: a drooping middle-aged man dragging along a pinched-faced child is at the foreground of the image, while in the background we see a hunched over woman with a sour face seated at a desk. The caption indicates that the scene represents a typical day in the life of a *bas bleu*, a woman who eschews her motherly duties to pursue her failing career as a writer:

- Satané de piallard [sic] enfant va!...laisse moi donc composer en paix mon ode sur le bonheur de la maternité!...
- Cest bon, c'est bon…il va se taire…je vais lui donner le fouet dans l'autre pièce (à part) dans le fait, de tous les ouvrages de ma femme c'est bien celui qui fait le plus de bruit dans le monde!...

The caricature not only mocks the *femme d'esprit*'s lack of talent, it also questions the very concept of artistic inspiration in women. For Daumier's *bas bleu*, even the inspiration behind the mediocre works is contrived, inauthentic. Girardin's commentary on the relationship between women authors and their less talented male counterparts is powerful and helps us understand the nineteenth-century obsession with caricaturing the woman author. She peels back the first layer of ridicule, revealing a defensiveness that points more towards weakness than conviction. For fear of staring their own failure in the face, unexceptional male

[29] Daumier's "Moeurs conjugales" series, which ran in the *Charivari* from 1839-1842, also contains several caricatures that ridicule women authors and readers.

authors must project a more palatable and also easily dominated image of the woman writer: if you cannot beat her, make her seem ridiculous.

Fig. 3 Les Bas Bleus. By Honoré Daumier. *Le Charivari,* 9 March 1844. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k3054013t/f3.item#.

It might not come as a surprise, then, to learn that ever since Girardin started publishing the weekly *Courrier* as the vicomte de Launay, the column had one consistent and relentless detractor: the most popular satirical journal of the nineteenth century, and Daumier's primary publishing venue, the *Charivari.* The first *Courrier* appeared in September 1836, and the first jab at the new column quickly followed in the *Charivari* a few months later in December 1836. The *Presse* had published an article about the recent nominees for the Legion of Honor. The *Charivari* mocked the article because a great number of the nominees also worked for the *Press*. The *Charivari* writes in their December article, "La *Presse* aurait dû écrire: 'On cite les artistes, les hommes de lettres et les 'savans attachés à ma rédaction, etc.' C'est en effet dans les bureau de la *Presse* qu'iront grêler presque toutes les croix annoncées. La *Presse* comptera bientôt plus de décorés que d'abonnés." (2) The *Charivari* elaborates their critique by listing the nominees according to various categories. Under the "Hommes de lettres" category, the *Charivari* writes, "M. Alexandre Dumas, M. Balzac, […] (*Nota.* On aurait bien voulu donner aussi la croix à M. le vicomte de Launay; mais on a pensé qu'*elle* préférait un sac à ouvrage. Ce n'est que changer de ridicule." (2) Alongside celebrated authors, the *Charivari* sarcastically includes the fictional vicomte as the overlooked nominee of their choice. However, the satirical article makes clear their disdain for the woman behind the vicomte: they refer to the vicomte as "*elle,*" demonstrating their knowledge of the truth behind the pseudonym. Moreover, they follow-up with a blatantly sexist joke, commenting that although certain people may have wanted the award to go to the vicomte, she would have much preferred a practical bag for her knitting supplies. The vicomte had only just started writing the *Courrier* at the end of September 1836, and Girardin's gender immediately posed a problem for the *Charivari.* The *Charivari*'s comment suggests that readers do acknowledge the talent of the author of the *Courrier*, but this talent is secondary, however, to the glaring fact that it is a woman responsible for the creation of the pompous, posh, and highly confident vicomte.

There is also a way in which the vicomte's humor at times seems to escape the journalists of the *Charivari.* Take for example a similar commentary that appears in the March 5, 1838 edition of the Charivari: the satirical newspaper mocks Girardin for taking time off from publishing the *Courrier* in order to write a collection of poetry. From January to February 1838, the *Presse* did not publish any columns of the *Courrier.* When Girardin resumes her writing and publishing of the column, the *Charivari* comments on her sabbatical: "Nous avions pensé qu'il donnait tout son temps et tous ses soins au baptême d'un nouveau-né; mais il n'en était rien. Le vicomte faisait un poème, et, s'il reprend aujourd'hui son *Courrier de Paris,* c'est que l'inspiration est éteinte. Nous nous en sommes aperçus à la lecture dudit *Courrier*" (2). Once again, the *Charivari* points unoriginally to Girardin's gender, grasping for the humor of stereotype. Rather than raising a newborn baby, as the editorial team of the *Charivari* had suspected, the vicomte took time off from his weekly column to test out a new genre – poetry.

However, when we read the vicomte's explanation of his absence, it becomes clear that the *Charivari* misses, or perhaps chooses to ignore, the self-deprecating humor that is already present in the vicomte's column. The vicomte immediately enlightens the reader about the reasons for his absence: "Un mois de silence, c'est beaucoup, cela demande une explication: Nous nous étions tout simplement révolté; nous ne voulions plus faire le *Courrier de Paris*, en vérité; nous ne voulions plus être journaliste sous prétexte que nous sommes poète" (325). In a comic prelude to a review of Théophile Gauthier's recently published poetry collection, *La Comédie de la mort,* the vicomte explains the *Courrier*'s absence. Inspired by Gauthier's seamless transition from journalist[30] to poet, the vicomte decided to also try his hand as a poet: "Quoi! Théophile Gauthier poète! le prince des moqueurs, ce maître en ironie, ce grand sabreur de renommées est aussi un rêveur de cascades, un habitant mélancolique du flottant royaume des nuages! lui, le brillant feuilletoniste de la *Presse* !" (325). The vicomte is impressed by Gauthier's skill at mastering such seemingly different genres; he succeeds at being bitingly ironic as a journalist, and yet wholly sincere in his poetry. The vicomte's commentary on Gauthier's genre jumping can be read doubly, since it was well-known that Girardin herself started her literary career as a poet, and a highly successful one at that. What follows is a clever meta-critique of a writer's generic exploration. Girardin considers a topic of debate that she knows only too well: can a writer (journalist) venture into other genres (poetry), or should they remain firmly based in the one that they have mastered? After reading Gauthier's poem, the vicomte is not only thoroughly convinced, but inspired: "Quand nous avons découvert que l'on pouvait passer si heureusement du feuilleton à l'élégie, du compte rendu à l'ode, et de la critique à l'enthousiasme, nous avons pensé que nous-même nous pouvions arriver à une semblable métamorphose" (326). The reader, however, is more than aware that such a switch would be possible for the vicomte to undertake, precisely because Girardin had already done it; let's not forget that before becoming the vicomte de Launay, she was the *Muse de la patrie*.[31]

The vicomte explains that he wanted to follow in the footsteps of other *feuilletonistes* turned poets – "Dumas, Méry, Théophile Gauthier" (326) – and attempt to scribble out a couple of verses. However, after not publishing the *Courrier* for several weeks, friends and readers of the vicomte allegedly sought him out in his self-imposed poetic exile and encouraged him to return to the genre that he had mastered: "ils nous ont dit: 'Vous avez tort, vous avez réussi dans un genre, peut-être allez-vous échouer dans un autre, vos feuilletons sont imités par tous les journaux, il y a des vicomtes de Cerisy, d'Allevard, dans

[30] Gauthier wrote the theater reviews for the *Presse,* which appeared weekly in the Monday edition.

[31] Critics still have many questions about Girardin's abandoning of poetry. Some, like Schapira (2016) and Giacchetti (2018) argue that Girardin's entire career as a poet was purely the ambition of her mother, Sophie Gay, rather than her own passion, which led to her disillusionment. All we can know for sure is that Girardin's departure from poetry coincided with her marriage to Émile de Girardin in 1831.

toutes les revues, c'est une preuve de succès; croyez-nous, reprenez le *Courrier de Paris*'." (326). In the reported speech of his followers, the vicomte reveals an underlying anxiety about venturing into different genres once one has already established oneself as a particular type of writer. But note that it is the supporters of the vicomte and not the vicomte himself who express this hesitancy towards the generic exploration. We might draw a parallel between Girardin's correspondence with Lamartine and Balzac and the warning of the vicomte's so-called "amis": both parties urge Girardin to reconsider her current path and remain straight on the path of intelligibility. Lamartine and Balzac had encouraged Girardin to prioritize the undertaking of a work of "serious" literature, following in the footsteps of Madame de Staël and George Sand. It did not make sense to them why such a talented young writer should waste her gifts in a genre as secondary as the press. Similarly, the vicomte's semi-fictional friends urge him to set aside his poetic aspirations and return to the journalistic genre in which he excels, and whose success is illustrated by a number of imitators.

Imitation breeds safeness, a sense of comfort that whatever one is doing, something must be right. I think Girardin could be gesturing back to her transition from poetry to journalism and reflecting on public reception of the unexpected shift from nationally recognized poetry to a glorified gossip column in the daily paper. We might also think about George Sand's *Lélia*: the author's third novel was an abrupt departure from what readers had grown to admire and respect. *Lélia*'s unusual take on love and desire, coupled with the novel's formal deviations, provoked a negative reaction from readers and critics: they wanted the Sand of *Indiana* and *Valentine*, not the Sand of the bastard novel *Lélia.* Both Sand's and Girardin's cases demonstrate how for women writers, deviation from expectations leads to swift criticism. It is no coincidence that Théophile Gauthier should be praised for his generic metamorphosis from journalist to poet, while Girardin, at the mere passing (and most likely fabricated) mention of trying her hand at poetry writing, is instantly made the butt of a joke. However, both Sand and Girardin found ways of confronting the masculine domination under which they were forced to exercise their talents.

Part IV. Formal Friction

It was not only the vicomte's gender-bending that irked the editorial team of the *Charivari*, it was also the form and style of the *chronique* itself. The *Charivari* often expressed a certain unease when analyzing the generic and formal status of the *Courrier*. In the January 9, 1839 edition, the *Charivari* published a lengthy diatribe against Girardin's column. The article, titled, "La Vicomte Charles de Launay," refers to the vicomte with female identifiers such as "la" and "elle" throughout. Between March and late November 1838, Girardin did not publish the *Courrier.* The journalist of the *Charivari* seems to be quite dismayed that the vicomte has resumed his weekly columns, and thus takes it upon himself to

convince the *Charivari*'s readers that the vicomte is a talentless fraud whose texts are drivel. The journalist begins by explaining that in order to write anything, no matter what the genre, one must have two basic capabilities: to know how to think and to express one's ideas with style (2). The vicomte, possessing neither of these qualities, had to thus create a new genre, "Il s'agissait donc de trouver une forme nouvelle qui permit à son esprit stérile de paraître tout plein de féconderie et d'imaginer quelque chose grâce à quoi les qualités négatives de la vicomte trouvassent moyen de se dissimuler autant que possible" (2). Notice the suggestive language of sterility, combined with the accusations of dissimulation; the *Charivari* attacks the genre of the *chronique* as viciously as its author. According to the *Charivari*, it is the bastard genre of the *chronique* that allows the vicomte to express his ideas in a way that hides their staleness and unoriginality. We can also read the critique doubly, as a jab at the woman behind the vicomte. The fiction of the *Courrier* and its noble author tricks readers, in a way: charmed by the vicomte's quick wit and the form of *Courrier*, readers cannot see through all of the subject changes and attention shifting to discern the vicomte's true "qualités negatives."

But what exactly are these negative qualities that the *Charivari* believes the vicomte is disguising? As it turns out, the *Charivari*'s explanation turns out to be more like a vague critique of the *Courrier*'s style. In addition to attacking the pell-mell structure of the columns, describing them as "indigestes juliennes," the journalist also finds fault with the language of the *Courrier*, writing, "c'est la trois millième édition […] de tous les vieux bons mots qui trainent le monde depuis que le monde est monde; véritable hôtel des Invalides de l'intelligence où toutes les anecdotes ont une place marquée, à la condition toutefois d'être usées, tannées et ridées" (3).

The *Charivari* once again targets the elements of the *Courrier* that contribute to its universal success. The rich and often purposefully *démodé* language of the vicomte, for example, is a major characteristic of his style as a writer, and one that readers and critics appreciate. For instance, in his 1846 encyclopedia-like analysis of the Parisian press, *La presse parisienne*, journalist Alfred Nettement refers to the *Courrier* as excelling "dans ce commerce de sentiments et d'épigrammes" (35). Why does the *Charivari* insist upon the sterility and usedness of the column, when most other readers see only its originality and its energy? As I explain earlier, Girardin was arguably the first to lead to this amalgamation of the humorous and the sober real, which could be one reason why Girardin's column was so threatening to the *Charivari*. Not only had the *Presse* added a supplement to their paper that they did not know the public had been craving, but it was a woman who was the master weaver of words and solicitor of laughs. By encroaching on the *Charivari*'s comic territory, The *Presse*'s addition of Girardin's column allowed readers to have it all.

But the *Charivari* was not the only critic to question the form, or lack thereof, of the *Courrier. Revue des Deux Mondes* critic Lagevenais pushed back

against the purported novelty of Girardin's column in 1843, arguing that its success was primarily due to Girardin's violation of the private sphere.

> Je crains bien que cette belle création ne soit pas précisément aussi neuve qu'on pourrait le croire. […] Parler des choses du monde avec esprit, dire avec grâce des enfantillages mondains […] est une assez vieille nouveauté. […] Ce qui appartient donc véritablement à Mme de Girardin, c'est d'avoir approprié son bulletin de la vie élégante à la forme banale du feuilleton. (142-143)

The true innovation of the *Courrier* is neither the *fond* nor the *forme*, but rather the marriage of two opposing forces: expressing the details of private, upper-class life by way of the very public and popular venue of the *feuilleton.* Paul de Molènes also comments on Girardin's forays into forbidden spheres, writing, "elle néglige le marivaudage pour la politique, ou du moins, ce qui est encore plus fâcheux, elle mêle la politique au marivaudage" (71). Indeed, the *Courrier*'s fusion of the public and private was one of the major developments that Girardin introduced to the genre. As Thérènty notes in her recent study *Femmes de presse, femmes de lettres,*

> Avant elle, la chronique était la simple énumération des fait intervenus depuis la dernière parution du journal; après elle, la chronique deviendra la rubrique parisienne du journal en charge de la description de l'itératif comme de l'exceptionnel en matière de mœurs et d'évènements mondains. Les espaces semi-privés (salons, boudoirs, intérieurs) relèvent de la chronique tout comme les espaces publics (rue, boulevards) (28).

Girardin's status as a woman journalist also exacerbates this discomforting publicizing of private, genteel life. As Lagevenais states,

> La double position de femme et de journaliste a quelque chose d'étrange qui arrête et choque tout d'abord l'esprit le moins timoré. Et qu'ont en effet de commun cette vie publique et militante, ces hasards d'une lutte sans fin, cette guerre avancée de la presse, avec la vie cachée du foyer, avec la vie distraite des salons? Est-ce que des voix frêles et élégantes sont faites pour se mêler à ce concert de gros mots bien articulés, de voix cassées et injurieuses, qui retentissent chaque matin dans l'arène de la polémique? (138)

The dilemma of the woman journalist was in some ways even more complex than that of the woman author because journalistic writing was viewed as the most public form of expression, and therefore inappropriate for women to the extent that during the nineteenth century, "les femmes journalistes sont très facilement assimilées à des femmes faciles, voire à des prostituées," as Thérenty notes (17). It is easier to understand Girardin's choice to write under a male pseudonym when one considers the stark division of spheres.[32]

There were other factors motivating Girardin's choice of pseudonym as well, namely, to distance Girardin from her husband, the *patron* of *La Presse.* The

[32] For a detailed study of the gendering of the press in the nineteenth century, see Christine Planté and Marie-Éve Thérenty's "Masculin/Féminin dans la presse du XIXe siècle."

aristocratic name also guaranteed Girardin a certain competency in speaking about the Salons and other spaces only open to nobility (Thérenty 19). Readers of the *Courrier* were quite preoccupied by the dual identities of the vicomte and Girardin, so much so that comments and musings about the purpose of writing as the vicomte are a trend in contemporary criticism of the column. In several of the articles, critics compare Girardin's pseudonym to a semi-transparent veil, a fabric that covers but that is not meant to conceal one's identity. Nettement, for example, describes the vicomte's name as a "pseudonyme transparent assez semblable à ces gazes qui n'ont l'air de cacher que pour mieux attirer les regards sur les objets qu'elles enveloppent sans les couvrir" (35), suggesting that the pseudonym functions partly as a publicity tactic to draw attention. But to draw attention to what exactly? the *Courrier*? or its author?

Barbey d'Aurevilly similarly questions the motivation behind the transparent veil, asking, "Mme de Girardin, en signant ces *Lettres* du nom du vicomte de Launay a-t-elle cru rendre plus piquante sa pensée, comme certaines femmes croient, en s'habillant en hommes, rendre plus voluptueuse et plus apparente leur beauté?" (3). Although Barbey suggests Girardin uses the male pseudonym to make her content cleverer, he does not seem to consider the other side of the motivation, namely that the simple fact of signing the *Courrier* as Madame Delphine de Girardin would render the exact same content less witty, less original. Because the negative perceptions of women's writing are so socially engrained, the masculine name at the top of the text holds more weight than the human being writing the text.

Barbey'sword choice to describe Girardin's possible motivation to render her ideas *plus piquantes* by using a male pseudonym is also noteworthy. Think back to Girardin's preface to her novella *La Canne de M. de Balzac*, published in 1836 before she started writing as the vicomte. One of the chapters that her editors forced her to eliminate was also qualified as *piquant*: "Dans ces pages enfin… il y avait un chapitre assez piquant" (137). This small detail makes clear that there was never a question of Girardin seeking to liven up her ideas and stir the pot by using a male pseudonym. On the contrary, her spiciness level was already at its peak in 1836, so much so that she was asked to tone it down. Instead, the *piquant* detail sheds light on the relationship between gender and genre and its effects on the public reception of an author. In signing her work as Delphine de Girardin, she had to censor herself; in signing her work as the vicomte de Launay, her boundless, sometimes biting, wit was almost universally celebrated. The veil comparison also functions in both cases: whereas the woman author often had to quiet her ideas beneath a veil of appropriateness, the veil of the masculine pseudonym, no matter how transparent, allowed her to reclaim an unapologetic voice in the public sphere.

Lagevenais also employs veil imagery to illustrate Girardin's immoral charade as the vicomte. He describes his unease at the idea of a woman expressing her opinion to a crowd, writing, "Je ne puis m'habituer à l'idée d'une femme faisant un cours, débitant son opinion sur toutes choses, approuvant,

condamnant, tranchant, tout comme un pédagogue en Sorbonne" (138). However, he anticipates the counterargument of his reader, citing an example of a law professor from Pétrarque's time who allowed his daughter to lead a lecture one day, to great success (138).

> Je conviens volontiers que l'amphithéâtre de l'école de Padoue était plus p lein en ces rencontres que d'habitude, tout comme le feuilleton a plus de le cteurs quand vous le signez. Mais nous oublions un détail, c'est que, ces jours là, on tendait un voile devant la chaire et que la docte et timide enfant n'osait risquer sa parole que cachée par la tapisserie. Or, c'est ce voile précisément que, dans votre imprudente impatience, vous déchirez aujourd'hui. Mon Dieu! nous vous savions là derrière (138)

In comparing Girardin's success to that of the law professor's "jeune, jolie et très piquante" daughter giving a lecture, Lagevenais insinuates that one of the reasons for the *Courrier*'s success is Girardin's fashionable status, her renowned physical beauty and good humor. The comparison becomes muddled, however, with Lagevenais's choice of words "le feuilleton a plus de lecteurs quand vous le signez" because Girardin, as we know, always signed the *Courrier* as the vicomte. Although the reader might interpret the pseudonym as a kind of veil, Lagevenais asserts that Girardin's veil, rather than protect the woman behind it from the probing stares of the public, hides nothing. It is Girardin herself who tears it apart, wielding her pen as "une guérrière brillamment armée de pied en cap" (Lagevenais 139).

Girardin was more than aware of the difficult reality of writing for the press as a woman, which she demonstrates not only with her choice of pseudonym, but also with her commentary in the *Courrier* itself. In the February 8, 1837 edition, she reflects on the role of women in society, writing, "Oh! les femmes! les femmes! Elles ne comprennent point leur vocation; elles ne savent point que leur premier intérêt, leur premier devoir est d'être séduisante" (87). Although the commentary may seem pessimistic coming from a woman, the vicomte's sarcasm in fact exposes a subversive statement about the hidden powers of seduction. Women's duty to seduce transitions into a metaphor likening women to mere decoration: "les femmes sont un ornement dans la vie, et la loi de tout ornement est de paraître fin, léger, délicat et coquet; ce qui ne l'emphêche pas d'être en cuivre ou en pierre, en or ou en marbre" (87). We can read beneath this metaphor a subtle message of empowerment. The vicomte suggests how women might work with the social position they are assigned because of their gender. Although society might expect them to be pure ornamentation, women nevertheless have the opportunity to determine with which "materials" they choose to fashion themselves.

Conclusion:

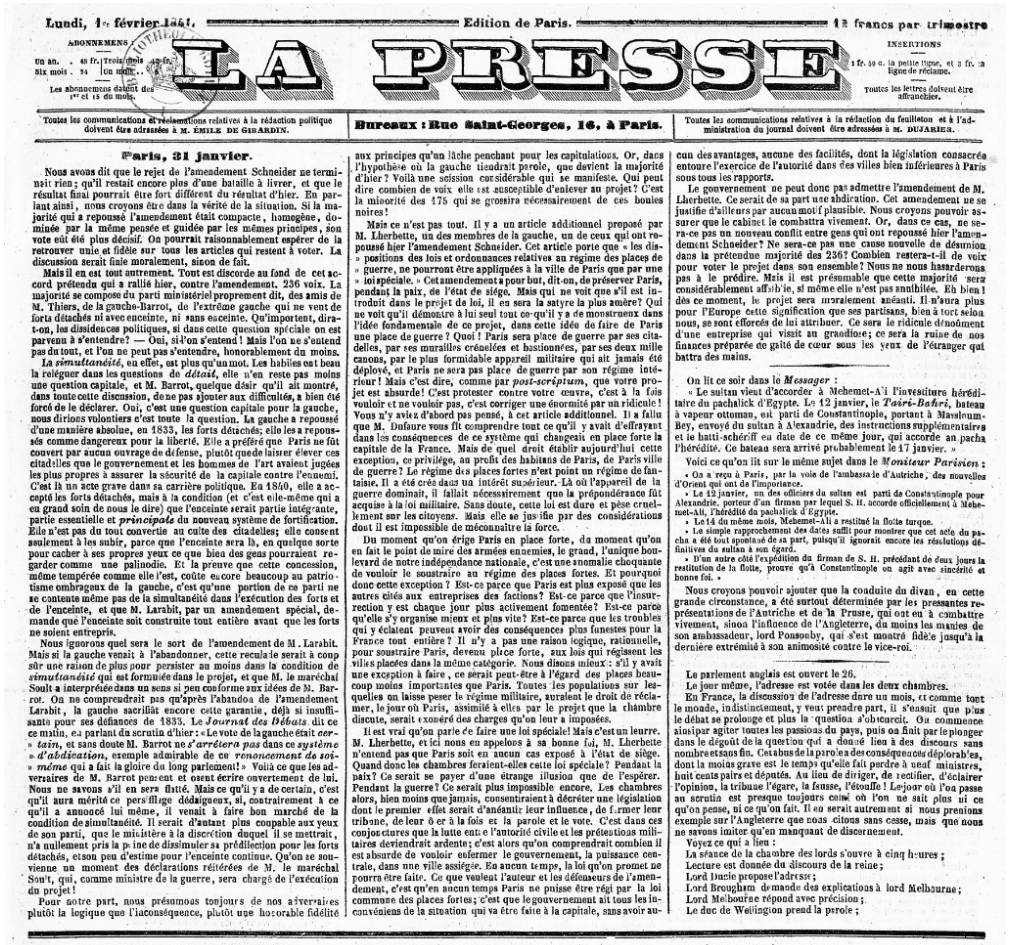
In 1843 Girardin's *Courrier de Paris* was published with Charpentier in two volumes as *Lettres parisiennes*. This publication, occurring slightly past the

midpoint of Girardin's career as the vicomte, serves as an important juncture for several reasons. As Elisheva Rosen explains, the editorial practice of reprinting journalistic writing in book form was not uncommon in the nineteenth century, and functioned on both economic and symbolic levels. On the economic side, the publication of journalistic writing was meant to build upon the established commercial success of a particular *feuilleton*. On the symbolic level, "l'opération est associée à un changement de statut, le livre étant censé opérer la transition du domaine journalistique au domaine littéraire" (3). The name change for example, functions as a way to tighten the generic ties of the column to epistolary literature, and to distance it from the *feuilleton* and its more negative connotations of frivolity (Rosen 6). The layout of Girardin's *Courrier* also changes drastically in the published volume, which functions as another means of drawing closer ties with the literary domain. In the *Presse,* the vicomte's column appears on the first and second pages of the newspaper in the *bas-de-page* position, beneath the "serious" *haut-de-page,* which was reserved for politics, finance, and world events (Thérenty 17). Each *chronique* was titled "FEUILLETON DE LA PRESSE. Courrier de Paris" (See fig. 4). In the published volume, each *chronique* is organized as if it were a chapter in a book: instead of "feuilleton," the weekly column is labelled as "Lettre" with a roman numeral (See fig. 5).

These editorial changes lessen the impact "médiatique" of Girardin's *chronique*, which is important when we also consider the gendering of different genres in the nineteenth century. As Planté and Thérenty remind us, epistolary literature, as opposed to journalistic writing, is considered a feminine genre (20). Although the feuilleton section of the paper was indeed also reserved for more feminine models such as "la conversation de salon ou l'art épistolaire" (Thérenty, "Femmes" 102), we have to remember that Girardin ruffled many a critic's feathers by blurring the formal and generic boundaries of the feuilleton. Her forays into literary critique, for example, elicited harsh responses from critics, since literary criticism was considered a more virile genre (Planté and Thérenty 21). Lagevenais's comparison of women poets to women critics is helpful in conceptualizing the social image of the woman critic during the July Monarchy: "J'ai entendu plaindre bien souvent les maris des femmes poètes: combien cependant leur destinée semble douce quand on songe aux maris des femmes critiques! […] Chevalerie embarrassante et qui renverse par trop les rôles!" (139-140). The editorial adjustments that appear in the republished *Lettres parisiennes* thus serve to render Girardin's public, social, masculine newspaper column into a more palatable feminine genre.

Moreover, because it was often aspiring authors who sought to republish their journalistic writing in book form (so as to climb the hierarchy of letters, from journalist to writer), several critics' responses to *Lettres parisiennes* exhibited a certain level of confusion regarding Girardin's decision. In an 1843 review of the *Lettres,* critic Joël Cherbuliez comments on the incoherency of the republication of the *Courrier*:

Mais alors pourquoi réunir en volume et paraître ainsi les croire dignes d'être conservés comme des modèles du genre? N'est-ce pas leur donner beaucoup trop d'importance, et appeler précisément la critique à s'en occuper? Mme de Girardin possède assez de titres littéraires sans avoir besoin d'y ajouter celui-là, et il nous semble toujours regrettable qu'un écrivain de mérite donne de si pernicieux exemples. (267)



Lundi, 1er février 1841. — Edition de Paris. — 12 francs par trimestre

ABONNEMENS
Un an. . 40 fr. Trois mois . 10 fr.
Six mois . 20 Un mois . . 4
Les abonnemens datent des 1er et 15 de mois.

LA PRESSE

INSERTIONS
1 fr. 50 c. la petite ligne, et 3 fr. la ligne de réclame.
Toutes les lettres doivent être affranchies.

Toutes les communications et réclamations relatives à la rédaction politique doivent être adressées à M. ÉMILE DE GIRARDIN.

Bureaux : Rue Saint-Georges, 16, à Paris.

Toutes les communications relatives à la rédaction du feuilleton et à l'administration du journal doivent être adressées à M. DUJARIER.

Paris, 31 janvier.

Nous avons dit que le rejet de l'amendement Schneider ne terminait rien; qu'il restait encore plus d'une bataille à livrer, et que le résultat final pourrait être fort différent du résultat d'hier. En parlant ainsi, nous croyons être dans la vérité de la situation. Si la majorité qui a repoussé l'amendement était compacte, homogène, dominée par la même pensée et guidée par les mêmes principes, son vote eût été plus décisif. On pourrait raisonnablement espérer de la retrouver unie et fidèle sur tous les articles qui restent à voter. La discussion serait finie moralement, sinon de fait.

Mais il en est tout autrement. Tout est discorde au fond de cet accord prétendu qui a rallié hier, contre l'amendement, 236 voix. La majorité se compose du parti ministériel proprement dit, des amis de M. Thiers, de la gauche-Barrot, de l'extrême gauche qui ne veut de forts détachés ni avec enceinte, ni sans enceinte. Qu'importent, dira-t-on, les dissidences politiques, si dans cette question spéciale on est parvenu à s'entendre? — Oui, si l'on s'entend! Mais l'on ne s'entend pas du tout, et l'on ne peut pas s'entendre, honorablement du moins.

La *simultanéité*, ou effet, est plus qu'un mot. Les habiles ont beau la reléguer dans les questions de *détail*, elle n'en reste pas moins une question capitale, et M. Barrot, quelque désir qu'il ait montré, dans toute cette discussion, de ne pas ajouter aux difficultés, a bien été forcé de le déclarer. Oui, c'est une question capitale pour la gauche, nous dirions volontiers c'est toute la question. La gauche a repoussé d'une manière absolue, en 1833, les forts détachés; elle les a repoussés comme dangereux pour la liberté. Elle a préféré que Paris ne fût couvert par aucun ouvrage de défense, plutôt que de laisser élever ces citadelles que le gouvernement et les hommes de l'art avaient jugées les plus propres à assurer la sécurité de la capitale contre l'ennemi. C'est là un acte grave dans sa carrière politique. En 1840, elle a accepté les forts détachés, mais à la condition (et c'est elle-même qui a eu grand soin de nous le dire) que l'enceinte serait partie intégrante, partie essentielle et *principale* du nouveau système de fortification. Elle n'est pas du tout convertie au culte des citadelles; elle consent seulement à les subir, parce que l'enceinte sera là, en quelque sorte pour cacher à ses propres yeux ce que bien des gens pourraient regarder comme une palinodie. Et la preuve que cette concession, même tempérée comme elle l'est, coûte encore beaucoup au patriotisme ombrageux de la gauche, c'est qu'une portion de ce parti ne se contente même pas de la simultanéité dans l'exécution des forts et de l'enceinte, et que M. Larabit, par un amendement spécial, demande que l'enceinte soit construite tout entière avant que les forts ne soient entrepris.

Nous ignorons quel sera le sort de l'amendement de M. Larabit. Mais si la gauche venait à l'abandonner, cette recule le serait à coup sûr une raison de plus pour persister au moins dans la condition de *simultanéité* qui est formulée dans le projet, et que M. le maréchal Soult a interprétée dans un sens si peu conforme aux idées de M. Barrot. On ne comprendrait pas qu'après l'abandon de l'amendement Larabit, la gauche sacrifiât encore cette garantie, déjà si insuffisante pour ses défiances de 1833. Le *Journal des Débats* dit ce matin, en parlant du scrutin d'hier : « Le vote de la gauche était *certain*, et sans doute M. Barrot ne *s'arrêtera pas* dans ce *système d'abdication*, exemple admirable de ce *renoncement de soi-même* qui a fait la gloire du long parlement! » Voilà ce que les adversaires de M. Barrot pensent et osent écrire ouvertement de lui. Nous ne savons s'il en sera flatté. Mais ce qu'il y a de certain, c'est qu'il aura mérité ce persiflage dédaigneux, si, contrairement à ce qu'il a annoncé lui même, il venait à faire bon marché de la condition de simultanéité. Il serait d'autant plus coupable aux yeux de son parti, que le ministère à la discrétion duquel il se mettrait, n'a nullement pris la peine de dissimuler sa prédilection pour les forts détachés, et son peu d'estime pour l'enceinte continue. Qu'on se souvienne un moment des déclarations réitérées de M. le maréchal Soult, qui, comme ministre de la guerre, sera chargé de l'exécution du projet!

Pour notre part, nous présumons toujours de nos adversaires plutôt la logique que l'inconséquence, plutôt une honorable fidélité aux principes qu'un lâche penchant pour les capitulations. Or, dans l'hypothèse où la gauche tiendrait parole, que deviendrait la majorité d'hier? Voilà une scission considérable qui se manifeste. Qui peut dire combien de voix elle est susceptible d'enlever au projet? C'est la minorité des 175 qui se grossira nécessairement de ces boules noires!

Mais ce n'est pas tout. Il y a un article additionnel proposé par M. Lherbette, un des membres de la gauche, un de ceux qui ont repoussé hier l'amendement Schneider. Cet article porte que « les dispositions des lois et ordonnances relatives au régime des places de » guerre, ne pourront être appliquées à la ville de Paris que par une » loi spéciale. » Cet amendement a pour but, dit-on, de préserver Paris, pendant la paix, de l'état de siége. Mais qui ne voit que s'il est introduit dans le projet de loi, il en sera la satyre la plus amère? Qui ne voit qu'il démontre à lui seul tout ce qu'il y a de monstrueux dans l'idée fondamentale de ce projet, dans cette idée de faire de Paris une place de guerre? Quoi! Paris sera place de guerre par ses citadelles, par ses murailles crénelées et bastionnées, par ses deux mille canons, par le plus formidable appareil militaire qui ait jamais été déployé, et Paris ne sera pas place de guerre par son régime intérieur! Mais c'est dire, comme par *post-scriptum*, que votre projet est absurde! C'est protester contre votre œuvre, c'est à la fois vouloir et ne vouloir pas, c'est corriger une énormité par un ridicule! Vous n'y aviez d'abord pas pensé, à cet article additionnel. Il a fallu que M. Dufaure vous fît comprendre tout ce qu'il y avait d'effrayant dans les conséquences de ce système qui changeait en place forte la capitale de la France. Mais de quel droit établir aujourd'hui cette exception, ce privilége, au profit des habitans de Paris, de Paris ville de guerre? Le régime des places fortes n'est point un régime de fantaisie. Il a été créé dans un intérêt supérieur. Là où l'appareil de la guerre dominait, il fallait nécessairement que la prépondérance fût acquise à la loi militaire. Sans doute, cette loi est dure et pèse cruellement sur les citoyens. Mais elle se justifie par des considérations dont il est impossible de méconnaître la force.

Du moment qu'on érige Paris en place forte, du moment qu'on en fait le point de mire des armées ennemies, le grand, l'unique boulevard de notre indépendance nationale, c'est une anomalie choquante de vouloir le soustraire au régime des places fortes. Et pourquoi donc cette exception? Est-ce parce que Paris est plus exposé que les autres cités aux entreprises des factions? Est-ce parce que l'insurrection y est chaque jour plus activement fomentée? Est-ce parce qu'elle s'y organise mieux et plus vite? Est-ce parce que les troubles qui y éclatent peuvent avoir des conséquences plus funestes pour la France tout entière? Il n'y a pas une raison logique, rationnelle, pour soustraire Paris, devenu place forte, aux lois qui régissent les villes placées dans la même catégorie. Nous disons mieux : s'il y avait une exception à faire, ce serait peut-être à l'égard des places beaucoup moins importantes que Paris. Toutes les populations sur lesquelles on laisse peser le régime militaire, en auraient le droit de réclamer, le jour où Paris, assimilé à elles par le projet que la chambre discute, serait exonéré des charges qu'on leur a imposées.

Il est vrai qu'on parle de faire une loi spéciale! Mais c'est un leurre. M. Lherbette, et ici nous en appelons à sa bonne foi, M. Lherbette n'entend pas que Paris soit en aucun cas exposé à l'état de siége. Quand donc les chambres seraient-elles cette loi spéciale? Pendant la paix? Ce serait se payer d'une étrange illusion que de l'espérer. Pendant la guerre? Ce serait plus impossible encore. Les chambres alors, bien moins que jamais, consentiraient à décréter une législation dont le premier effet serait d'anéantir leur influence, de fermer leur tribune, de leur ôter à la fois et la parole et le vote. C'est dans ces conjonctures que la lutte entre l'autorité civile et les prétentions militaires deviendrait ardente; c'est alors qu'on comprendrait combien il est absurde de vouloir enfermer le gouvernement, la puissance centrale, dans une ville assiégée. En aucun temps, la loi qu'on pourrait faire ne pourra être faite. Ce que veulent l'auteur et les défenseurs de l'amendement, c'est qu'en aucun temps Paris ne puisse être régi par la loi commune des places fortes; c'est que le gouvernement ait tous les inconvéniens de la situation qui va être faite à la capitale, sans avoir aucun des avantages, aucune des facilités, dont la législation consacrée entoure l'exercice de l'autorité dans des villes bien inférieures à Paris sous tous les rapports.

Le gouvernement ne peut donc pas admettre l'amendement de M. Lherbette. Ce serait de sa part une abdication. Cet amendement ne se justifie d'ailleurs par aucun motif plausible. Nous croyons pouvoir assurer que le cabinet le combattra vivement. Or, dans ce cas, ne serra-ce pas un nouveau conflit entre gens qui ont repoussé hier l'amendement Schneider? Ne sera-ce pas une cause nouvelle de désunion dans la prétendue majorité des 236? Combien restera-t-il de voix pour voter le projet dans son ensemble? Nous ne nous hasarderons pas à le prédire. Mais il est préemmable que cette majorité sera considérablement affaiblie, si même elle n'est pas anuihilée. Eh bien! dès ce moment, le projet sera moralement anéanti. Il n'aura plus pour l'Europe cette signification que ses partisans, bien à tort selon nous, se sont efforcés de lui attribuer. Ce sera le ridicule dénoûment d'une entreprise qui visait au grandiose; ce sera la ruine de nos finances préparée de gaîté de cœur sous les yeux de l'étranger qui battra des mains.

On lit ce soir dans le *Messager* :

« Le sultan vient d'accorder à Mehemet-Ali l'investiture héréditaire du pachalick d'Egypte. Le 12 janvier, le *Taëri-Bahri*, bateau à vapeur ottoman, est parti de Constantinople, portant à Mauleum-Bey, envoyé du sultan à Alexandrie, des instructions supplémentaires et le hatti-schérif en date de ce même jour, qui accorde au pacha l'hérédité du pachalick d'Egypte.

Ces nouvelles ont été accueillies à Constantinople avec une vive satisfaction. Le 13 janvier, les officiers du sultan et ceux du pacha ont été invités à un grand dîner donné par le capitan-pacha, auquel ont assisté les ambassadeurs de France, d'Autriche, de Prusse et de Russie. »

Voici ce qu'on lit sur le même sujet dans le *Moniteur Parisien* :

« On a reçu à Paris, par la voie de l'ambassade d'Autriche, des nouvelles d'Orient qui ont de l'importance.

» Le 13 janvier, un des officiers du sultan est parti de Constantinople pour Alexandrie, porteur d'un firman par lequel S. H. accorde officiellement à Méhemet-Ali, l'hérédité du pachalick d'Egypte.

» Le 14 du même mois, Mehemet-Ali a restitué la flotte turque.

» La simple rapprochement des dates suffit pour montrer que cet acte du pacha a été tout spontané de sa part, puisqu'il ignorait encore les résolutions définitives du sultan à son égard.

» D'un autre côté l'expédition du firman de S. H. précédant de deux jours la restitution de la flotte, prouve qu'à Constantinople on agit avec sincérité et bonne foi. »

Nous croyons pouvoir ajouter que la coadjute du divan, en cette grande circonstance, a été surtout déterminée par les pressantes représentations de l'Autriche et de la France, qui ont eu à combattre vivement, sinon l'influence de l'Angleterre, du moins les manœuvres de son ambassadeur, lord Ponsonby, qui s'est montré fidèle jusqu'à la dernière extrémité à son animosité contre le vice-roi.

Le parlement anglais est ouvert le 26.

Le jour même, l'adresse est votée dans les deux chambres.

En France, la discussion de l'adresse dure un mois, et comme tout le monde, indistinctement, y veut prendre part, il s'ensuit que plus le débat se prolonge et plus la question s'obscurcit. On commence ainsi par agiter toutes les passions du pays, puis on finit par le plonger dans le dégoût de la question qui a donné lieu à des discours sans nombre et sans fin. Ce sont de la pure perte des considérations déplorables, dont la moins grave est le temps qu'elle fait perdre à neuf ministres, huit cents pairs et députés. Au lieu de diriger, de rectifier, d'éclairer l'opinion, la tribune l'égare, la fausse, l'étouffe! Le jour où l'on passe au scrutin est presque toujours celui où l'on ne sait plus ni ce qu'on pense, ni ce qu'on fait. Il en serait autrement si nous prenions exemple sur l'Angleterre que nous citons sans cesse, mais que nous ne savons imiter qu'en manquant de discernement.

Voyez ce qui a lieu :

La séance de la chambre des lords s'ouvre à cinq heures;
Lecture est donnée du discours de la reine;
Lord Ducie propose l'adresse;
Lord Brougham demande des explications à lord Melbourne;
Lord Melbourne répond avec précision;
Le duc de Wellington prend la parole;

FEUILLETON DE LA PRESSE.

Courrier de Paris.

Oh! la belle fête, le poétique et charmante fête! jusqu'alors on n'avait rien vu de si complet. Figurez-vous, heureux habitans de la province, vous qui n'avez peut-être jamais dansé que dans la salle du conseil de révision de votre bonne ville; figurez-vous vous-même, malheureux parti sans d'une politique timide, vous qui n'avez pas osé vous permettre ce plaisir si agréablement séditieux; figurez vous une admirable salle de spectacle du meilleur goût, toute fraîche, toute blanche, toute dorée, magiquement éclairée *à giorno*, car il y avait à la fois l'astre du jour, et tous les astres de la nuit : un lustre colossal qui brillait comme le soleil, et puis cent petits lustres étincelans suspendus au ciel comme des étoiles; les étoiles filaient un peu, mais c'était une illusion de plus; figurez-vous enfin toutes les loges de ce magnifique théâtre remplies de femmes élégantes couronnées de fleurs et de diamans. Les regards étaient éblouis. Nous ne craignons pas d'exagérer en disant que toutes les femmes avaient des diamans, exceptés deux ou trois, peut-être, qui semblaient n'en avoir pas mis pour se faire remarquer. Vrai, n'avoir pas de diamans ce jour-là, cela paraissait une affectation. En effet, pourquoi ne pas être comme tout le monde?

Mais ce qu'il y avait de plus extraordinaire, et ce qu'on doit remarquer dans de semblables fêtes, c'est une réunion de danseurs élégans, de jeunes gens comme il faut, ayant une noble tournure et de bonnes manières. Là il n'y avait pas la moindre cravate de satin blanc, pas le moindre gilet brodé en chenille; là nous n'avons pas vu un seul merveilleux coiffé en page de Louis XII, les cheveux séparés sur le front et retenus de chaque côté par des petits peignes. Là, point de costume de faux-trombadour, comme il s'en trouve quelquefois dans les bals les plus paisibles. Point de figures étranges, masques involontaires qui font rire tout le monde. Point de nez de carnaval, point de gnomes, et pas trop de valseurs microscopiques. Il faut rendre justice aux hommes, ils sont aujourd'hui beaucoup moins laids qu'il y a dix ans. Encore dix années, et nous finirons par avoir des représentans présentables.

Parmi les femmes, il y avait bien çà et là quelques parures d'un goût bizarre. Plusieurs chapeaux rouges *nirobolans* et deux *Iphigénie* couronnées de roses, et enveloppées de longs voiles blancs; mais comme d'ailleurs, c'était assez joli. Il y avait bien aussi une certaine robe de velours orange garnie d'une courte pointe en dentelle qui faisait un peu trop d'effet; mais cette robe était très bien portée; et l'on se disait en admirant la femme qui en était parée : C'est sans doute quelqu'étrangère de *distinction*; une élégante Française ne s'exposerait jamais à paraître si belle dans un bal public.

Mais ce bal public se composait aussi d'une centaine de fêtes particulières, toutes brillantes et animées. Chaque loge était un salon qui avait sa maîtresse de maison, ses habitués et ses visiteurs. On allait tour à tour chez Mme de ***, chez la duchesse de ***, comme on y va tous les soirs; seulement on n'avait pas pour la première fois, et l'ennui de remettre et d'ôter son manteau entre chaque visite; et puis, si l'on voulait être seul, on se mêlait à la foule. On quittait sa loge, et on allait admirer sur le théâtre le coup-d'œil de la salle qui était magnifique. Quelqu'un disait à propos de cela : Les acteurs sont bien heureux, ce qu'on voit de leur place est bien plus beau que ce que nous voyons de la nôtre. Le fait est que rien n'est plus merveilleux que l'aspect d'une salle de spectacle vue de l'extrémité du théâtre : il y a là un effet de perspective dont rien ne peut donner l'idée. Nous recommandons aux personnes qui demain iront à l'Opéra pour le bal des *Inondés*, d'avoir le courage de traverser une contredanse, au risque de l'embrouiller, nous leur conseillons même d'avoir l'audace de traverser une valse, au risque d'être emporté par elle, et d'aller se placer au pied de l'orchestre au risque d'être assourdi par lui; et là, de rester un moment à contempler le brillant, sous ce déluge de lumière, cette assemblée superbe admirablement bien composée et immense, ce qui la rend imposante; mais divisée par petits compartimens, ce qui lui donne un air fantastique et presque puéril : on dirait un joujou colossal; un gigantesque musée de tableaux, mais de tableaux vivans, dont tous les personnages se connaissent, se parlent, se sourient et se saluent entre eux. Ce n'est plus une réalité, c'est une vision étrange, un enchantement, et l'on se surprend à chercher l'enchanteur. Les indiscrets vont même jusqu'à demander son nom. L'autre soir à cette question que nous avons faite, on a répondu en nous citant une douzaine de noms illustres; que nous nous garderons de tracer parce qu'ils doivent leur illustration à de plus nobles choses, si toutefois il y a au monde une plus noble chose que la charité!

Le grand succès qu'a obtenu ce bal de la *liste civile* est d'un heureux augure pour celui qui aura lieu demain à l'Opéra. Déjà de toutes parts on s'y donne rendez-vous. Nous nous verrons mardi aux inondés, cela se dit ainsi; tâchez d'arriver de bonne heure et d'avoir une loge. Moi, je ne pourrai venir que très tard; vous vous ferez très belle, répond une patronesse; mesdames nous l'exigeons, c'est d'étiquette — c'est aussi de très bon goût. — Bien mieux, c'est un très bon calcul : être jolie, dans un petit bal, pour des gens qui vous ont vue la veille et qui vous reverront le lendemain, peu importe; mais paraître belle à des regards qui ne vous ont jamais aperçue et qui ne vous apercevront peut-être que cette fois; séduire en une heure et pour la vie quelque voyageur étranger, quelque provincial un peu sauvage qui emportera votre souvenir dans son désert ou dans ses montagnes, c'est très flatteur et très grave; il ne faut point du tout négliger ces triomphes-là. Pouvoir semer des souvenirs et des illusions pleins une fête, c'est une coquetterie vaniteuse dont on ne saurait trop profiter. — Rassurez-vous, on en profitera; nous mettrons nos robes les plus fraîches; nous serons très belles. — Soit, mais ne soyez pas trop à la mode. En fait de parure, la fantaisie n'est permise que dans l'intimité du grand monde. Pour hasarder dans un bal certaine coiffure, certains costumes, il faut y être en force, avoir là tous ses amis, tous ses ennemis, tous ses parens et toutes ses envieuses fidèles.

A pro os de ce bal on a imaginé une histoire absurde de billets volés à M. de T..., commissaire du bal, qui serait allé chez un banquier pour placer dix mille francs, etc., etc., etc. Tout cela n'a pas le sens commun; rien n'est vrai dans cette aventure. Il y a des gens qui croient prouver de l'esprit en inventant des mensonges absurdes. On prétend que celui-ci est une méchanceté. — Une méchanceté contre les inondés! C'est généreux.

Il court aussi une histoire non moins absurde; au sujet du vote de M. Alexandre Soumet, qui s'en serait, dit-on, rapporté au sort pour le choix de son candidat à l'Académie. Cette fable n'est fondée sur rien : M. Soumet a toujours dû voter pour M. Victor Hugo, tout en reconnaissant le talent et les droits de M. Ancelot. L'auteur de la *Divine Epopée* n'est pas un homme à faire un jeu de hasard des promesses à l'amitié, et des honneurs de l'Académie. Une autre histoire folle est aussi attribuée à la femme d'un de nos ministres. A quoi donc cela sert-il d'être une des femmes les plus jolies, les plus élégantes et les plus distinguées, si cette grâce parfaite, cette distinction exquise ne vous préservent pas des suppositions les plus vulgaires et les plus burlesques?

Mais voici quelque chose de plus odieux : On a envoyé à tous les rédacteurs du journaux une lettre contenant à peu près ces mots : « J'ai la douleur de vous apprendre que M. Alphonse Karr a été tué ce matin en duel. M. M..., son adversaire, a immédiatement quitté Paris. » Cette fausse lettre *anonyme* était signée du nom d'un des amis de M. Karr, ce qui lui donnait une triste probabilité. La sinistre nouvelle s'est répandue dans tout Paris avant que M. Karr ait eu le temps de rassurer sa famille. Connaissez-vous rien de plus affreux que cette mystification?

Fig. 3. *La Presse,* 1 February 1841. Bibliothèque nationale de France. gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4283797

LETTRE III

1er février 1841.

Le bal d'hier et le bal de demain. — Un mot de l'empereur.

Oh ! la belle fête, la poétique et charmante fête[15] ! jusqu'alors on n'avait rien vu de si complet. Figurez-vous, heureux habitants de la province, vous qui n'avez peut-être jamais dansé que dans la salle du conseil de révision de votre bonne ville ; figurez-vous, malheureux partisans d'une politique timide, vous qui n'avez pas osé vous permettre ce plaisir si agréablement séditieux ; figurez-vous une admirable salle de spectacle du meilleur goût, toute fraîche, toute blanche, toute dorée, magiquement éclairée *a giorno* et plus qu'*a giorno*, car il y avait à la fois l'astre du jour et tous les astres de la nuit, un lustre colossal qui brillait comme le soleil, et puis cent petits lustres étincelants suspendus au ciel comme des étoiles ; les étoiles filaient un peu, mais c'était une illusion de plus ; figurez-vous enfin toutes les loges de ce magnifique théâtre remplies de femmes élégantes couronnées de fleurs et de diamants. Les regards étaient éblouis. Nous ne craignons pas d'exagérer en disant que toutes les femmes avaient des diamants, excepté deux ou trois, peut-être, qui semblaient n'en avoir pas mis pour se faire remarquer. Vrai, n'avoir pas de diamants ce jour-là, cela paraissait une affectation. En effet, pourquoi ne pas être comme tout le monde ?

Mais ce qu'il y avait de plus extraordinaire, et ce qu'on

Fig. 4. *Lettres parisiennes,* Lettre III, By Delphine de Girardin.

Girardin, who by 1843 had already established herself as a nationally-celebrated poet and short story writer, simply did not need the literary clout that republishing her column would give her. Cherbuliez also disapproves of honoring the vicomte's columns with permanence: reformatting and binding together the frivolous *feuilletons* grants them a level of respect that for him they simply do not deserve. Furthermore, the higher status of the more privileged form invites literary critics to seriously consider the *Courrier*, whereas previously, as I demonstrated in my chapter, it had only been other journalists (from the *Charivari,* for example) who had commented on the column. Indeed, Lagevenais published his vicious attack on the *Courrier* following the publication of *Lettres parisiennes* in 1843. Lagevenais appears to have had similar motivations to Cherbuliez for critiquing Girardin at this juncture, namely the elevated cultural status that accompanied the formal transformation of the ephemeral newspaper column to permanent book.

As I discussed earlier in my chapter, Balzac had challenged Girardin to apply her talents and produce "un grand, un beau livre." Catherine Nesci, referencing the 1843 publication of the *Courrier* in volumes, asks, "n'a-t-elle pas produit une *Comédie humaine* de sa façon et répondu au défi que lui lançait Balzac […]?" (233). It is fascinating that even for scholars today, the form of Girardin's work remains as important as the work itself. And yet, the form that modern readers encounter today (the collective *Lettres parisiennes*) is not a form that daily readers had access to before 1843. By analyzing the *Courrier* alongside its contemporary critiques, we can better understand how Girardin's boundary-pushing of gender and genre was a truly innovative act in the literary landscape of the July Monarchy.

CHAPTER 3

Ce que je n'ose écrire: Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Writing Oneself

> Un jour qu'il est à côté de celle dont la loi le dit seigneur et maître, il s'aperçoit que tout à coup elle se met à s'élever si haut, si haut, qu'il lui est impossible de la suivre.
>
> Paul de Molènes, "Les femmes poètes," *Revue des deux mondes*

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore serves as a complicated figure in the French literary canon. On the one hand, she is arguably one of the most celebrated nineteenth-century female poets, lauded by her contemporaries such as Baudelaire and Verlaine, as the embodiment of a feminine poetics. On the other hand, contemporary scholars have struggled with her exaltation of femininity, humility, and motherhood, attempting to understand her poetry outside of its heteronormative exterior. Most notably, Desbordes-Valmore was excluded from Domna Stanton's anthology *The Defiant Muse: French Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present,* since, as Stanton states in the introduction, her goal in compiling the anthology was to exclude poems that "privilege *kinder, kirch, küchen,* extol conjugal bliss, passively bemoan seduction and abandonment, and seek escape into transcendent saintliness or the beauty of flora and fauna" (xviii). Take for example this excerpt from Desbordes-Valmore's poem "Sans l'oublier," which appeared in her 1825 collection *Élégies et poésies nouvelles*:

> Sans l'oublier on peut fuir ce qu'on aime,
> On peut bannir son nom de ses discours,
> Et de l'absence implorant le secours,
> Se dérober à ce maître suprême,
> Sans l'oublier!
>
> Sans l'oublier j'ai vu l'eau dans sa course,
> Porter au loin la vie à d'autres fleurs:
> Fuyant alors le gazon sans couleurs,

J'imitai l'eau fuyant loin de la source,
Sans l'oublier. (154)

At first glance, the poem might indeed seem to fit Stanton's exclusionary criteria: the poet laments, longs for, and surrenders to her beloved, all in the first stanza no less. But if we take a moment to look past the poem's shiny heteronormative exterior, we discover that Desbordes-Valmore's careful choice of language and imagery might actually encourage a more fluid interpretation. The images of flowing water and flowers are ones that reappear often in Desbordes-Valmore's poetry, particularly in her poems evoking nostalgia and exile. In the poem "La Fleur du sol natal," for example, Desbordes-Valmore uses similar images to express a deep longing for her childhood home of Douai, and particularly for her dear friend Albertine who passed away in 1819 at the age of 32: "Cette jeune Albertine, à nos foyers restée, / Ce lilas embaumé que je croyais perdu, / O fleur, sauvage fleur de ma rive enchantée" (*Poésies 1830,* 45). I would argue that Desbordes-Valmore's conflicted position in French literary history has contributed to her poetry being read with a sort of tunnel vision.[33]

Desbordes-Valmore was overwhelmingly praised for her poetic talent and embodiment of the "éternel féminin" in the mid-nineteenth century;[34] she was criticized and labelled as antifeminist in the nineties; how are we supposed to read her today? I attempt to answer this question throughout my chapter by analyzing Desbordes-Valmore's poetry while also taking into account the critical reception of her work and her person throughout the nineteenth century. Understanding Desbordes-Valmore's reception – from the nineteenth century to the present – can help shed light on the social attitudes towards gender and poetry at each period in time. Such an analysis will also open up a space for a new consideration of her poetry.

It was not only Desbordes-Valmore's poetry that embodied the pure "feminine," it was also her state of being in the world. What is perhaps less widely-known is the highly influential role she herself played in the crafting this image of the faithful lover and dutiful mother martyred by angst. Rather than the narrative of passivity and avoidance that some scholars have suggested, I argue that Desbordes-Valmore's consciousness of the peculiarity and privilege of her situation allowed her to influence her own reception, a feat that demonstrates a significant level of social awareness and assiduity. Similar to the public's fixation on George Sand's personal life, the reception of Desbordes-Valmore's works was often closely tied to a fascination and inclination to read her poetry as autobiography. Such a restricted reading of women authors' works was and still

[33] Several scholars have worked to challenge the existing critical reception of Desbordes-Valmore as heteronormative, and thus problematically antifeminist, such as Johnson (1991), Planté (1994), Greenberg (1999), Schultz (1999), and Boutin (2001).

[34] Charles Baudelaire, "Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains: Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. In *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire: L'Art romantique,* vol. 3. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1885, pp. 340.

is widely practiced, as Barbara Johnson argues in her essay "Gender and Poetry,": "When men employ the rhetoric of self-torture, it is *read* as rhetoric. When women employ it, it is confession. Men are read rhetorically; women, literally" (123). Deborah Jenson explains that up until the publication of Francis Ambrière's meticulously researched biography *Le Siècle des Valmore*, critical scholarship on Desbordes-Valmore was "not only obsessed with her life but also utterly inconsistent and mystifying as to the nature of that life" (120-121). Critics were so obsessed with uncovering the truth of Desbordes-Valmore's personal life and amorous relationships because they allegedly served as the foundation of her poetry: the heart-wrenching evocation of pain and suffering for which Desbordes-Valmore is so highly praised was believed to be the direct result of a passionate, "secret," and entirely real love interest. By means of this "biographical logic," the inspiration furnished by the love interest takes on more agency than the woman poet herself. Jenson explains that "the possibility of originality for the woman poet is replaced by the mystery of the biographical riddle" (119).

Whereas critics might have considered Desbordes-Valmore to be the passive vessel of poetic inspiration spurred by a beloved "other," Desbordes-Valmore herself proved to be more than aware of the profitability of the narrativization of her personal life. The "story" of Desbordes-Valmore's life that readers and critics came to understand helped to epitomize her as the "heterosexual Romantic heroine," as Johnson writes (110). This is the story: as an innocent aspiring poet, the young Marceline fell deeply in love with Henri de Latouche. After this passionate yet ill-fated romance, Marceline married the actor Prosper Valmore and settled down to a calmer life of marital and maternal contentment that was nevertheless not free of tragedy: four of her children passed away before her. Ambrière's biography, which he put together using public and private records, reveals that the path of Desbordes-Valmore's life was a bit more winding than the above narrative suggests. At just 10 years old, Marceline began a relatively successful acting career that continued all the way up to her marriage to fellow actor Prosper Valmore in 1817. During her career as an actress, she had three lovers and two illegitimate children who both died soon after birth (Johnson 111). It was only after the publication of her first volume of poetry in 1819 that she began her love affair with Latouche. During her marriage to Valmore, she had five children, four of which died before she did. It is also widely believed that Latouche was the biological father of Marceline's daughter Ondine (Johnson 112). Jenson writes that Desbordes-Valmore was "an adept manipulator of the same biographical secrets that have been used so repetitively to take her rhetoric literally." (Jenson 121). In Gretchen Schultz's chapter on Desbordes-Valmore, she lays out the ways in which contemporary critics have hinted at the poet's maneuvering, choosing to interpret her biographical adjustments as "artless self-protection or concerted image-making" (45). Using nineteenth-century criticism, I would like to explore the ways in which the reconstruction of her own biographical narrative served Desbordes-Valmore. It is

also worth considering how nineteenth-century readers and critics themselves also contributed to the mythmaking of Desbordes-Valmore's life, and in turn how the image of the tragic, suffering poet has endured even today to influence contemporary criticism.

So how did Desbordes-Valmore transform herself from struggling actress with multiple lovers to devoted wife and mother? In the theater world, Desbordes-Valmore's pre-marital relationships were relatively well-known, and followed her during her early transition from actress to poet. Following the publication of her first poetry collection in 1819, a reviewer for the *Consitutionnel* even criticized readers for writing off Desbordes-Valmore, ignoring her poetic talent and instead placing more importance on her scandalous amorous reputation (Jenson 124). It was ultimately other women writers (Sophie Gay in the *Revue Encyclopédique* and Madame Dufrénoy in the *Minerve littéraire*) who first gave Desbordes-Valmore positive reviews in the press while uncoincidentally eschewing mention of her personal life (Jenson 124). Sophie Gay reviews Desbordes-Valmore's first collection by contextualizing it within the current political climate in France.[35] She encourages readers to seek respite from the tense political atmosphere by escaping to the idyllic, pastoral world of Desbordes-Valmore's *Poésies.* Although, like other critics, Gay indeed focuses on the sentimental force of Desbordes-Valmore's verses ("le talent de madame Valmore [est] tout entier dans son cœur" (157)), she does not neglect the variety of other themes present in the young poet's volume. Gay's review of Desordes-Valmore's *Poésies* differs from the preceding reviews not only in its refusal to comment on the poet's personal life, but also in its demonstration of the value and relevancy of her poems when considered under broader themes.

Gay writes, "Comme tous les auteurs d'élégies, madame Valmore soupire pour un volage; mais parfois échappant à la monotonie du genre, elle sait mêler à ses regrets douloureux une aimable philosophie, et déplorer aussi bien les préjugés du monde, que les perfidies de l'amour" (158). Gay then cites several verses of "À Délie," a semi-autobiographical elegy in which Desbordes-Valmore reflects on the difficulties that women in artistic careers (acting, writing poetry) face. Gay highlights the following excerpt to comment on society's hypocritical reception of women artists: "O des erreurs du monde inexplicable exemple! / Charmante Muse! objet de mépris et d'amour, / Le soir on vous honore au temple, / Et l'on vous dédaigne au grand jour" (159). Gay then suggests that prejudice against women, and particularly women artists, is one of the most nefarious forms of discrimination circulating in French society: "Quand donc ce siècle, si fier de ses lumières et du bonheur d'avoir vaincu tant de préjugés absurdes, triomphera-t-il du plus cruel de tous ?" (158). Such explicit sympathy for Desbordes-Valmore, and for women artists in general, helped turn the tide of negative critical reception of Desbordes-Valmore's work, as the more positive reviews of her following collection demonstrate.

[35] Political tensions between the opposition liberals and the ultras (Paliyenko 71).

As Desbordes-Valmore's collection received slightly increased publicity thanks to Dufrénoy's and Gay's reviews, other (male) critics followed suite, including the young journalist Jacques-François Ancelot, who published a lengthy critique of the collection in the February 1821 edition of the *Annales de la littérature et des arts.* Although Ancelot's critique of Desbordes-Valmore's *Poésies* is for the most part positive and constructive, he takes a problematic starting point that sets the tone for the rest of the review. He begins by referencing the already well-established cultural understanding that women excel in the realm of sentimental literature. When considering the genre of poetry, it is through the elegy that women poets shine: "Puisque la condition *sine qua non,* pour réussir dans l'élégie, est d'être sensible à l'amour, d'avoir brûlé de tous ses feux, de connaître et ses douceurs et ses peines, on s'attend à rencontrer les femmes dans ce genre de poésie qu'elles ont dû regarder de bonne heure comme leur domaine particulier" (200). If this gendered generalization does not seem particularly shocking, Ancelot takes his subtle insults one step further by alluding to Desbordes-Valmore's amorous history. According to the critic, Desbordes-Valmore succeeds so well in her elegies because she has lived the varied passions that make up the thematic base of her poetry. He suggests, "Il est inutile de dire que la constance n'est pas de rigueur dans les passions élégiaques. […] La diversité d'amants jette de la variété sur les tableaux un peu monotones de l'élégie; quelques observateurs ont même soutenu qu'elle ajoutait à la vraisemblance" (200-201). Ancelot's careful framing encourages his reader to move through not only his critique, but the collection itself, with a detective's eye: which poems correspond to which lovers? How can we as readers identify the inspiration behind each poem? Contrary to Gay's critique of the collection, Ancelot's review is imbued with the need to take Desbordes-Valmore's personal life into account.

Interestingly, like Gay, Ancelot also cites several verses of "À Délie." Rather than analyze the poem as Gay does, Ancelot appears to include "À Délie" solely to reference Gay's review without explicitly mentioning her as the author. Ancelot disagrees with Gay's interpretation of the poem and accuses her of using it to advance "quelques déclamations qui ont aujourd'hui perdu le mérite de l'à-propos" (207). He explains, "Chaque siècle a ses préjugés, et ceux de nos pères n'étaient peut-être pas plus déraisonnables que les nôtres" (207). As I mentioned earlier, Gay is quite overt in her review in denouncing the social discrimination against women artists. Ancelot's veiled rebuke makes it clear that she had ruffled a few feathers with her critique. It becomes clear that whereas Desbordes-Valmore's *consoeurs* analyze and praise her poetry, her *confrères* feel the need to ground their critiques in veiled allusions to her love life. In the following sections of this chapter, I work through close readings of poems paired with criticism across the centuries in an attempt to understand why Desbordes-Valmore is read the way she is at certain times. In sifting through the shifting images and perceptions of Desbordes-Valmore and pairing them with her poetry, we might better understand and complicate her critical legacy.

A Century of Misreadings: Constructing the Woman Poet and Her Community

Desbordes-Valmore's first collection, *Elégies, Marie, et romances,* was published in 1819 and attracted little publicity. Ambrière notes that only a handful of theater critics mentioned the volume in passing, while the "serious" press ignored it entirely (t. 1, 270). Several months later, when the volume was republished in July of 1820 without the prose piece *Marie,* the collection earned modest praise in the press and in literary circles (Paliyenko 70). What caused this shift in the public's reception of Desbordes-Valmore's first collection? Scholars offer several theories. Éliane Jasenas attributes the delayed success of Desbordes-Valmore's first collection to the fact of readers belatedly recognizing in the poet's style a certain association with the lyricism of Lamartine, whose paradigm-shifting *Méditations poétiques* had been published just some months earlier in March of 1820 (Paliyenko 71). Aimée Boutin points to the darker side of such a comparison with Lamartine, revealing that it was no coincidence that Desbordes-Valmore equally innovative volume of lyric poetry should be met with silence, while Lamartine's should be heralded as the birth of French romantic poetry. She explains that it was not only Desbordes-Valmore's gender, but also her low social class and professional status as an actress that contributed to her invisibility compared to Lamartine (Boutin 10). Analyzing the context of the publication and republication of Desbordes-Valmore's first collection is thus crucial in considering the powerful role that public opinion played in the early shaping of the her career. When we look closer at these pivotal months in Desbordes-Valmore's career, we uncover an alternative narrative that complicates Desbordes-Valmore's critical legacy as the *Mater Dolorosa* of French poetry. Rather than the relatively simple, yet pathetic trajectory of the *maîtresse de la douleur*, dissecting the early years of Debsordes-Valmore's poetic career reveals that she was engaged in a complex negotiation of questions of gender, reputation, and the very establishment of Romantic poetry itself.

Readers and critics were not the only public who assumed the influence of Lamartine's lyric poetry on that of Desbordes-Valmore. Lamartine himself misread Desbordes-Valmore's poem, "À M. A. de L.," mistakenly interpreting the poem as addressed to himself. The poem is in fact addressed to M. Aimé de Loy, a little-known young Lyonnais poet whose greatest glory, according to Sainte-Beuve, was to have his verses (signed A.D.L.) mistaken for those of Lamartine (*Portraits* 236). Originally published in *l'Almanach des Muses* in 1831, and then in Desbordes-Valmore's collection *Les Pleurs* (1833), "À M. A. de L." – and its misinterpretation – launched a poetic dialogue between Desbordes-Valmore and Lamartine (Croisille 67). Sainte-Beuve comments on the exchange in his biography of Desbordes-Valmore, writing that Lamartine was so flattered and moved upon reading the verses in the 1831 *Keepsake français*, "il s'échappa de son sein une nuée de strophes ailées, un admirable chant et vraiment sublime, à la louange de son humble sœur en poésie" (*Madame Desbordes-Valmore* 222).

Lamartine responds to "cette pauvre petite comédienne de Lyon" (his words, according to Sainte-Beuve) with a poem dedicated to Desbordes-Valmore, in which he compares her to a delicate sail caught in the waves (*Madame Desbordes-Valmore* 223):

> Cette pauvre barque, ô Valmore,
> Est l'image de ton destin.
> La vague, d'aurore en aurore,
> Comme elle te ballotte encore
> Sur un océan incertain!
>
> Tu ne bâtis ton nid d'argile
> Que sous le toit du passager,
> Et comme l'oiseau sans asile,
> Tu vas glanant de ville en ville
> Les miettes du pain étranger. (*Poésies complètes* 526)[36]

Although Desbordes-Valmore was indeed already married at the time of the volume's publication, she had signed the 1819 *Élégies* using her maiden name "Mme Marceline Desbordes," and then subsequent volumes using a hyphenated last name. Note how in Lamartine's response, he uses Desbordes-Valmore's married name, reinforcing the image of the young poet as being controlled by forces more powerful than herself. Desbordes-Valmore responds to Lamartine's poem a month later in February of 1832 with a poem that employs the same metaphor of the errant boat. In the following section, I analyze the poetic exchange between Desbordes-Valmore and Lamartine, focusing on adjustments that appear in Desbordes-Valmore's writing before and after Lamartine's misguided response.

Desbordes-Valmore's original poem to Aimé de Loy also begins with an image of a solitary, abandoned boat: "Nacelle abandonnée / Errante comme moi, / Avec ta destinée / Tu n'entraines que toi" (*Les Pleurs* 221). It is important to note that although Desbordes-Valmore indeed identifies with the vagabonding of the solitary boat that represents de Loy, she remarks on the difference between herself and de Loy: "Que t'importe l'orage, / Libre jouet des vents? / Moi je crains le naufrage ; / J'emporte mes enfans!" (*Les Pleurs* 221-222). Desbordes-Valmore herself is not "lost" in the same manner as de Loy, who led a life "la plus errante et la plus diverse qu'on puisse imaginer," according to Sainte-Beuve (*Portraits contemporains* 236). On the contrary, Desbordes-Valmore observes the journey of de Loy from afar: "J'ai vu le voile sombre / Qui t'enlève du port; / Et j'ai pleuré de l'ombre / Où s'enferme ton sort" (*Les Pleurs* 222). Desbordes-Valmore presents herself as the authoritatively seasoned poet who guides de Loy to understanding his own poetic talent. She reassures the young wanderer that

[36] The poem is first published in *L'Émeraude* on January 7, 1832 (Planté, "Comment l'appelez-vous" 5).

no matter how lost he may seem or how far he might stray from his poetic calling, "Cette voile est sacrée, / Et son but est divin!" (*Les Pleurs* 222). Desbordes-Valmore's authority comes from her experience; she goes on to recount her similar fears: "Sur la route attristée / Où s'envolaient mes jours, / Par un charme arrêtée, / Je crus l'être toujours" (*Les Pleurs* 222).

Such uneasiness is temporary, however. In the final strophe, Desbordes-Valmore uses the first person plural pronoun *nous* for the first time, representing a coming together of a poetic community:

> Nacelle fugitive
> Échappée à ce bord,
> Une immutable rive
> Doit nous rejoindre encor;
> Là, les voiles amies,
> Calmes dans leurs débris,
> Reposent endormies
> Sous d'immortels abris! (*Les Pleurs* 223)

"Les voiles amies," the community of established poets, welcome the young, errant de Loy. It is important to note that Desbordes-Valmore presents herself in an entirely self-assured manner; she herself is not the small, weak, lost boat on the great ocean. On the contrary, she is the stabilizing figure who seeks to guide a younger poet towards community. Readers of the poem might also note the role that gender does or does not play in the poem. On the one hand, Desbordes-Valmore speaks as a woman poet to de Loy, mentioning her concern for her children and her own struggle as a young poet. On the other hand, the community into which Desbordes-Valmore welcomes de Loy is not necessarily gendered. In fact, Desbordes-Valmore seems to suggest with her rhyme scheme that the poetic world should be one of inclusivity: in the final lines of the poem, the words "amies", "debris", "endormies", and "abris" all rhyme, yet they alternate between feminine and masculine rhymes. In other words, the final lines of the poem formally suggest a likeness, a cohesion that nevertheless respects poetic tradition and is indiscriminate in its membership: pious mothers and young vagabonds are both welcome.

In taking a closer look at Desbordes-Valmore's "À M. A. de L.," it seems surprising that Lamartine could have interpreted the poem as addressed to himself. As Christine Planté points out, by 1831, Lamartine, "élu à l'Académie française et glorieux auteur des *Harmonies,* ne pouvait à vrai dire guère faire figure de 'nacelle abandonnée'" ("En bateau" 57). Moreover, in Lamartine's response, he compares Desbordes-Valmore herself to the modest boat lost in the ocean, "une humble voile sur l'onde" (123). We as readers are faced not only with a misunderstanding (Lamartine believing the original poem directed towards himself), but also a rather unflattering misreading of the original poem. Nevertheless, Desbordes-Valmore responds to Lamartine's poem with "À M.

Alphonse de Lamartine," which appears in the 1833 collection *Les Pleurs.* Leaving no confusion as to the poem's intended recipient, Desbordes-Valmore not only references language from Lamartine's poem, but also explicitly names Lamartine: "du haut de son vol sublime, / Lamartine jetait mon nom."

Desbordes-Valmore's poetic response to Lamartine differs indeed from her original poem "À M. A. de L." In "À M. Alphonse de Lamartine," Desbordes-Valmore is no longer the established poet and maternal figure looking to guide a younger *confrère*. Instead, she is more of a lowly worshiper of the God-like Lamartine, unworthy of his recognition. Edward Kaplan argues that in Desbordes-Valmore's second response to Lamartine, she "seems willingly to advance the stereotypes Lamartine had introduced" (264). Desbordes-Valmore does seem to take special care in mimicking the language and images from Lamartine's poem. One example that stands out is the transformation of the bird and nest imagery. In Desbordes-Valmore's original "À M. A. de L.," she employs imagery of the bird's nest, invoking themes such as motherhood and poetic voice, but also protection:

> Doucement captivée
> Au bord d'un nid de fleurs,
> Sur ma jeune couvée
> J'ai ri de mes douleurs;
> Et l'on trouvait des charmes
> À mes chants d'autrefois (*Les Pleurs* 222)

If we compare this image to Lamartine's interpretation of the bird symbol, we find significant changes:

> Tu ne bâtis ton nid d'argile
> Que sous le toit du passager,
> Et comme l'oiseau sans asile,
> Tu vas glanant de ville en ville
> Les miettes du pain étranger. (*Poésies complètes* 526)

Consider how Lamartine reimagines the bird imagery that Desbordes-Valmore had introduced. Desbordes-Valmore's "nest" is no longer comforting, no longer made of flowers; instead, it exists in total precarity, much like the poet herself. Where the poet's songs in Desbordes-Valmore's version were positively received, the pitiful bird of Lamartine's poem painstakingly searches for crumbs of recognition. Morevover, in Desbordes-Valmore's response to Lamartine, we observe a mimicking of his language that was absent in the original "À M. A. de L.":

> Je suis l'indigente glaneuse
> Qui d'un peu d'épis oubliés

A paré sa gerbe épineuse,
Quand ta charité lumineuse
Verse du blé pur à mes pieds. (*Les Pleurs* 222)

In self-identifying as the "indigente glaneuse," Desbordes-Valmore assumes the poverty and the aimlessness that Lamartine had projected onto her, and reinforces his absolute poetic authority. Lamartine's misunderstanding and subsequent response to Desbordes-Valmore's "À M. A de L." functions in many ways as a projection of belittling male views of women poets. I would agree with Kaplan's observation that Desbordes-Valmore willingly accepts the stereotypes that Lamartine ascribes her, but we cannot say that she does so without reflection. Barbara Johnson argues Desbordes-Valmore carefully considered her public image at all points in her career, and it is through her eager assumption of feminine tropes that she successfully constructs an "unthreatening poetics of sincerity" (112). Desbordes-Valmore is all too aware of the part she must play based on the role that Lamartine assigns her in his poem.

This exchange between Desbordes-Valmore and Lamartine has demonstrated why it is so important to contextualize Desbordes-Valmore's poetry. As my analysis has revealed, readings, misreadings, and transformations play an important role in Desbordes-Valmore's construction of her own image as a poet. Too often has Desbordes-Valmore been criticized for her self-subjugation without any further questioning into how this self-subjugation might have served another purpose (in fact, it is in "À M. Alphonse de Lamartine" that Desbordes-Valmore writes the famous lines that are so often used as evidence against her power as a woman: "je suis une faible femme; / Je n'ai su qu'aimer et souffrir" (*Les Pleurs* 222)).

Kaplan compares Desbordes-Valmore's humble subordinating to Lamartine with her 1860 "Une lettre de femme" in order to demonstrate her growth as a self-assertive poet. According to Kaplan, Debsordes-Valmore "speaks more boldly for herself toward the end of her career" (264). I would argue that such a comparison demonstrating "feminist" growth is misguided, especially if we consider the likely possibility that Desbordes-Valmore wrote "Une lettre de femme" far before its publication in 1860.[37] My analysis seeks to prove that Desbordes-Valmore's poetry, even under the guise of humility, demonstrates a subtle defiance towards assignations of weakness and errancy that was consistent throughout her entire career.

Many scholars have posited Desbordes-Valmore's "Une lettre de femme" as one of her rare instances of overt feminist expression. Appearing in the posthumous 1860 collection *Poésies inédites*, the poem begins with a bold statement, "Les femmes, je le sais, ne doivent pas écrire; / J'écris pourtant." Most

[37] In Yves Bonnefoy's preface to his anthology of Desbordes-Valmore's poetry, he notes that many of the poems appearing in the 1860 volume *Poésies inédites* were "écrits de longue date" (261). The poem "L'Entrevue au ruisseau," for example, was initially published with musical accompaniment as early as 1830 (262).

scholars cite only these two initial verses, since at first glance, the rest of the poem appears to reinforce the trope of the suffering lady pining after an inaccessible lover.[38] In Wendy Greenberg's 1999 study *Uncanonical Women,* for example, she considers "Une lettre de femme" through the lens of Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine.* Greenberg argues that although the initial verses could represent Cixous's notion of *s'écrire*, the rest of the poem enforces ideas of feminine dependency and submission: "Unfortunately, Desbordes-Valmore focuses more on 'the other' than on herself, and for this reason, she does not 'write herself" (109). Similarly, Barbara Johnson argues that despite the powerful and matter-of-fact initial declaration, the poet quickly, "minimize[s] the transgression by making her writing redundant with respect to what is already written 'in' the lover" (115).

I propose a twofold reengagement of Cixous's notion of *s'écrire* with Desbordes-Valmore's poetry. First, I present a rereading of Desbordes-Valmore's celebrated "Une lettre de femme" in which we consider the poem as something other than a heterosexual love poem. In my reading, I imagine the writer of the letter and its recipient as two facets of the same being: the woman persona and the poet persona. In other words, Desbordes-Valmore the poet writes to herself as Desbordes-Valmore the woman; in modern times, we might call this a "self-love" poem. Secondly, I analyze how we can better understand the power and transgression behind Desbordes-Valmore's autobiographical rewriting through the frame of *écriture féminine.* In examining both strands – the poetry and the poet herself – we discover that Desbordes-Valmore's alleged self-effacing tendencies are far from clear-cut.

As mentioned earlier, many scholars have struggled to reconcile the bold feminist declarations with the subsequent expressions of humility in "Une lettre de femme." I would like to question at the outset the very manner in which we read the poem, beginning with the title. Despite its title, "Une lettre de femme" does not in any way resemble a letter. It features seven quatrains consisting of alternating alexandrines and tetrasyllabic verses. Here is the poem in its entirety:

> Les femmes, je le sais, ne doivent pas écrire;
> J'écris pourtant,
> Afin que dans mon cœur au loin tu puisses lire
> Comme en partant.
>
> Je ne tracerai rien qui ne soit dans toi-même
> Beaucoup plus beau:
> Mais le mot cent fois dit, venant de ce qu'on aime,
> Semble nouveau.
>
> Qu'il te porte au bonheur ! Moi, je reste à l'attendre,
> Bien que, là-bas,

[38] See, for example, Danahy (1988), Greenberg (1999), and Kaplan (1997).

Je sens que je m'en vais, pour voir et pour entendre
Errer tes pas.

Ne te détourne point s'il passe une hirondelle
Par le chemin,
Car je crois que c'est moi qui passerai, fidèle,
Toucher ta main.

Tu t'en vas, tout s'en va! Tout se met en voyage,
Lumière et fleurs,
Le bel été te suit, me laissant à l'orage,
Lourde de pleurs.

Mais si l'on ne vit plus que d'espoir et d'alarmes,
Cessant de voir,
Partageons pour le mieux : moi, je retiens les larmes,
Garde l'espoir.

Non, je ne voudrais pas, tant je te suis unie,
Te voir souffrir:
Souhaiter la douleur à sa moitié bénie,
C'est se haïr.

The decision to call the poem "Une lettre de femme" reinforces the sense of feminine solidarity that nineteenth-century epistolary exchanges facilitated. In Hoock-Demarle's study "Correspondances féminines au XIXe siècle," she demonstrates how the practice of women's letter writing in the nineteenth-century transformed from a private means of daily communication ("écrits ordinaires") into an "instrument qui va permettre aux femmes de redéfinir leur espace de vie et leurs modes d'expression" (68). Although the *roman épistolaire* was an already well-established (and "feminine") genre in the nineteenth-century,[39] letter writing for women (perhaps without the intent to publish the letters) was an entirely socially acceptable practice. Not only has correspondence between women long been a form of relationship and network forging, often at times during which feminine solidarity was not easily socially, culturally, or politically accessible, it has also functioned as a means of self-reflection and self-discovery. As Brigitte Diaz writes in her introduction to the volume *L'épistolaire au féminin,* the paradox of letter writing manifests in the phenomenon "où l'on s'adresse à l'autre pour se trouver soi-même" (9).

Christine Planté also underlines the importance of the letter-poem, particularly the fact that "la lettre […] n'est pas de la littérature," meaning that a letter does not necessarily have to abide by the same codified literary traditions and norms that a poem does ("La lettre et le poème" 208). Because Desbordes-

[39] See Christine Planté, *L'épistolaire, un genre féminin?* (1998).

Valmore's poem is a presented as a love letter, open to the public, without a defined recipient, it allows each reader to embody the speaker herself: "chaque voix de femme qui la prononce fait de la chanteuse le nouveau référent provisoire de la femme amoureuse fictive, mais manifeste du même coup que sa signification, transindividuelle, est irréductible à cette circonstance et à ce référent" (Planté 208). I would argue that at the outset, in calling the poem "Une lettre de femme," Desbordes-Valmore not only alludes to a traditionally feminine genre, but she also intentionally encourages an ambiguous reading of the poem, two features that lay the groundwork for a feminist reading of the poem. My choice to read the poem as a kind of "self-love" poem is not meant to be a definitive revelation, so much as it helps show that the poem is constructed so as to allow multiple ways of interpreting it, and that, in particular, there are multiple feminist ways of interpreting it once the reader overcomes the ideological impulse to take it as an artifact of heterosexuality.

In Greenberg's analysis, she initially argues that the poem, although relatively modest in tone, proves that Desbordes-Valmore indeed merits the title of "feminist" poet, contrary to the opinion of Domna Stanton, who famously excluded her from her feminist anthology. Contrary to Stanton, Greenberg notes that the "preponderance of communication verbs" in the poem underline the powerful act of writing as a woman. Such an act, however, is not without suffering, as Greenberg pairs the rhyming verbs "écrire" and "lire" in the first stanza with "souffrir" and "se haïr" in the last stanza (109). Arguing that the poet's suffering is brought on by the very act of writing, Greenberg then cites a passage from Cixous's "Rire de la méduse" in order to demonstrate how Desbordes-Valmore encapsulates Cixous's theory of *s'écrire*: "Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, où elles ont été éloignées aussi violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps; pour les mêmes raisons, par la même loi, dans le même but mortel. Il faut que la femme se mette au texte – comme au monde, et à l'histoire –, de son propre mouvement" (37). However, rather than an affirmatively feminist force of movement, the movement towards self-actualization, Greenberg interprets the movement in "Une lettre de femme" as "the violent movement of a woman away from her beloved" (109).

At the outset, we as readers must question the relationship between the speaker and the receiver of the "letter." To assume that the poet addresses the letter to a (male) love interest is in some ways a failure of imagination or a giving in to ideological habit that results in a silencing of the woman's voice; the poem becomes trapped in the very phallogocentric system of patriarchal thought that we wish to escape. After all, there is no grammatical indication that the "tu," the receiver of the letter, is male or female, or self or other, child, brother, etc., for that matter. This manipulation of language to resist gendering her poems is a technique that Desbordes-Valmore often employs, so why have critics only read

"Une lettre de femme" as a uniquely heterosexual love note?[40] If we take on the poem from a non-heteronormative perspective, we not only uncover alternative strategies of resistance that Desbordes-Valmore employs, we also assume new techniques for reading her oeuvre as a whole.

Cixous explores how writing can empower relationships between women, beginning with an individual's relationship with herself: "*Femme pour femmes:* en la femme toujours se maintient la force productive de l'autre, en particulier de l'autre femme" (48). Using the "*mère*" as a metaphor for production in all senses of the term (life-giving, artistic creation, conditions of existence), Cixous explains that women must constantly be in exchange with one another, strengthening this internal force of giving and receiving. She coins a term, "l'équivoix" to represent the multiplicity of feminine voices that exist within each woman: "c'est, te touchant, l'équivoix qui t'affecte, te pousse depuis son sein à venir au langage, qui lance *ta* force; […] la partie de toi qui entre en toi t'espace et te pousse à inscrire dans la langue ton style de femme" (48-49). If we read "Une lettre de femme" as a letter addressed to the poet herself, to a female friend, to a daughter, it becomes not another cry of "feminine dependency" (Greenberg 110), but instead a powerful and subversive declaration of self-empowerment in the face of social adversity.

Desbordes-Valmore's "Lettre de femme" is not only a reflection on the struggles of writing poetry as a woman, but also an acknowledgement of the necessity of submitting to forms of criticism, rejection, and pain so that this life-giving self-expression remains possible. If we consider the poem as a mode of self-reflection rather than a letter addressed to an unidentified love object, the relationship between the speaker and the other of the poem transforms. Despite the social understanding that "les femmes […] ne doivent pas écrire," the poet writes so that she herself may translate and make sense of her own sentiments: in the first stanza, "J'écris pourtant, / Afin que dans mon cœur au loin tu puisses lire." The two figures are merged, and yet, in no way is the poet separate from the woman whom she addresses, "Je ne tracerai rien qui ne soit dans toi-même / beaucoup plus beau." The poet is rather the embodied self, the *équivoix*, that encourages women to transform sentiments into art.

In the frame of Cixous's self-writing, we could consider Desbordes-Valmore as deeply embedded in the processing of discovering the nuances of how to *s'écrire* in "Une lettre de femme." Cixous details the difficulties of coming to terms with the desire for self-expression because women have been taught that their conditions of possibility are finite. She urges women to come to writing so that they may express without hesitation, without restriction, their overflowing imaginations and desires. Coming to writing is a process, however, complete with stages of doubt that are both socially and self-imposed: "qui ne s'est pas, surprise et horrifiée par le remue-ménage fantastique de ses pulsions

[40] For an analysis of the variability of Desbordes-Valmore's poetic "I," see Danahy (1988) "Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and the Engendered Canon" : "[Desbordes-Valmore] does not accept the male as paradigm for the universal or the poet in particular" (138).

(car on lui a fait croire qu'une femme bien réglée, normale, et d'un calme…divin), accusée d'être monstrueuse? qui, sentant s'agiter une drôle envie (de chanter, d'écrire, de proférer, bref de faire sortir du neuf), ne s'est pas crue malade?" (39). In an autobiographical letter to Sainte-Beuve, Desbordes-Valmore describes her own process of coming to poetry, almost in spite of herself:

> A vingt ans, des peines profondes m'obligèrent de renoncer au chant, parce que ma voix me faisait pleurer; mais la musique roulait dans ma tête de malade, et une mesure toujours égale arrangeait mes idées, à l'insu de ma réflexion. Je fus forcée de les écrire pour me délivrer de ce frappement fiévreux, et l'on me dit que c'était une élégie.[41]

From actress to poet, Desbordes-Valmore could not contain her inspiration; such attempts at repression were intensely painful. Barbara Johnson has criticized this particular recollection, arguing that Desbordes-Valmore eliminates her own agency as a poet by suggesting that finding her poetic voice was not a choice, but an act forced upon her, "a kind of victimization" (107). When read in conversation with Cixous's description, however, we can see that the two processes are not dissimilar; the difference lies in the fact that in Desbordes-Valmore's historical, social, and cultural milieu, it was more difficult for women to find ways of self-expression, so they were forced to discover methods and carve out spaces in which they could explore their artistry. In considering these outside factors, we can see that Desbordes-Valmore is far from passive; she resists by recognizing her limitations as a woman poet operating in a patriarchal society and therefore employs a language and constructs a narrative that fits neatly within the imposed boundaries. Rather than writing poetry in order to support her failing actor husband and her infant child, Desbordes-Valmore modifies and embellishes: she gave life to the "musique" and the "idées" inside her "tête malade" because they begged to be released; she had no other choice. Her suggestion that she unwittingly came to writing poetry supports the argument that Desbordes-Valmore made careful efforts to embody the figure of the woman poet in a manner that would be as "unthreatening" as possible for her nineteenth-century audiences.

In "Une lettre de femme," what scholars have previously understood as the poet submitting to her lover, relinquishing all sense of self-sufficiency, can also be understood as a coming to terms with the painfulness that accompanies the forced repression of artistic expression. Schultz notes that Desbordes-Valmore consistently employs this strategy: "she presents an 'appropriate' picture inoffensive to dominant sensibilities, at the same time addressing, in a much more subtle and ambiguous manner, questions of gender and difference in writing" (58). In the last stanza, when the poet writes, "Non, je ne voudrais pas, tant je te suis unie, / Te voir souffrir: / Souhaiter la douleur à sa moitié bénie, / C'est se hair" if we understand the speaker poet as addressing her non-poet self, the ending of the poem in fact becomes a subtle declaration of solidarity. The two

[41] Quoted in C.A. Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits contemporains,* t. II, Paris: Michel Levy, 1869, pp. 100-101.

halves finally unite, the poet with the typically voiceless, and both are posed to, if not flourish as Cixous would wish, then at least persist without shame.

It is also helpful to consider the similarities between "Une lettre de femme" and another of Desbordes-Valmore's poems, "Cantique des mères." Published in the volume *Pauvres Fleurs* (1839), the poem addresses the 1834 silk worker revolt in Lyon. Desbordes-Valmore functions as the voice of the working class women whose sons and husbands were imprisoned or murdered during the uprising. Serving as the voice of these united women, Desbordes-Valmore appeals directly to Louis-Philippe's wife, Queen Marie-Amélie, urging her to engage her feminine empathy and take action against the social injustices being committed:

> Reine pieuse aux flancs de mère,
> Écoutez la supplique amère
> Des veuves aux rares deniers
> Dont les fils sont vos prisonniers :
> Si vous voulez que
> Dieu vous aime
> Et pardonne au geôlier lui-même,
> Priez d'un salutaire effroi
> Pour tous les prisonniers du roi !

Desbordes-Valmore understands the increased accessibility of feminine networks for expressing emotion and enacting change. The speaker attempts to convince the queen of her own maternal role, "ce sont vos enfants, madame / Adoptés au fond de votre âme," and despite the fact that it is the queen's very husband who is behind the atrocities, the speaker (representing *les mères* and *les veuves*) is never bitter towards the queen. On the contrary, the speaker earnestly envelops the queen in her maternal circle, pleading, "Ô vous! dont le lait coule encore. / Notre sein tari vous implore." Aimée Boutin remarks on Desbordes-Valmore's rather radical assumption that the queen and the working class women "share a common bond as mothers, regardless of the gap in their social classes" (164).

When we read Desbordes-Valmore's poetry with Cixous's concept in mind, "Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture," we can begin to understand her poetry on different levels. What critics have considered limiting labels in the past – "motherly", "feminine", "humble" – can in fact encourage new consideration of Desbordes-Valmore's intentions and the execution of these intentions. Rather than only privileging Desbordes-Valmore's "modesty" and her "humility," what if we acknowledge the power present in seeking out women's solidarity? As Gretchen Schultz writes, Desbordes-Valmore often makes it quite clear that she is neither writing to men nor for men; instead, "she addresses her work to the women she would have as readers and critics" (58).

"Jeune homme irrité…": Desbordes-Valmore on Metapoetic Discourse

In the following section, I will consider ways in which Desbordes-Valmore's life and poetry were taken up by critics, and one example of her response to a critic. As mentioned earlier, Desbordes-Valmore came from humble beginnings and never received formal poetic training. Gretchen Schultz explains that Desbordes-Valmore largely refrained from nearly all critical discourse because she considered such theorization of poetry as intellectual elitism (54). I will consider three articles on Desbordes-Valmore written by nineteenth-century critics and poets: Paul de Molènes, Baudelaire, and Verlaine. With these articles, we can trace Desbordes-Valmore's reception throughout the nineteenth century, specifically focusing on how critics mobilize Desbordes-Valmore to advance differing positions.

Paul de Molènes's lengthy 1842 article "Simples essais d'histoire littéraires: Les femmes poètes," appearing in the *Revue des deux mondes,* is titled misleadingly, because it is most definitely not a simple essay on the history of women poets. It is a manifesto detailing women's social and biological incompatibility with any artistic sphere as much as it is a diatribe against the work of nineteenth-century women poets, including Amable Tastu, Louise Colet, and Delphine de Girardin. Molènes indeed devotes an extended section to Desbordes-Valmore, but not before prefacing his critique with unfounded philosophical musings and shoddy historicization of women's poetic tradition. Startling yet perhaps predictable in its misogyny, Molènes's article merits analysis because it serves as one of the few moments at which Desbordes-Valmore engaged in metapoetic discourse. After the publication of the scathing essay, Desbordes-Valmore responded with a poem, "Jeune homme irrité," a mocking and yet still sincere rebuttal. "Jeune homme irrité" serves as a prime example of the poetic strategies that Desbordes-Valmore employs to challenge misogynistic social views on women writers. In the following section I will dig deeper into the exchange between Molènes' and Desbordes-Valmore to demonstrate how Desbordes-Valmore challenges the negative stereotypes of women poets and addresses the systemic social inequality that women artists must face and overcome.

Molènes's begins his essay broadly with thoughts on artistic criticism and reception, "Quel que soit le travail qu'on fasse sur son intelligence, il est impossible de juger une œuvre d'art sans être influencé par ce qu'on sait ou ce qu'on devine de l'artiste." Molènes provides the reader with examples – it is impossible to read Don Quixote without imagining its heroic (and one-handed) author; it is impossible to read one line of Byron's poetry without being reminded of the flowing white mane of his noble horse (49). In recalling such images, it is almost as if Molènes privileges stereotyped versions of poets, authors, and artists. Observing the physical tableau or reading the actual poem is not as powerful as the image of its creator that already exists in the public's consciousness.

When readers encounter poetry that is written by women, however, this psychological imageable recollection takes on a sinister side, "il ne vient aucune pensée, il ne se présente aucun tableau qui ne blesse le cœur ou ne répugne à l'imagination" (49). Molènes argues that the poet's existence is fundamentally incompatible with that of a woman, his reasoning being that the greatest poets of all time have very rarely had many children: "Rois d'un empire qui ne se transmet pas, ils meurent sans laisser d'héritiers" (50). Women, on the other hand, are made to be mothers: "La femme, en dehors de la famille est un être en dehors du monde pour lequel il a été crée" (50). We might draw a connection between Molènes's comments and those of the critics of *Lélia* that I discussed in Chapter 1. The character of Lélia provoked a deep distress in readers and critics because of the shared understanding of women's roles in life. A woman who is not a mother, who is not grounded in the familial private sphere, is first and foremost unnatural. And yet, we as modern critics know that Desbordes-Valmore honors motherhood as one of the foremost themes of her poetry. Surprisingly, Molènes all but ignores all of Desbordes-Valmore's poems that feature themes about motherhood, despite the fact that these poems would complicate his declarations on the incompatibility of "womanly" nature and poetic practice.

Molènes then launches into a lengthy fictional story that details the life trajectory of a girl who wishes to become a poet. What is curious is that qualities characteristic of poets begin to manifest as early as the girl's childhood. When she is not yet even 10-years old, she begins to express "des allures étranges" during which "son regard est triste" (52). This young girl, who does not even comprehend what it means to be a poet, already demonstrates the signs of introspection and sensitivity to language that we associate with great poets. It is not until the girl's marriage that Molènes utters the word *poète* for the first time: "le moment est venu où l'on croit que sa destinée de femme va s'accomplir; c'est pour la destinée de poète qu'elle a grandi" (52). Although Molènes alleges that the poetic destiny is an unnatural aspiration, this particular woman's trajectory seems to be entirely cohesive with her natural intellectual development; from her early childhood through her marriage, she is persistently motivated by a "désir impérieux de savoir" (52). Moreover, if Molènes had not followed this exemplary story with such unflattering portraits of contemporary women poets, one could read his illustrative model as almost favorable, especially if the reader of the essay is herself a woman poet. He writes,

> Celui qui s'est uni à une femme poète a épousé, lui aussi, l'habitante d'un autre élément que le sien. Un jour qu'il est à côté de celle dont la loi le dit seigneur et maître, il s'aperçoit que tout à coup elle se met à s'élever si haut, si haut, qu'il lui est impossible de la suivre. Entre un être qui rampe et un être qui vole une union ne peut pas long-temps subsister: la femme poète rompt avec son mari, et l'existence telle qu'elle l'a désirée si long-temps commence pour elle. C'est alors qu'a lieu ce renversement des lois humaines dont il est permis de s'indigner.

According to Molènes, the woman poet not only exists beyond the laws of society and human nature, she lives *above* them, eventually achieving the independence that she has sought out her entire life.

If the fictional anecdote about the "tragic" destiny of the woman poet is not convincing enough for readers, Molènes turns to more concrete, physical arguments against women practicing poetry. Curiously, it is a woman's physical features that manifest perversity when she strays from her "natural" life path. Molènes asks the reader,

> Comment appeler une créature dont le sein, destiné à allaiter des enfans et à renfermer les joies maternelles, demeure stérile et ne bat que pour des sentimens d'orgueil, dont la bouche, faite pour livrer passage à de tendres accens, s'ouvre pour prononcer de hardies, et bruyantes paroles, dont les yeux, créés pour sourire, pour être doux et ignorans, sont pensifs, sévères, et, quand certains éclairs les illuminent, laissent voir d'effrayantes profondeurs, enfin dont toutes les facultés et tous les organes ont pris une destination contraire à celle qui leur était assignée, comment appeler une pareille créature? (53)

At the outset, a woman who strays from the path of motherhood no longer merits consideration as a human being; she becomes "une créature" without a name, and not only because there exists no grammatically correct feminine form of *poète* in French.[42] Molènes advances the idea that poetry physically transforms a woman: her breast becomes sterile, a figurative term that invokes only too literal fears in women readers. Her mouth and eyes, which are meant to be "tendres" and "doux," become hard and impenetrable. Gretchen Schultz analyzes how the figure of the romantic poet came to be and the ways in which male poets drew inspiration from femininity while at the same time reinforcing the notion of the masculine poetic genius. She notes that the very characteristics of the romantic poet as it came to be understood in the first half of the nineteenth century, "centrality, exceptionality, solitude, and divinization" render it totally incompatible with femininity (*Gendered Lyric* 36).

Molènes's reasoning is thus not entirely surprising to us. His article does, however, encourage us to consider Desbordes-Valmore's ability to occupy different roles depending on the ways in which she perceived her reception at various times. One particularly interesting manifestation of this adaptation is when we consider the role that publication plays in discussions of women's writing. In Molènes's article, he somewhat softens his attack on women and letters: he qualifies that if a woman must write, she should write only for herself, and not for any public. With this qualification we can note a trend in contemporary criticism of the women authors that I have analyzed: it is the notion of publicizing interiority that proves to be one of the most problematic facets of women's writing for critics. Indeed, in my chapters on George Sand and Delphine de Girardin, I traced how these women writers also struggled to make

[42] See Christine Planté's *La petite soeur de Balzac* (1989) for the controversial history of the feminization of the term *poète* in French.

a space for their work in a social world that equated women publishing with prostitution (Thérenty 17). When Sand published *Lélia,* the journalist Feuillide wrote that because of the novel's indecency, it simply could not be the work of a woman: "un homme seul a pu le publier" (72). Similarly, critic Lagevenais dwelled on Girardin's interloper status as a pseudo-journalist by detailing the antagonism between the virile world of the press and the genteel, feminine universe of the salon (138). As Schultz points out, it was Madame de Staël who had signaled public opinion as the greatest barrier to women writers. The moment that a woman chooses to make her work public, she effectively loses her femininity, which necessarily entails modesty and dependency (*Gendered Lyric* 37).

The world of poetry is no different, particularly because Romantic poetry as a genre was so influenced by an intimate reflections on the self. Women poets, according to Molènes, deserve neither respect nor sympathy, and it is towards these poets that he directs his attack: "C'est contre Sapho et ses descendantes que je veux uniquement m'élever" (54). Molènes then sketches out a brief history of women attempting poetry, or, as he phrases it, a history of "*les doigts de rose* compromis avec la plume" (55) [emphasis in original], beginning in the seventeenth century with Madame Deshoulières, and continuing up to the Empire with Madame Dufrénoy (who, as we know, was one of the first critics to review Desbordes-Valmore's early *Poésies* in the *Minerve littéraire*). Compared to his consideration of contemporary women poets, Molènes's treatment of these past *Saphos* is rather favorable; he seems to speak almost nostalgically of these figures and their lost traditions. His transition to Desbordes-Valmore is to say that it is "fâcheux" that she should seek to make a place for herself in their lineage (55).

We know that Desbordes-Valmore begins her poetic career with the elegy; Molènes thus takes her work on the idyllic elegy as the point of departure of his invective. After citing and briefly analyzing two "masters" of the elegy, Fontenelle Gessner and André Chenier, he explains that what these two – and all (male) poets, for that matter – have in common is their deep figurative "friendship" with Horace and Virgil: "bon gré mal gré, nous les avons tous eu pour compagnons dans les premières années de notre vie […] ils deviennent, ces immortels poètes, semblables à d'humbles amis d'enfance […] ils vous tiennent toujours ouverts leurs trésors de beau langage et de nobles pensées" (60). Molènes effectively describes a "boys club" that has existed for poets since Antiquity, presided over by friends; male poets are equal in their endeavors, and no matter how far one may stray from poetry, one will always be welcomed back by the almost subconscious knowledge that was imbued during those critical childhood moments. And what about women? Is it possible for a young girl to have the same connection with the ancient masters, and subsequently foster and hone this inherent power to *faire resurgir* "beau langage" and "nobles pensées" throughout her life? For Molènes, absolutely not: "Les femmes n'ont jamais eu ces amitiés salutaires; je crois donc qu'il y a des sources de poésie qu'elles

peuvent deviner, car il n'est rien qu'elles ne devinent, mais dont elles ne peuvent pas jouir" (60). Women may feign a superficial understanding of fundamental poetic traditions, but they can never truly derive the same pleasure that would a man. The suggestive verb choice of *jouir* underlines Molènes's argument of the socially and biologically-enforced differences between men and women poets.

Molènes claims that Desbordes-Valmore's "guide," her primary source of inspiration for her elegies, was Évariste de Parny. He therefore employs de Parny's "rules of poetry" to judge Desbordes-Valmore's entire poetic oeuvre based on three lines of a single poem.[43] During his ceremony of acceptance into the Académie Française, de Parny had spoken of his expert views of the elegiac form. He claimed, "Le poète doit se faire oublier, et non pas s'oublier lui-même; l'élégance du style est nécessaire et ne suffit pas; il faut encore un choix délicat de détails et d'images, de l'abondance sans négligence, du coloris sans aucun fard, et le degré de précision qui peut s'allier avec la facilité" ("Discours de réception"). According to Molènes's close reading of the excerpted three lines, Desbordes-Valmore failed to fulfill any of de Parny's thematic and formal requirements. Molènes writes of Desbordes-Valmore's elegy,

> elle a trouvé moyen de s'oublier elle-même en ne se faisant pas oublier. Ses élégies ont l'intérêt que présentent toutes les lettres amoureuses, intérêt très puissant pour ceux qui les ont écrites ou ceux à qui elles sont adressées, mais très faible pour ceux que le hasard ou une indiscrétion en a rendu maîtres. (61)

Molènes's comparison of Desbordes-Valmore's poem to a love letter is fascinating, particularly when we consider the ways in which Desbordes-Valmore plays with her poems' forms and titles to blur the boundaries between what constitutes "intimate" correspondence and "public" poetry. As I discussed in my analysis of "Une lettre de femme," the poem takes on an entirely different life if we consider alternative addressees.

In a surprising move, Desbordes-Valmore responded to Molènes's offensive article, but in a manner that proved to be forceful and yet cohesive with the image of herself that she had worked to construct over her poetic career. Appearing in her 1843 volume *Bouquets et prières,* the poem "Jeune homme irrité" is a critique of the degrading treatment of women writers by male critics:

> Jeune homme irrité sur un banc d'école,
> Dont le cœur encor n'a chaud qu'au soleil,
> Vous refusez donc l'encre et la parole
> À celles qui font le foyer vermeil?
> Savant, mais aigri par vos lassitudes,
> Un peu furieux de nos chants d'oiseaux,

[43] Molènes cites three lines from "L'Attente":
"Quoi! sur ton coeur jamais ne pourrai-je dormir?
Ou bien;: J'ai goûté cet amour, j'en pleure les délices,
Cher amant! quand mon sein palpita sous ton sein, etc." (61)

Vous nous couronnez de railleurs roseaux!
Vous serez plus jeune après vos études:
Quand vous sourirez,
Vous nous comprendrez.

Vous portez si haut la férule altière,
Qu'un géant plîrait sous son docte poids.
Vous faites baisser notre humble paupière,
Et nous flagellez à briser nos doigts.
Où prenez-vous donc de si dures armes?
Qu'ils étaient méchants vos maîtres latins!
Mais l'amour viendra: roi de vos destins,
Il vous changera par beaucoup de larmes :
Quand vous pleurerez,
Vous nous comprendrez!

Ce beau rêve à deux, vous voudrez l'écrire.
On est éloquent dès qu'on aime bien;
Mais si vous aimez qui ne sait pas lire,
L'amante à l'amant ne répondra rien.
Laissez donc grandir quelque jeune flamme
Allumant pour vous ses vagues rayons;
Laissez-lui toucher plumes et crayons;
L'esprit, vous verrez, fait du jour à l'âme:
Quand vous aimerez,
Vous nous comprendrez!

The poem is composed of three stanzas of ten lines. In each stanza, the first eight lines feature decasyllabic verses, while the last two verses of each stanza are composed of two five-syllable hemistiches. In examining the rhyme scheme, we can see that the first eight lines of each stanza can also be divided into two quatrains: the first quatrain is composed of alternating feminine and masculine rhymes (*rimes croisées*), such as école – soleil – parole – vermeil in the first stanza. The second quatrains all feature *rimes embrassées,* with two verses of masculine rimes enclosed by two verses of feminine rimes, such as armes – latins – destins – larmes in the second stanza. The patterns of feminine and masculine *rimes croisées* followed by *rimes embrassées* might reflect the way in which Desbordes-Valmore perceives the relationship between the male critic and the woman poet. The *rimes croisées* represent the sparring of the two, while the *rimes embrassées* stand in as a resolution of the conflict, giving the poet the final word. Finally, Desbordes-Valmore divides the last verse of each stanza into two hemistiches to emphasize her final message: male critics have a lot of learning to do before they can begin to understand the work of women poets.

The thematic development of the poem merits a closer analysis as well. In the first stanza, the speaker challenges the relationship between education and maturity by questioning the critic, whom she refers to as a young, irritated schoolboy. Desbordes-Valmore uses sensorial imagery to compare the critic to the poet by suggesting the power of emotion and sentiment. The young man's heart "n'a chaud qu'au soleil," whereas women are the ones who "font le foyer vermeil." The evocation of light and warmth in both lines draws attention to the difference between the two figures of the poem: the young man needs outside help stir his emotions, while the woman herself exudes warmth and vivacity, spreading life into the spaces that she inhabits. As Schultz writes, Debsordes-Valmore privileges sentiment over intellect, as the speaker notes that all the erudition in the world will not be able to help the male poet master that which can only be achieved through experience, particularly the female experience (Schultz 51).

In the second stanza, the "jeune homme irrité" grows in power, taking the position of the vindictive teacher, while the poet becomes the punished student. Desbordes-Valmore also seems to subtly reference the section of Molènes's offensive essay in which he claims that women, even if they feign a surface-level understanding of Horace and Virgil, will never truly be able to "jouir" from the beauty of their poetry. In "jeune homme irrité," Desbordes-Valmore counters with, "Où prenez-vous donc de si dures armes? / Qu'ils étaient méchants vos maîtres latins!", deftly turning Molènes's elitist attack back against him. Moreover, Desbordes-Valmore further develops the advice from the first stanza: "Quand vous sourirez, / Vous nous comprendrez," becomes "Quand vous pleurerez, / Vous nous comprendrez" in the second stanza. Oftentimes women poets were mocked for certain expressions of emotion, and their poetry was ridiculed for being too weepy to the point of becoming maudlin. Figure 1, a caricature by Honoré Daumier, illustrates the perception of women poets as talentless, mawkish *bas-bleus.* The lithograph's caption reads, "Nos comptes sont facile à établir…vous m'aviez confié mille exemplaires de votre recueil poétique intitule **soupirs de mon âme**…vingt sept volumes ont été donné aux journaux…et en défalquant ce que j'ai vendu je trouve qu'il me reste juste neuf cent soixante treize **soupirs de votre âme** dans mon magasin!" [emphasis in original]. The caricature portrays the woman poet as sheepish, untalented, and overly sentimental, unable to produce poetry that entices readers. In "Jeune homme irrité," however, Desbordes-Valmore reclaims melancholy as a source of power in women's poetic production. Whereas the young man's weapons, or "armes,"are the traditions of exclusionary education to which only men had access, the woman poet's "armes" align with "larmes," tears that bring recognition and understanding to those who are brave enough to express vulnerability.

The final stanza of the poem brings to light the hypocrisy that underlies someone like Molènes's understanding of a women's role in poetry:

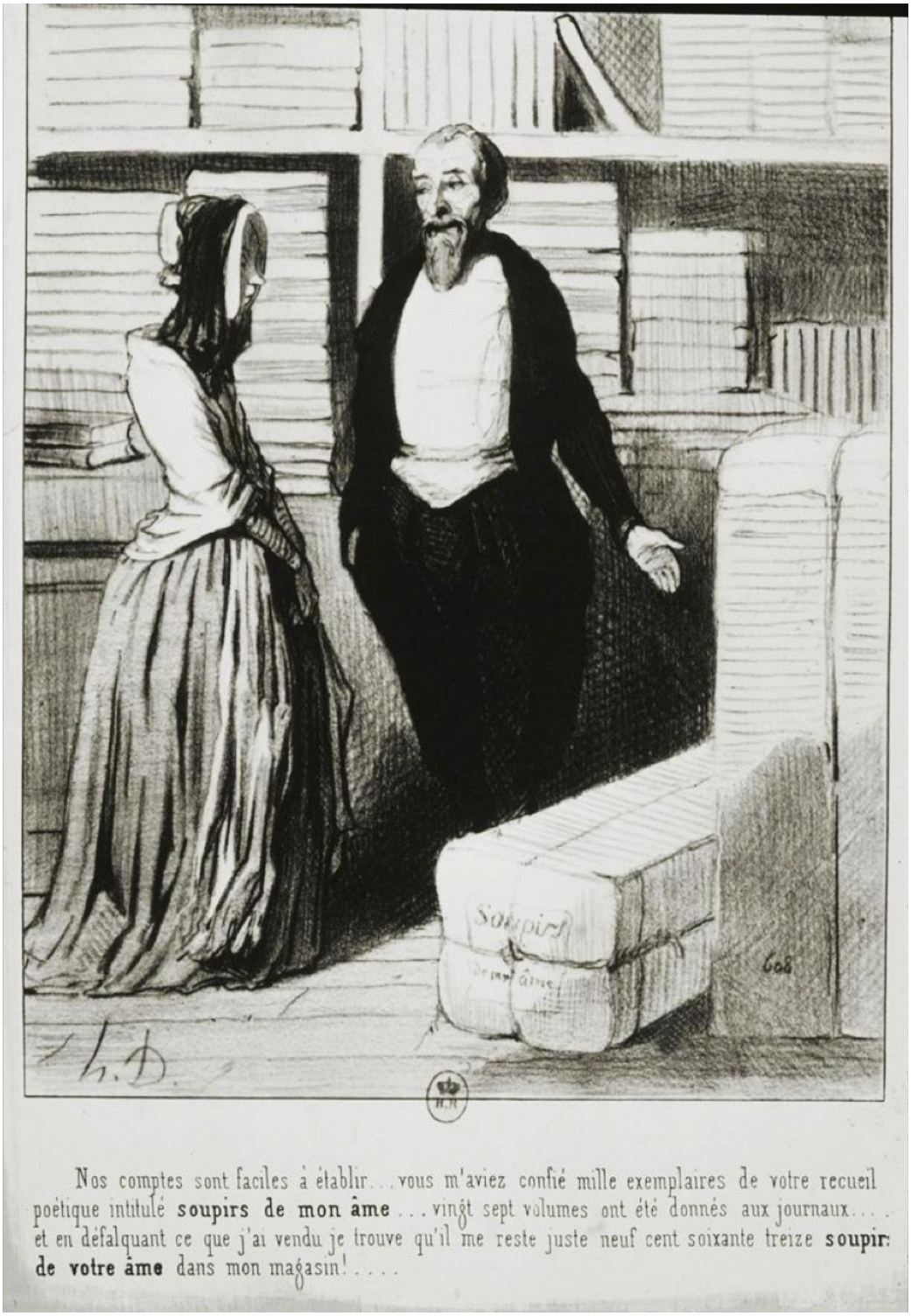


Figure 1. Honoré Daumier, *Nos comptes sont faciles à établir, Le Charivari*, June 17, 1844, Lithograph, University of California, San Diego. Available from: ARTstor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed April 19, 2021).

Ce beau rêve à deux, vous voudrez l'écrire.
On est éloquent dès qu'on aime bien;
Mais si vous aimez qui ne sait pas lire,
L'amante à l'amant ne répondra rien.

The male poet places the woman on a pedestal as the desired object and muse while at the same time denying her access to education and cultural production. Nevertheless, the poem ends on an encouraging note, with a succinctly expressed suggestion:

Laissez donc grandir quelque jeune flamme
Allumant pour vous ses vagues rayons;
Laissez-lui toucher plumes et crayons;
L'esprit, vous verrez, fait du jour à l'âme:

The light-filled imagery returns with Debsordes-Valmore urging the men who control the literary sphere to grant women more opportunities. Rather than ridiculing women poets, the literary world would deeply benefit from recognizing and then developing the talent that they possess. The steps in this process of understanding progress from "quand vous sourirez" to "quand vous pleurerez" to finally, and perhaps, most essentially, "Quand vous aimerez, / Vous nous comprendrez!" By choosing to respond to Molènes's petty critique with poetry – that is, by using the very means for which he viciously chastises her, Desbordes-Valmore exhibits a defiance against the dominant discourse, and a cleverness in her courage. She is often understood as a meek, humble figure (think back to her response to Lamartine's misreading of her poem, for example), but this witty poetic response to a cowardly critic demonstrates Desbordes-Valmore's very solid ability to stand up for herself and other women poets.

It is also important to consider how Desbordes-Valmore's poetic successors approached her poetry because these later nineteenth-century critiques help to illuminate the transformations in the critical evaluations of women's poetry. Moreover, one could even argue that some of the critical essays on Desbordes-Valmore have become more widely read than her poetry itself. For example, the most well-known pieces written about Desbordes-Valmore by her contemporaries are undoubtedly Baudelaire's and Verlaine's essays. These essays have become the foundation of studies on Desbordes-Valmore, so much so that our contemporary understanding of her work is necessarily filtered through the critical lens of these more "canonical" male poets. To understand the paramount importance of these critical views shaping the development of Desbordes-Valmore's reception over the past two centuries, it is helpful to think about Bourdieu's ideas on criticism, when he notes, "tout ce que nous savons, […] nous le savons à travers la critique" (287). As contemporary scholars, we must be aware that our modern perceptions of certain artists are entirely constructed by and through the criticism about those artists. In this final section

of my chapter, I will consider how Baudelaire's and Verlaine's critical essays contributed to the creation of the almost mythical figure of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, *poète maudite*. I will then explore the ways in which a closer look at Desbordes-Valmore's poetry helps to complicate and even challenge the dominant images of her as the eternal feminine incarnate.

Nestled between his musings on Auguste Barbier and Théophile Gauthier, Baudelaire's 1861 essay on Desbordes-Valmore appears in his "Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains." Although Desbordes-Valmore is the only woman poet to figure in the essay collection (as is also the case for Verlaine's *Poètes maudits*), fewer scholars are quick to point out this detail. This could be because Baudelaire's essay reads as not entirely sincere; each compliment seems to be grounded with an underhanded insult.[44] He begins his "reflection" on Desbordes-Valmore by explaining that his appreciation of her poetry clashes with his typical tastes. He lays out a hypothetical conversation with a friend to demonstrate how his highly favorable opinion of Desbordes-Valmore just doesn't quite make sense:

> Plus d'une fois un de vos amis, comme vous lui faisiez confidence d'un de vos goûts ou d'une de vos passions, ne vous a-t-il pas dit: 'Voilà qui est singulier! car cela est en complet désaccord avec toutes vos autres passions et avec votre doctrine?' Et vous répondiez: 'C'est possible, mais c'est ainsi. J'aime cela; je l'aime, probablement à cause même de la violente contradiction qu'y trouve tout mon être' (338).

Baudelaire appreciates Desbordes-Valmore's poetry *in spite of* himself, or against his better judgement, and it is only thanks to his penchant for contradiction that he feels drawn to the poet's natural expressivity. He positions himself as her polar opposite, but it is this clash of style, aesthetics, and theme that draws Baudelaire to the poet's work.

For it is indeed the "naturalness" of Desbordes-Valmore's poetic voice that stands out the most to Baudelaire. He refers to her "cri" and her "soupir naturel" that engulf readers in a state of sudden, unexpected beauty (339). However, Baudelaire also explicitly references the formal errors that readers must tolerate, since these errors charmingly accompany such a "natural" poetic talent. He alludes to Desbordes-Valmore's lack of formal training, writing, "si vous prenez le temps de remarquer tout ce qui lui manque de ce qui peut s'acquérir par le travail, sa grandeur se trouvera singulièrement diminuée" (339). As Paliyenko remarks, Baudelaire's description "illustrates the patriarchal making of a *femme poète,* above all, a woman whose poetic expression is captivating in its sincerity but lacking in the formal perfection displayed by her male counterparts" (Paliyenko 265). It is this very intellectual elitism against which Desbordes-Valmore spoke out during her career, and particularly in the

[44] Gretchen Schultz is one of the few scholars to question the sincerity of Baudelaire's essay on Desbordes-Valmore, citing his correspondence with his editor as evidence. "Baudelaire's appreciation for Desbordes-Valmore's poetry thus appears to be only an insincere exception to his abhorrence for and dismissal of women writers" (*The Gendered Lyric* 48).

poem "Jeune homme irrité." As I demonstrated in my analysis of "Jeune homme irrité," it is naïve to presume that Desbordes-Valmore's formal poetics are unmeditated, the product of a purely "natural" process of poetic production. As she clearly expresses in the poem, with its measured rhyme scheme and calculated rhythm, women must be given equal chance to develop their talents precisely because poetry is not solely the product of innate talent; even if it is a gift, it is a gift that must be perfected.

Moreover, in the third paragraph, Baudelaire situates Desbordes-Valmore among her *consoeurs* – other women authors, or as Baudelaire refers to them, "monstruosité[s]" (339). Baudelaire pauses in his lauding of Desbordes-Valmore to express his utter disdain for *la femme auteur.* His diatribe is useful, however, in that it demonstrates why exactly Desbordes-Valmore is received so differently from other women authors and poets. For Baudelaire, the disgust that the *femme auteur* inspires derives from her failed impersonation of "masculine" talent: "Nous avons connu la femme auteur philanthrope, la prêtresse systématique de l'amour, la poëtesse républicaine, la poëtesse de l'avenir, fouriériste ou saint-simonienne; et nos yeux, amoureux du beau, n'ont jamais pu s'accoutumer à toutes ces laideurs compassées, […] à tous ces sacrilèges pastiches de l'esprit mâle" (339). Note the heavily politicized nature of Baudelaire's categories: women authors who attempt to exist in the public sphere as something other than self-effacingly feminine are perceived as automatically transgressing onto male territory (Johnson 103). Women authors and poets are first and foremost frauds, since for a woman, to write is to assume a man's position and his power. This misogynistic argumentation is consistent with that of Molènes in his 1842 article on women poets. Unlike Molènes's, however, Baudelaire separates Desbordes-Valmore from other nineteenth-century women poets.

For Baudelaire, Desbordes-Valmore's talent is so startlingly different from that of other women poets precisely because "[elle] fut femme, fut toujours femme et ne fut absolument que femme" (340). He emphasizes that in Desbordes-Valmore's poetry, she made no attempts at dissimulation, or rather simulation of a male poetic talent. For Baudelaire, it is through an "expression poétique" as well as a careful choice of subject matter that Desbordes-Valmore succeeds in representing the purely feminine: "Qu'elle chante les langueurs du désir dans la jeune fille, la désolation morne d'un Ariane abandonnée ou les chauds enthousiasmes de la charité maternelle, son chant garde toujours l'accent délicieux de la femme; pas d'emprunt, pas d'ornement factice, rien que *l'éternel féminin*" (340). Baudelaire even compares Desbordes-Valmore's poetry to that of Victor Hugo, arguing that no other poet captures the essence of maternal love better than Desbordes-Valmore. This emphasis on the maternal is crucial. As Paliyenko proposes, because Desbordes-Valmore's writing embodies female nature in a maternal manner, it does not "threaten the cultural identification of a woman's psychology with her reproductive biology" (Paliyenko 265). Barbara Johnson argues that Desbordes-Valmore's positive treatment among such

misogynist discourse is the result of "her total avoidance of monstrosity, her willingness not to impinge on male territory in any way" (104).

Part of Desbordes-Valmore's unthreatening nature comes from the totally "natural" source of her poetry. Baudelaire describes her poetic production as unconscious an involuntary: "Elle trace des merveilles avec l'insouciance qui préside aux billets destinés à la boîte aux lettres" (341). In other words, we might say that Baudelaire treats Desbordes-Valmore differently from her *consoeurs* because she is a fluke in the system. Not only, according to Baudelaire, does she avoid provocative subjects, but the poetry that she does produce surges forward involuntarily; she is a poet in spite of herself. At the time that Baudelaire wrote his essay on Desbordes-Valmore, her final volume *Poésies inédites* had just been posthumously published in 1860. Baudelaire's remarks on this final publication reveal the darker underside of his cloyingly positive praise of Desbordes-Valmore's natural talent. He writes that on her deathbed, Desbordes-Valmore, "qui ne savait pas se taire, parce qu'elle était toujours pleine de cris et de chants qui voulaient s'épancher, préparait encore un volume" (342). The verb choice of *savoir* suggests a parallel between Desbordes-Valmore's lack of formal education, which Baudelaire indeed referenced earlier in the essay, and her irrepressible poetic voice. Indeed, in the final paragraph of his essay, Baudelaire likens reading Debsordes-Valmore's poetry to wandering around a simple English garden and being struck by unexpected emotion – hysterical emotion, to be precise. The wanderer "sent monter à ses yeux les pleurs de l'hystérie, *hysterical tears*" (343). The decision to characterize such emotion as hysterical serves as a further invalidation of Desbordes-Valmore's poetry, since it in a manner pathologizes her unnaturally natural poetic talent.

What Baudelaire overlooks, however, is the fact that Desbordes-Valmore is also capable of irony. We must not forget that before Desbordes-Valmore was a poet, she was a theater actress, an expert performer. To be an actress in nineteenth-century France was to toe the line between sincerity and exaggeration. The role of the actress was not only to perform the work of the playwright, but to ignite the passion of the viewers. As Berlanstein writes in her study of the women of theater in France,

> Public opinion of the first half of the nineteenth century scrutinized the actress as never before for signs of a womanly heart within her seductive body. […] Even as the bourgeois ruling class insisted on its moral integrity, the public expected that theater women would inflame men's senses and challenge their reasoning powers. (103)

Actresses were thus forced to wear many different masks: to unthreateningly embody an innocent femininity while also taking advantage of the persuasive powers that such a performance of naïve femininity could afford them. Is Desbordes-Valmore's performance of femininity so convincingly perfect that it is in fact ironic? If we look back at Desbordes-Valmore's response to Lamartine's poem dedicated to her, we could consider that Desbordes-Valmore is performing

a particular role. In this case, the role is that of humble poet who is totally unworthy of the attention that Lamartine has bestowed upon her.

> Mais dans ces chants que ma mémoire
> Et mon cœur s'apprennent tout bas,
> Doux à lire, plus doux à croire,
> Oh ! n'as-tu pas dit le mot gloire ?
> Et ce mot, je ne l'entends pas ;
>
> Car je suis une faible femme ;
> Je n'ai su qu'aimer et souffrir ;
> Ma pauvre lyre, c'est mon ame,
> Et toi seul découvres la flamme
> D'une lampe qui va mourir.

She plays the role so well that her sincerity goes unquestioned, but we as readers should nevertheless question her proximity to the ideas she expresses.

As for Verlaine's essay on Desbordes-Valmore, it is better known that she occupies the position of the only woman poet in his *Poètes maudits* (1884). What is it about Desbordes-Valmore and her poetry that inspired Verlaine to place her amongst contemporaries such as Rimbaud and Mallarmé? Christine Planté explains that even at the time when *Poètes maudits* was published, her presence in the essay collection was somewhat puzzling: not only is she the only woman, she is also the only Romantic poet, and the most chronologically distant from the other highlighted authors ("Verlaine et Desbordes-Valmore" 21).

Although he does begin the essay by remarking on Desbordes-Valmore's unmerited obscurity and distances her from other women poets of the time (Louise Collet, Amable Tastu, Anaïs Ségalas, whom he refers to as "bas-bleus sans importance" (55)), Verlaine takes a very different attitude towards Desbordes-Valmore than does Baudelaire. The essay proves to be a detailed analysis of her poetry rather than a semi-critical meditation on her gender. He cites large excerpts of several poems, including "Une lettre de femme" in its entirety, calling it divine (59). Like Baudelaire, however, Verlaine still emphasizes Desbordes-Valmore's femininity above all. All the passion and "émotion presque excessive" (58) of her poetry stems from her pure, unadulterated femininity.

Indeed, in the conclusion of the essay, Verlaine compares Desbordes-Valmore to three other women: "Marceline Desbordes-Valmore est tout bonnement, – avec George Sand, si différente, dure, non sans des indulgences charmantes, de haut bon sens, de fière et pour ainsi dire de mâle allure – la seule femme de génie et de talent de ce siècle et de tous les siècles en compagnie de Sapho peut-être, et de Sainte Thérèse" (76). The most celebrated woman author of the nineteenth century, the ancient Greek poetess of female homoeroticism, and the sixteenth-century Spanish saint: according to Verlaine, these three

women share with Desbordes-Valmore the gift of genius. The comparison with George Sand is perhaps unsurprising, considering that Sand was arguably one of the most successful authors of her time, regardless of gender. In 1884, at the time of the essay's publication, Sand had also experiencing a resurgence in popularity following her death in 1876. It is interesting, though, that Verlaine differentiates Desbordes-Valmore from Sand precisely due to their differing gendered states of being. He states that Sand's state of being was more male than female, and the adjectives that he uses to describe Sand ("dure", "de haut bon sens", "fière") differ starkly from the picture he paints of Desbordes-Valmore in his essay ("cette adorablement douce femme" (60), "la jeune fille", "l'inquiète" (62)). It is almost as if, contrary to Sand's forays into masculinity, Desbordes-Valmore's genius stands out in its total embracing of sentiment and femininity; although quite different, both women should both be considered geniuses in their own ways. The comparison with Sappho is similarly straightforward at the outset; she was, after all, one of the greatest lyric poets in history. When read in conjunction with Verlaine's meditation on Desbordes-Valmore's exploration of female friendship, however, the comparison to the ancient Greek poet takes on significance relating to Desbordes-Valmore's privileging of female bonds and other homosocial relationships.

Verlaine also compliments Desbordes-Valmore on her usage of hendecasyllabic verses: "le premier d'entre les poètes de ce temps, employé avec le plus grand bonheur des rythmes inusités, celui de onze pieds entre autres, très artiste sans *trop* le savoir et ce fut tant mieux" (71). Although the assumption that Desbordes-Valmore's poetic talent is the result of chance versus meditated decision is still present ("artiste sans *trop* le savoir"), Verlaine's privileging of her metric choices is nonetheless significant. As Gretchen Schultz has demonstrated, Verlaine's hendecasyllabic poems "signal his debt to Desbordes-Valmore in his exploration of the rhythmic and subjective possibilities of poetic language": he used the eleven-syllable line to write about homosexuality (219). In fact, the very first poem in which Verlaine employs hendecasyllabic verse is his "Arriette oubliée IV" appearing in *Romances sans paroles* in 1874. In her article "Verlaine et Desbordes-Valmore," Christine Planté dissects Verlaine's poetic debt to Desbordes-Valmore and analyzes his "Ariette IV" in terms of the "souvenirs textuels" – personal references, metric and lexical choices – that point towards an affinity to the *poète maudite* (29).

Verlaine also is one of the only critics to write about Desbordes-Valmore's poems on friendship, and particularly friendship between women, by citing excerpts of "Les deux amours" and "Les deux amitiés." Although certain critics have indeed intimated at the possibility of a lesbian relationship between Desbordes-Valmore and her childhood friend Albertine, who passed away in 1819 at the age of 32 (Ambrière 234), I prefer to consider these particular readings of Desbordes-Valmore as merely another way in which we can understand how her poetry has the power to speak beyond the heteronormative constraints by which she has often been bound. In one of the notes of his edited anthology of

Desbordes-Valmore's poetry, Yves Bonnefoy cites a personal note written by Desbordes-Valmore in which she recounts a dream during which Albertine appeared to her. The note dates from May 21, 1831:

> Ses yeux, où je regardais alors, curieuse et avec émotion, brillaient d'une clarté singulière et s'agitaient comme pour parler. Elle me conduisait pour me faire panser le cou, où j'avais une blessure ouverte, mais ce qu'on me donna et que j'y appliquai avec indolence, bien que je sentisse des douleurs et des élancements cruels, ne faisait qu'ouvrir cette blessure, à travers laquelle je croyais voir jusqu'au fond de mon cœur. […] Et j'ai senti les lèvres d'Albertine s'attacher longtemps avec une pitié passionnée sur les miennes. Alors j'ai eu un peu de frayeur, mais je ne bougeais pas, dans la crainte d'affliger cette chère ombre. (Pougin 21-22)[45]

Bonnefoy warns against readings of the letter that would lead to interpretations of Desbordes-Valmore's sexuality, referencing the poem "Mal du pays" in particular (257). "Mal du pays," first appearing in *Les Pleurs* (1833), is a passionate mourning of Albertine. In the poem, Desbordes-Valmore juxtaposes images of birth and death to underline her longing for her lost friend, as well as a certain nostalgia for lost innocence:

> Je veux aller mourir aux lieux où je suis née;
> Le tombeau d'Albertine est près de mon berceau;
> Je veux aller retrouver son ombre abandonnée;
> Je veux un même lit près du même ruisseau.

The homesickness that Desbordes-Valmore conveys is rooted both in the place and in the person that represented for the poet her years of innocence and of love. She deeply laments the present, remarking, "J'ai soif de sommeil, d'innocence, / D'amour!." We might also note the echoing evocations of Albertine's "ombre" that appear in both "Mal du pays" and Desbordes-Valmore's 1831 dream. Moreover, in the last stanza of "Mal du pays," Desbordes-Valmore engages a similar image of an open wound, perhaps to suggest the vulnerability that accompanies such a raw opening up of oneself. Whereas in the 1831 dream she wrote of a "blessure ouverte" on her neck, it is Desbordes-Valmore's heart in the last stanza of "Mal du pays" that is laid bare:

> Viens encore, viens! J'ai tant de choses à te dire!
> Ce qu'on t'a fait souffrir, je le sais! J'ai souffert.
> Ô ma plus que sœur! viens: ce que je n'ose écrire,
> Viens le voir palpiter dans mon cœur entr'ouvert!

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[45] This short text can be found in a notebook conserved at the Bibliothèque Marceline Desbordes-Valmore in Douai (Planté, "Un rêve étrange," 20). Arthur Pougin, the editor of the 1898 *Jeunesse de Mme Debsordes-Valmore d'après des documents nouveaux* calls the texte "une note très curieuse" that he found "dans un album où elle traçait ses pensées, les esquisses de ses poésies, où elle réunissait tous les vestiges de sa vie passé" (Pougin 20).

Bonnefoy singles out the penultimate line of the poem in particular to warn against readings that would speculate about Desbordes-Valmore's sexuality (257), but I would consider such readings to be not as opportunistic as they are exploratory. Instead, they represent the different ways that we can read Desbordes-Valmore's poetry so that its modes of cultural circulation continue to multiply beyond the limited representation of the poet as the *Mater dolorosa* of nineteenth-century French poetry. Part of Desbordes-Valmore's poetic skill was to produce texts available for and open to multiple readings, multiple ways of interpreting their forms of address. Yet she did this somehow very quietly, so that people did not have to notice her openness to non-normative forms of relationality the way they did with Sand.

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EPILOGUE

In *Les Œuvres bâtardes* I have explored the ways that three differently-situated women artists experienced gendered forms of discrimination and overcame these forms of discrimination through various tactics, be it by means of the adoption of alternate authorial personas, the performance of masculinity or femininity, or the bastardization of traditional generic forms. Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, for example, was extremely sensitive to the judgment of her publics and adapted not only her work, but also her projected identity accordingly. The reappropriation of her work in the context of gender and sexuality studies today attests to the communicative power of her poetry to resonate with diverse communities and in varied fields of study. One of the facets of women's authorship that I have explored is the role that the concept of "celebrity" played for these three artists. Sand, Girardin, and Desbordes-Valmore all thought critically and creatively about the ways that gender related to the forms of celebrity that they achieved. Public opinion is crucial when building or deconstructing a reputation, and each author that I have studied carved a space for herself in the often unaccommodating community of the nineteenth-century French literary, journalistic, and poetic landscapes.

George Sand's reaction to the negative public reception of *Lélia* and her subsequent rewriting of the novel demonstrate an artist's coming-to-terms with a misalignment of personal and social modes of understanding. My analysis of the *Lélia* scandal does not seek to privilege one version of the text over the other, but rather to shed light on the cultural underworkings that motivated the production of each unique work. In the decades following the publication of *Lélia*, Sand's career and celebrity only continued to grow as she explored different genres of self and literary expression, from her shift into political commentary with her socialist novels, to her highly successful *romans champêtres* series, to her transformation into the *bonne dame de Nohant.* Sand's treatment of femininity in her works does vary drastically from phase to phase of her career, and even from work to work, yet the critique of the social constructions of women and the expectations that such constructions entail remains a thematic constant. From her earliest publications (such as *Indiana* and *Lélia*) all the way through the Second Empire (*Elle et Lui*), Sand's creation of atypical female characters, her careful analysis of amorous, familial, and social relationships between men and women, and her formal experimentation with narrative voice, all point to an effort to fight for the inclusion of women in literature.

Delphine de Girardin was born into a very different *milieu* – as the daughter of a literary celebrity, she had privileged access to a rare gift: that of public acceptance. From the young age of 16, she was heralded as the *Muse de la patrie*, Madame de Staël's Corinne in the flesh. And yet, even these public accolades of the young poet's work were not without their dark underpinnings.

The path of the national muse is one that must be followed faithfully, and the moment that Girardin began to stray from that path was the moment that she too opened up her art and her identity to critique. The young, beautiful, precocious Delphine embraced her singular fault, one Lamartine had disdained: "elle riait trop" (Séché 60). As the Vicomte de Launay, Girardin dared to operate in multiple worlds that were reserved for men: journalism, politics, satire, humor. She was the voice of Parisian culture in the 1830s and 1840s, and she used her respected position to boldly comment on all subjects, from the frivolous to the sacrosanct. Girardin's gender-bending exploration of modern life serves as an alternative, inclusive narrative to the one that we are so familiar with as scholars of French literature, and yet this beautifully fragmented *oeuvre* that is the *Courrier de Paris* perfectly complements the canon of works designated to represent Paris, capital of the nineteenth century.

The third artist of *Les Œuvres bâtardes,* Desbordes-Valmore, differed from Sand and Girardin in that she never sought to conceal, however superficially, her status as a woman poet. On the contrary, she used this facet of her identity to her benefit. At a time when the figure of the "woman poet" was first and foremost associated with wholly negative connotations, – she was a sexless, talentless, bastard figure – Desbordes-Valmore enacted an alternative strategy: she not only embraced her femininity, she exaggerated it, and simultaneously quietly opened the door to multiple ways of reading the forms of address she put forth in her poems. Adjacent to the tactics of pseudonym-adopting, pants-wearing women authors, Desbordes-Valmore strategized in an equally effective manner. In performing the nineteenth-century understanding of ideal femininity so perfectly, Desbordes-Valmore became a prototype of the French Romantic poetry movement. In reexamining her poetry as I have done in my dissertation, we are able to fully appreciate the formal skills that she employed in her self-fashioning, and recognize her ongoing contributions to poetic studies in gender and sexuality.

This dissertation is a study of many subjects: gender, form, sexuality, feminism; the list goes on. And yet, if I were to designate a theme, a unifying thread, that unites and motivates all the subjects that I treat in *les Œuvres bâtardes*, that thread would be an insistence on inclusivity. This study is one that encourages ongoing inclusivity: in exploring the struggles and successes of these women of letters, we can ensure that their contributions to the canon of French literature are as fully acknowledged as they should be. In a modern world where representation is starting to be rightfully considered as the cornerstone of artistic value and production, it is worthwhile to pay tribute to the women who fought, in their own ways, to pave a path for those who existed outside of the normalized. We can learn from their techniques and their resilience, and to always keep in mind, no matter the obstacle, their determination to *écrire, pourtant.*

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CHAPTER 3: *Ce que je n'ose écrire*: Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Writing Oneself

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