

**GEORGE SAND, SOME ASPECTS OF HER LIFE
AND WRITINGS**

BY

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Aurore Dupin

Psychology Of A Daughter Of Rousseau

In the whole of French literary history, there is, perhaps, no subject of such inexhaustible and modern interest as that of George Sand. Of what use is literary history? It is not only a kind of museum, in which a few masterpieces are preserved for the pleasure of beholders. It is this certainly, but it is still more than this. Fine books are, before anything else, living works. They not only have lived, but they continue to live. They live within us, underneath those ideas which form our conscience and those sentiments which inspire our actions. There is nothing of greater importance for any society than to make an inventory of the ideas and the sentiments which are composing its moral atmosphere every instant that it exists. For every individual this work is the very condition of his dignity. The question is, should we have these ideas and these sentiments, if, in the times before us, there had not been some exceptional individuals who seized them, as it were, in the air and made them viable and durable? These exceptional individuals were capable of thinking more vigorously, of feeling more deeply, and of expressing themselves more forcibly than we are. They bequeathed these ideas and sentiments to us. Literary history is, then, above and beyond all things, the perpetual examination of the conscience of humanity.

There is no need for me to repeat what every one knows, the fact that our epoch is extremely complex, agitated and disturbed. In the midst of this labyrinth in which we are feeling our way with such difficulty, who does not look back regretfully to the days when life was more simple, when it was possible to walk towards a goal, mysterious and unknown though it might be, by straight paths and royal routes?

George Sand wrote for nearly half a century. For fifty times three hundred and sixty-five days, she never let a day pass by without covering more pages than other writers in a month. Her first books shocked people, her early opinions were greeted with storms. From that time forth she rushed head-long into everything new, she welcomed every chimera and passed it on to us with more force and passion in it. Vibrating with every breath, electrified by every storm, she looked up at every cloud behind which she fancied she saw a star shining. The work of another novelist has been called a repertory of human documents. But what a repertory of ideas her work was! She has said what she had to say on nearly every subject; on love, the family, social institutions and on the various forms of government. And with all this she was a woman. Her case is almost unique in the history of letters. It is intensely interesting to study the influence of this woman of genius on the evolution of modern thought.

I shall endeavour to approach my subject conscientiously and with all due respect. I shall study biography where it is indispensable for the complete understanding of works. I shall give a sketch of the original individuals I meet on my path, portraying these only at their point of contact with the life of our authoress, and it seems to me that a gallery in

which we see Sandeau, Sainte-Beuve, Musset, Michel (of Bourges), Liszt, Chopin, Lamennais, Pierre Leroux, Dumas *fils*, Flaubert and many, many others is an incomparable portrait gallery. I shall not attack persons, but I shall discuss ideas and, when necessary, dispute them energetically. We shall, I hope, during our voyage, see many perspectives open out before us.

I have, of course, made use of all the works devoted to George Sand which were of any value for my study, and among others of the two volumes published, under the name of Wladimir Karenine,[1] by a woman belonging to Russian aristocratic society. For the period before 1840, this is the most complete work that has been written. M. Samuel Rocheblave, a clever University professor and the man who knows more than any one about the life and works of George Sand, has been my guide and has helped me greatly with his wise advice. Private collections of documents have also been placed at my service most generously. I am therefore able to supply some hitherto unpublished writings. George Sand published, in all, about a hundred volumes of novels and stories, four volumes of autobiography, and six of correspondence. In spite of all this we are still asked for fresh documents.

[1] WLADIMIR KARENINE: *George Sand, Sa vie et ses aevures*. 2 Vols. Ollendorf.

It is interesting, as a preliminary study, to note the natural gifts, and the first impressions of Aurore Dupin as a child and young girl, and to see how these predetermined the woman and the writer known to us as George Sand.

Lucile-Amandine-Aurore Dupin, legitimate daughter of Maurice Dupin and of Sophie-Victoire Delaborde, was born in Paris, at 15 Rue Meslay, in the neighbourhood of the Temple, on the 1st of July, 1804. I would call attention at once to the special phenomenon which explains the problem of her destiny: I mean by this her heredity, or rather the radical and violent contrast of her maternal and paternal heredity.

By her father she was an aristocrat and related to the reigning houses.

Her ancestor was the King of Poland, Augustus II, the lover of the beautiful Countess Aurora von Koenigsmarck. George Sand's grandfather was Maurice de Saxe. He may have been an adventurer and a *condottiere*, but France owes to him Fontenoy, that brilliant page of her history. All this takes us back to the eighteenth century with its brilliant, gallant, frivolous, artistic and profligate episodes. Maurice de Saxe adored the theatre, either for itself or for the sake of the women connected with it. On his campaign, he took with him a theatrical company which gave a representation the evening before a battle. In this company was a young artiste named Mlle. de Verrieres whose father was a certain M. Rinteau. Maurice de Saxe admired the young actress and a daughter was born of this *liaison*, who was later on recognized by her father and named Marie-Aurore de Saxe. This was George Sand's grandmother. At the age of fifteen the young girl married Comte de Horn, a bastard son of Louis XV. This husband was obliging enough to his wife, who was only his wife in name, to die as soon as possible. She then returned to her mother "the Opera lady." An elderly nobleman, Dupin de Francueil, who had been the

lover of the other Mlle. Verrieres, now fell in love with her and married her. Their son, Maurice Dupin, was the father of our novelist. The astonishing part of this series of adventures is that Marie-Aurore should have been the eminently respectable woman that she was. On her mother's side, though, Aurore Dupin belonged to the people. She was the daughter of Sophie-Victoire Delaborde milliner, the grandchild of a certain bird-seller on the Quai des Oiseaux, who used to keep a public-house, and she was the great-granddaughter of Mere Cloquart.

This double heredity was personified in the two women who shared George Sand's childish affection. We must therefore study the portraits of these two women.

The grandmother was, if not a typical *grande dame*, at least a typical elegant woman of the latter half of the eighteenth century. She was very well educated and refined, thanks to living with the two sisters, Milles. Verrieres, who were accustomed to the best society. She was a good musician and sang delightfully. When she married Dupin de Francueil, her husband was sixty-two, just double her age. But, as she used to say to her granddaughter, "no one was ever old in those days. It was the Revolution that brought old age into the world."

Dupin was a very agreeable man. When younger he had been *too* agreeable, but now he was just sufficiently so to make his wife very happy. He was very lavish in his expenditure and lived like a prince, so that he left Marie-Aurore ruined and poor with about three thousand a year. She was imbued with the ideas of the philosophers and an enemy of the Queen's *coterie*. She was by no means alarmed at the Revolution and was very soon taken prisoner. She was arrested on the 26th of November, 1793, and incarcerated in the *Couvent des Anglaises*, Rue des Fosse's-Saint-Victor, which had been converted into a detention house. On leaving prison she settled down at Nohant, an estate she had recently bought. It was there that her granddaughter remembered her in her early days. She describes her as tall, slender, fair and always very calm. At Nohant she had only her maids and her books for company. When in Paris, she delighted in the society of people of her own station and of her time, people who had the ideas and airs of former days. She continued, in this new century, the shades of thought and the manners and Customs of the old *regime*.

As a set-off to this woman of race and of culture, Aurore's mother represented the ordinary type of the woman of the people. She was small, dark, fiery and violent. She, too, the bird-seller's daughter, had been imprisoned by the Revolution, and strangely enough in the *Couvent des Anglaises* at about the same time as Maurice de Saxe's granddaughter. It was in this way that the fusion of classes was understood under the Terror. She was employed as a *figurante* in a small theatre. This was merely a commencement for her career. At the time when Maurice Dupin met her, she was the mistress of an old general. She already had one child of doubtful parentage. Maurice Dupin, too, had a natural son, named Hippolyte, so that they could not reproach each other. When Maurice Dupin married Sophie-Victoire, a month before the birth of Aurore, he had some difficulty in obtaining his mother's consent. She finally gave in, as she was of an indulgent nature. It is possible that Sophie-Victoire's conduct was irreproachable

during her husband's lifetime, but, after his death, she returned to her former ways. She was nevertheless of religious habits and would not, upon any account, have missed attending Mass. She was quick-tempered, jealous and noisy and, when anything annoyed her, extremely hot-headed. At such times she would shout and storm, so that the only way to silence her was to shout still more loudly. She never bore any malice, though, and wished no harm to those she had insulted. She was of course sentimental, but more passionate than tender, and she quickly forgot those whom she had loved most fondly. There seemed to be gaps in her memory and also in her conscience. She was ignorant, knowing nothing either of literature or of the usages of society. Her *salon* was the landing of her flat and her acquaintances were the neighbours who happened to live next door to her. It is easy to imagine what she thought of the aristocrats who visited her mother-in-law. She was amusing when she joked and made parodies on the women she styled "the old Countesses." She had a great deal of natural wit, a liveliness peculiar to the native of the faubourgs, all the impudence of the street arab, and a veritable talent of mimicry. She was a good housewife, active, industrious and most clever in turning everything to account. With a mere nothing she could improvise a dress or a hat and give it a certain style. She was always most skilful with her fingers, a typical Parisian work-girl, a daughter of the street and a child of the people. In our times she would be styled "a *midinette*."

Such are the two women who shared the affection of Aurore Dupin. Fate had brought them together, but had made them so unlike that they were bound to dislike each other. The childhood of little Aurore served as the lists for their contentions. Their rivalry was the dominating note in the sentimental education of the child.

As long as Maurice Dupin lived, Aurore was always with her parents in their little Parisian dwelling. Maurice Dupin was a brilliant officer, and very brave and jovial. In 1808, Aurore went to him in Madrid, where he was Murat's *aide-de-camp*. She lived in the palace of the Prince of Peace, that vast palace which Murat filled with the splendour of his costumes and the groans caused by his suffering. Like Victor Hugo, who went to the same place at about the same time and under similar conditions, Aurore may have brought back with her

de ses courses lointaines

Comme un vaguefaisceau de lueurs incertaines.

This does not seem probable, though. The return was painful, as they came back worried and ill, and were glad to take refuge at Nohant. They were just beginning to organize their life when Maurice Dupin died suddenly, from an accident when riding, leaving his mother and his wife together.

From this time forth, Aurore was more often with her grandmother at Nohant than with her mother in Paris. Her grandmother undertook the care of her education. Her half-brother, Hippolyte Chatiron, and she received lessons from M. Deschartres, who had educated Maurice Dupin. He was steward and tutor combined, a very authoritative man,

arrogant and a great pedant. He was affectionate, though, and extremely devoted. He was both detestable and touching at the same time, and had a warm heart hidden under a rough exterior. Nohant was in the heart of Berry, and this meant the country and Nature. For Aurore Dupin Nature proved to be an incomparable educator.

There was only one marked trait in the child's character up to this date, and that was a great tendency to reverie. For long hours she would remain alone, motionless, gazing into space. People were anxious about her when they saw her looking so *stupid*, but her mother invariably said: "Do not be alarmed. She is always ruminating about something." Country life, while providing her with fresh air and plenty of exercise, so that her health was magnificent, gave fresh food and another turn to her reveries. Ten years earlier Alphonse de Lamartine had been sent to the country at Milly, and allowed to frequent the little peasant children of the place. Aurore Dupin's existence was now very much the same as that of Lamartine. Nohant is situated in the centre of the Black Valley. The ground is dark and rich; there are narrow, shady paths. It is not a hilly country, and there are wide, peaceful horizons. At all hours of the day and at all seasons of the year, Aurore wandered along the Berry roads with her little playfellows, the farmers' children. There was Marie who tended the flock, Solange who collected leaves, and Liset and Plaisir who minded the pigs. She always knew in what meadow or in what place she would find them. She played with them amongst the hay, climbed the trees and dabbled in the water. She minded the flock with them, and in winter, when the herdsmen talked together, assembled round their fire, she listened to their wonderful stories. These credulous country children had "seen with their own eyes" Georgeon, the evil spirit of the Black Valley. They had also seen will-o'-the-wisps, ghosts, the "white greyhound" and the "Big Beast"! In the evenings, she sat up listening to the stories told by the hemp-weaver. Her fresh young soul was thus impregnated at an early age with the poetry of the country. And it was all the poetry of the country, that which comes from things, such as the freshness of the air and the perfume of the flowers, but also that which is to be found in the simplicity of sentiments and in that candour and surprise face to face with those sights of Nature which have remained the same and have been just as incomprehensible ever since the beginning of the world.

The antagonism of the two mothers increased, though. We will not go into detail with regard to the various episodes, but will only consider the consequences.

The first consequence was that the intelligence of the child became more keen through this duality. Placed as she was, in these two different worlds, between two persons with minds so unlike, and, obliged as she was to go from one to the other, she learnt to understand and appreciate them both, contrasts though they were. She had soon reckoned each of them up, and she saw their weaknesses, their faults, their merits and their advantages.

A second consequence was to increase her sensitiveness. Each time that she left her mother, the separation was heartrending. When she was absent from her, she suffered on account of this absence, and still more because she fancied that she would be forgotten.

She loved her mother, just as she was, and the idea that any one was hostile or despised her caused the child much silent suffering. It was as though she had an ever-open wound.

Another consequence, and by no means the least important one, was to determine in a certain sense the immense power of sympathy within her. For a long time she only felt a sort of awe, when with her reserved and ceremonious grandmother. She felt nearer to her mother, as there was no need to be on ceremony with her. She took a dislike to all those who represented authority, rules and the tyranny of custom. She considered her mother and herself as oppressed individuals. A love for the people sprang up in the heart of the daughter of Sophie-Victoire. She belonged to them through her mother, and she was drawn to them now through the humiliations she underwent. In this little enemy of reverences and of society people, we see the dawn of that instinct which, later on, was to cause her to revolt openly. George Sand was quite right in saying, later on, that it was of no use seeking any intellectual reason as the explanation of her social preferences. Everything in her was due to sentiment. Her socialism was entirely the outcome of her suffering and torments as a child.

Things had to come to a crisis, and the crisis was atrocious. George Sand gives an account of the tragic scene in her *Histoire de ma vie*. Her grandmother had already had one attack of paralysis. She was anxious about Aurore's future, and wished to keep her from the influence of her mother. She therefore decided to employ violent means to this end. She sent for the child to her bedside, and, almost beside herself, in a choking voice, she revealed to her all that she ought to have concealed. She told her of Sophie-Victoire's past, she uttered the fatal word and spoke of the child's mother as a lost woman. With Aurore's extreme sensitiveness, it was horrible to receive such confidences at the age of thirteen. Thirty years later, George Sand describes the anguish of the terrible minute. "It was a nightmare," she says. "I felt choked, and it was as though every word would kill me. The perspiration came out on my face. I wanted to interrupt her, to get up and rush away. I did not want to hear the frightful accusation. I could not move, though; I seemed to be nailed on my knees, and my head seemed to be bowed down by that voice that I heard above me, a voice which seemed to wither me like a storm wind."

It seems extraordinary that a woman, who was in reality so kind-hearted and so wise, should have allowed herself to be carried away like this. Passion has these sudden and unexpected outbursts, and we see here a most significant proof of the atmosphere of passion in which the child had lived, and which gradually insinuated itself within her.

Under these circumstances, Aurore's departure for the convent was a deliverance. Until just recently, there has always been a convent in vogue in France in which it has been considered necessary for girls in good society to be educated. In 1817, *the Couvent des Anglaises* was in vogue, the very convent which had served as a prison for the mother and grandmother of Aurore. The three years she spent there in that "big feminine family, where every one was as kind as God," she considered the most peaceful and happy time of her life. The pages she devotes to them in her *Histoire de ma vie* have all the freshness of an oasis. She describes most lovingly this little world, apart, exclusive and self-sufficing, in which life was so intense.

The house consisted of a number of constructions, and was situated in the neighbourhood given up to convents. There were courtyards and gardens enough to make it seem like a small village. There was also a labyrinth of passages above and underground, just as in one of Anne Radcliffe's novels. There were old walls overgrown with vine and jasmine. The cock could be heard at midnight, just as in the heart of the country, and there was a bell with a silvery tone like a woman's voice. From her little cell, Aurore looked over the tops of the great chestnut trees on to Paris, so that the air so necessary for the lungs of a child accustomed to wanderings in the country was not lacking in her convent home. The pupils had divided themselves into three categories: the *diables*, the good girls, who were the specially pious ones, and the silly ones. Aurore took her place at once among the *diables*. The great exploit of these convent girls consisted in descending into the cellars, during recreation, and in sounding the walls, in order to "deliver the victim." There was supposed to be an unfortunate victim imprisoned and tortured by the good, kindhearted Sisters. Alas! all the *diables* sworn to the task in the *Couvent des Anglaises* never succeeded in finding the victim, so that she must be there still.

Very soon, though, a sudden change-took place in Aurore's soul. It would have been strange had it been otherwise. With so extraordinarily sensitive an organization, the new and totally different surroundings could not fail to make an impression. The cloister, the cemetery, the long services, the words of the ritual, murmured in the dimly-lighted chapel, and the piety that seems to hover in the air in houses where many prayers have been offered up-- all this acted on the young girl. One evening in August, she had gone into the church, which was dimly lighted by the sanctuary lamp. Through the open window came the perfume of honeysuckle and the songs of the birds. There was a charm, a mystery and a solemn calm about everything, such as she had never before experienced. "I do not know what was taking place within me," she said, when describing this, later on, "but I breathed an atmosphere that was indescribably delicious, and I seemed to be breathing it in my very soul. Suddenly, I felt a shock through all my being, a dizziness came over me, and I seemed to be enveloped in a white light. I thought I heard a voice murmuring in my ear: '*Tolle Lege.*' I turned round, and saw that I was quite alone. . . ."

Our modern *psychiatres* would say that she had had an hallucination of hearing, together with olfactory trouble. I prefer saying that she had received the visit of grace. Tears of joy bathed her face and she remained there, sobbing for a long time.

The convent had therefore opened to Aurore another world of sentiment, that of Christian emotion. Her soul was naturally religious, and the dryness of a philosophical education had not been sufficient for it. The convent had now brought her the aliment for which she had instinctively longed. Later on, when her faith, which had never been very enlightened, left her, the sentiment remained. This religiosity, of Christian form, was essential to George Sand.

The convent also rendered her another eminent service. In the *Histoire de ma vie*, George Sand retraces from memory the portraits of several of the Sisters. She tells us of Madame Marie-Xavier, and of her despair at having taken the vows; of Sister Anne-Joseph, who was as kind as an angel and as silly as a goose; of the gentle Marie-Alicia, whose serene

soul looked out of her blue eyes, a mirror of purity, and of the mystical Sister Helene, who had left home in spite of her family, in spite of the supplications and the sobs of her mother and sisters, and who had passed over the body of a child on her way to God. It is like this always. The costumes are the same, the hands are clasped in the same manner, the white bands and the faces look equally pale, but underneath this apparent uniformity what contrasts! It is the inner life which marks the differences so vigorously, and shows up the originality of each one. Aurore gradually discovered the diversity of all these souls and the beauty of each one. She thought of becoming a nun, but her confessor did not advise this, and he was certainly wise. Her grandmother, who had a philosopher's opinion of priests, blamed their fanaticism, and took her little granddaughter away from the convent. Perhaps she felt the need of affection for the few months she had still to live. At any rate, she certainly had this affection. One of the first results of the larger perspicacity which Aurore had acquired at the convent was to make her understand her grandmother at last. She was able now to grasp the complex nature of her relative and to see the delicacy hidden under an appearance of great reserve. She knew now all that she owed to her grandmother, but unfortunately it was one of those discoveries which are made too late.

The eighteen months which Aurore now passed at Nohant, until the death of her grandmother, are very important as regards her psychological biography. She was seventeen years old, and a girl who was eager to live and very emotional. She had first been a child of Nature. Her convent life had taken her away from Nature and accustomed her to falling back on her own thoughts. Nature now took her back once more, and her beloved Nohant feted her return.

"The trees were in flower," she says, "the nightingales were singing, and, in the distance, I could hear the classic, solemn sound of the labourers. My old friends, the big dogs, who had growled at me the evening before, recognized me again and were profuse in their caresses. . . ."

She wanted to see everything again. The things themselves had not changed, but her way of looking at them now was different. During her long, solitary walks every morning, she enjoyed seeing the various landscapes, sometimes melancholy-looking and sometimes delightful. She enjoyed, too, the picturesqueness of the various things she met, the flocks of cattle, the birds taking their flight, and even the sound of the horses' feet splashing in the water. She enjoyed everything, in a kind of voluptuous reverie which was no longer instinctive, but conscious and a trifle morbid.

Added to all this, her reading at this epoch was without any order or method. She read everything voraciously, mixing all the philosophers up together. She read Locke, Condillac, Montesquieu, Bossuet, Pascal, Montaigne, but she kept Rousseau apart from the others. She devoured the books of the moralists and poets, La Bruyere, Pope, Milton, Dante, Virgil, Shakespeare. All this reading was too much for her and excited her brain. She had reserved Chateaubriand's *Rene*, and, on reading that, she was overcome by the sadness which emanates from these distressing pages. She was disgusted with life, and attempted to commit suicide. She tried to drown herself, and only owed her life to the

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