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George Sand and the ideological Reappropriation of the English Gothic Novel in 1830s France

The French critical scene has mostly circumscribed the importance of the English Gothic novel in the French literary context within the historical time frame of the French Revolution until the 1820s.¹ Following the lead of Maurice Lévy's important critical work in 1968, *Le Roman gothique anglais, 1764-1824*², critics have postulated the decline of the genre in France following this threshold date. The French version of the English Gothic, termed 'roman noir', is therefore perceived as giving way to the 'fantastique', an important genre in French literary history.³ The posterity of the gothic novel in France has been viewed mainly in terms of popular literature of doubtful value: the shocking 'romans frénétiques', and the often mediocre imitations of Ann Radcliffe's famous novels, teasingly called 'radcliffades' in Bellin de la Liborlière's 1799 parody, *La Nuit Anglaise*.⁴ The term 'frénétique' was first coined by Charles Nodier in 1821 in order to condemn the new wave of novels seeking to horrify the reader through extreme violence and macabre scenes. This genre, often conflated with the gothic, embodied the worst excesses of the 'roman noir' and was viewed as «un négatif dégradé du romantisme».⁵ The critical devaluation of the gothic genre gathered

¹ See for example C. SETH (ed.), *Imaginaires gothiques aux sources du roman noir français*, Paris 2010 and the special issue on 'Le roman gothique' in Europe, *Revue littéraire mensuelle* 659 (1984).

² Maurice LÉVY, *Le Roman gothique anglais: 1764-1824*, Paris 1995.

³ According to Mellier, «Le roman gothique apparaît historiquement comme le premier courant littéraire à être porteur de nombreux traits essentiels, qui, par la suite, serviront à caractériser le fantastique» (Denis MELLIER, *La Littérature fantastique*, Paris 2000, 18).

⁴ Bellin DE LA LIBORLIÈRE, *La Nuit Anglaise, ou les Aventures de M. Dabaud. Roman comme il y en a trop. Par le R. P. Spectoruini, moine italien*, Toulouse 2006.

⁵ Anthony GLINOER, *La Littérature frénétique*, Paris 2009, 67.

further ground through the numerous 'radcliffades' populating the literary market, considered to be mere entertainment devoid of any serious ideological import. The late onset of Romanticism in the 1830s, together with the drive to safeguard its high cultural status led critics to distance it from the undesirable pejorative connotations of the Gothic. This has led critics to downplay the presence of the Gothic novel in the works of important writers such as Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo and George Sand, and to overlook the ways in which these writers tapped into the genre's rich expressive capabilities and political resonances.

This article seeks to redress this critical situation by examining the ways in which a significant novelist like George Sand actively reappropriated this imported genre in order to explore key ideological issues concerning 1830s France. Far from limiting herself to the popular suspense strategies of the 'radcliffades', aimed towards an un-discerning readership, Sand galvanises the latent ideological potential of the Gothic novel in order to deal with thorny problems, especially in relation to the female condition. An analysis of two of her early novels, *Lélia* (1833) and *Mauprat* (1837) will therefore illustrate Sand's insightful remodelling of the gothic genre in order to criticise the existing state of affairs in France as well as to propose her egalitarian ideal. In *Lélia*, the gothic novel serves as a means to explore the impasses of the female condition within the socio-political context of the July monarchy, whereas in *Mauprat*, the focus is placed on the tripartite revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The English Gothic novel is particularly conducive to the exploration of the female condition, since it places at its centre a persecuted heroine at the threshold of womanhood, who bravely needs to face a number of terrifying ordeals. A number of gothic tropes relating to the heroine's victim status have been read as a literary transposition of an oppressive patriarchal society, which exerted a very real influence on women's fate. William Blackstone's influential treatise, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), compares the law regulating women's rights within marriage to an old inherited gothic castle, obsolete and anachronistic.⁶ Emma Clery interestingly argues that woman's feeble legal status within marriage renders her 'ghostly', thus providing an added dimension to the spectre of the supernatural in Radcliffe's novels, whereas Diana Wallace views contemporary marriage laws as a concrete manifestation of the gothic trope of live burial.⁷ Female authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Dacre and Mary Wollstonecraft made use of the genre to dramatise the constraints experienced by women in their society, but also to reflect on the heroine's

⁶ William BLACKSTONE, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Oxford 1766, 268.

⁷ Emma J. CLERY, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, Cambridge 1995, 126; Diana WALLACE, «“The Haunting Idea”: Female Gothic Metaphors and Feminist Theory», in: D. WALLACE, A. SMITH (eds.), *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, Basingstoke 2009, 26-41.

possibilities. The critic Ellen Moers for instance, comments on the enabling quality of the gothic heroine's travels, sending «maidens on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties».⁸

The gothic novel is also considered to be a literary reaction to a crucial political event which heavily impacted George Sand's outlook and beliefs – the French Revolution. The Marquis de Sade's famous remark in 1800 that the gothic novel was «le fruit indispensable des secousses révolutionnaires dont l'Europe entière se ressentait»⁹ posits a simplistic relation of cause and effect, which is undercut by the number of gothic novels that precede this event. However, as Ronald Paulson points out, gothic novelists fruitfully reappropriated powerful themes relating to the Revolution, such as the figure of the rebel, the overthrow of the old order, the mob's violence and most importantly, the motif of imprisonment, inextricably associated with the Bastille.¹⁰ In 1798, Mary Wollstonecraft ingeniously linked the gender implications of the gothic novel with its Revolutionary associations, through her eponymous heroine's memorable exclamation, «Marriage had bastilled me for life», in *Maria, or the wrongs of woman*.¹¹

These ideological resonances of the gothic genre were very relevant to Sand, who had to live under the strict legal constraints of the 1804 Napoleonic Code, which deprived the married woman of any juridical rights and forbade her from disposing of property.¹² The revolutionary ideals of freedom and equality were therefore still a chimera for French women in Sand's time, and the old gothic castle to which Blackstone compared English law had its French counterpart in the imprisoning strictures of the Code. This legal framework narrowed the options of French women to conjugal domesticity, and precluded outlets to her passion and intelligence – a state of affairs which Sand probes repeatedly in her novels. Throughout her literary career, Sand experiments with literary strategies enabling her heroines to circumvent the limitations imposed by the Code and gain a greater agency. This thematic concern was expressed most keenly in her 1830s novels through the medium of the gothic genre. Female inequality and women's inexistent freedom of choice are thus analysed in *Lélia* (1833) in relation to the case of the intellectual woman, through the gothic modes of excess and transgression. The gothic model also enabled Sand to explore the frustrated ideals

⁸ Ellen MOERS, *Literary Women*, London 1977, 126.

⁹ Donatien Alphonse François de SADE, *Les Crimes de l'amour, nouvelles héroïques et tragiques; précédés d'une idée sur les romans*, Paris 1987, 42.

¹⁰ Ronald PAULSON, *Representations of Revolution, 1789-1820*, New Haven 1983.

¹¹ Mary WOLLSTONECRAFT, *Maria, or, The Wrongs of Woman*, New York 1975, 23.

¹² See article 1124 of the Civil Code: «Les personnes privées de droits juridiques sont les mineurs, les femmes mariées, les criminels et les débiles mentaux», *Code civil des français: éd. originale et seule officielle* <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1061517>> [consulted on the 18th September 2013].

of the Revolution. Her formation as a writer took place in the atmosphere of social upheaval brought about by the 1830 July Revolution and she shared the general disillusion following the defeat of the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Her convictions were reinforced by her presence at the historical 1835 'monster trial' of the 1830 revolutionaries¹³, and in *Mauprat* (1837), Sand reappropriates the gothic model to express her ideals and the obstacles that need to be overcome.

Lélia (1833): the 'excessive' intellectual woman

The figure of the female philosopher, as represented by the eponymous heroine of *Lélia*, occupies an important place in Sand's literary imagination. Sand confesses her «prédilection pour le personnage fier et souffrant de Lélia»¹⁴, whom she finds to be «choquante de réalité».¹⁵ *Lélia* is an independent wandering woman who expresses her profound existential dissatisfaction in long diatribes, lamenting her inability to find an outlet for her intellectual faculties through what Isabelle Naginski calls her «spectaculaire introspection».¹⁶ The philosophical reflections and poetic sensibility of extreme characters were considered a mark of superiority for the 'mal du siècle' heroes of Goethe's *Werther* (1774) and Senancour's *Obermann* (1804). However these same traits were deemed illegitimate and transgressive when applied to female characters. In pursuing the path of intellectual exploration, *Lélia* falls outside of the social configuration of femininity and displays traits which were coded as masculine. Besides, she stubbornly refuses the traditional romantic plot by rejecting the poet Sténio, and therefore breaks radically with the prescribed models of female behaviour sanctioned by the Napoleonic Code. *Lélia*'s «extension outrée de[s] facultés» and her «vie sans règle et sans frein»¹⁷ makes her a troubling figure of subversion. In order to expose the 'excessive' nature of the cerebral woman, Sand resorts to the gothic genre, considered to signify «a writing of excess»¹⁸, and remoulds male and female exemplars of excess and transgression: the gothic antiheroine and the Faustian gothic antihero.

¹³ The government of Louis Philippe gathered the accused leaders of the 1830 insurrection from all over France for a trial in Paris in May 1835. Sand attended one of the sessions of this 'procès monstre'.

¹⁴ See Sand's preface for the 1839 version of the novel, *Lélia: texte de l'édition 1839*, Meylan 1987, 56.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 56.

¹⁶ Isabelle HOOG NAGINSKI, «*Lélia*, ou l'héroïne impossible», *Études littéraires* 35 (2003), 87-106: 89.

¹⁷ George SAND, *Lélia*, in: *Romans 1830*, éd. Marie-Madeleine Fragonard 1991, 455. All subsequent references will be to this edition and are abbreviated as *L.*

¹⁸ Fred BOTTING, *Gothic*, London 1996, 1.

The term 'gothic antiheroine'¹⁹, created by Diane Hoeveler, refers to the strong, excessive, sexual, cruel and subversive woman who offers a striking counterpart to the virtuous gothic heroine. The most noteworthy examples are the femme fatale Signora Laurentini in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and the diabolical Victoria in Charlotte Dacre's lesser known novel, *Zofloya* (1806). Their audacity, pride, excess and sense of initiative has led Hoeveler to describe them as «masculine feminine»²⁰, and such traits are eventually punished through a horrifying death. In her creation of Lélia, Sand transforms this negative model; while her heroine is exempt from the gothic antiheroine's destructive sexual drives, she retains traits that are useful for the independent intellectual woman, namely her subversive power and 'masculine' attributes. Lélia reverses the conventional power balance in her relationship with Sténio, since she adopts a dominant masculine role:

Elle l'entoura de ses bras et le pressa contre elle avec une force surhumaine.
Sténio qui voulait encore lui résister se sentit dominé par cette puissance qui
le glaçait d'effroi [...] Sténio tomba anéanti sur les dalles de la terrasse. (*L*, 419)

However, this power of domination is not merely sexual as in the case of the gothic antiheroine, but symbolises Lélia's quest to appropriate a poetic voice. In a scene where the heroine improvises a melancholic poetic song, Sténio interrupts her, «en lui arrachant la harpe des mains» (*L*, 442), the symbol of the poetic muse. As a female artist, Lélia needs to actively forge her own space within a hostile androcentric intellectual milieu which does not cater for female philosophers. In order to expand her sphere of possibilities, Lélia resorts to the forbidden 'masculine' domain of the mind, the virtues of which had already been extolled by Mary Wollstonecraft.²¹ Lélia's masculinity is emphasised by her choice of costume for a masked ball and by her sister's observation that «dans cette expression fière et froide de votre visage endormi, il y avait je ne sais quoi de masculin et de fort qui m'empêchait presque de vous reconnaître» (*L*, 477). Moreover, Lélia's refusal to conform to the patriarchal marriage plot further breaks with sexual norms, since according to Sténio: «là où il n'y a pas d'amour, il n'y a pas de femme» (*L*, 410). This defiance of social femininity provokes a mingled reaction in the poet; notwithstanding his besotted fascination, he feels «un sentiment d'horreur» towards Lélia, and he construes her image in terms of gothic monstrosity.

¹⁹ Diane HOEVELER, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*, Liverpool 1998, 95.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 31.

²¹ See Andrew ELFENBEIN, «Mary Wollstonecraft and the sexuality of genius», in: C. JOHNSON (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, Cambridge 2002, 228.

At times, he considers her to be «son fléau, son démon, son génie du mal», «un cadavre qui aurait ouvert son cercueil» (L, 411), whereas the deranged monk Magnus, who becomes obsessed with her, sees her as «un monster hideux, une harpie, un spectre» (L, 430). It is telling that similar accusations of female monstrosity have been levelled towards the female artist in France, pejoratively termed 'Bas-bleu' (bluestocking) because of her 'unfeminine' cerebral nature, and scathingly caricatured by Honoré Daumier.

Sand reinforces Lélia's 'masculinisation' by endowing her with traits of the gothic antihero, such as Melmoth, Maturin's cursed wanderer.²² Lélia's excess, «produit par l'abus de la pensée» (L, 450), «cette aspiration brûlante vers une existence impossible» (L, 501), and her desire «de la partie la plus éthérée de notre âme vers l'inconnu» (L, 416) are all reminiscent of the excess and violent metaphysical aspirations of Maturin's satanic antihero. According to Craciun, Melmoth allegorises «the soul's immensity and its desire to transgress all boundaries»²³, while G.R. Thompson describes him as «a lonely self-divided hero embark[ed] on an insane pursuit of the Absolute».²⁴ The anguished roving of Lélia's soul and her desperate quest evoked in the passage below are also suggestive of this archetypal gothic wanderer:

Que d'univers j'ai parcourus dans ces voyages de l'âme! J'ai traversé les steppes blanchies des régions glacées. [...] J'ai, dans l'espace d'une heure, vu le soleil se lever aux rivages de la Grèce et se coucher derrière les montagnes bleues du Nouveau-Monde. (L, 458)

At the same time, *Lélia's* allusions to this metaphysical gothic are inflected by femino-centric concerns. Thus, the borders which Lélia seeks to transcend pertain to those imposed by the Code on the female condition, and the «existence impossible» which she craves for is that of the female intellectual who bypasses the conventional marriage plot.

The issue of Lélia's excess and transgression is further explored through the trope of gothic doubling. The English gothic model often dramatizes a conflict between doubles, two extreme versions of femininity: the highly virtuous and virginal vulnerable heroine, and the passionate gothic antiheroine. Their doubling puts in motion a fierce struggle from which only one of the two can emerge victorious. According to the conventional logic of the gothic mode, it is the gothic antiheroine who needs to be

²² In Charles Maturin's novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*, published in 1820.

²³ Adriana CRACIUN, *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, Cambridge 2003, 118.

²⁴ Gary Richard THOMPSON, «Introduction: Romanticism and the Gothic tradition», in: G.R. THOMPSON (ed.), *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism*, Pullman 1974, 1-10: 2.

eliminated by the end of the novel, in order to purge all traces of female transgression. This scenario of the dark double, exemplified mostly by Emily/ Signora Laurentini in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Lilla/Victoria in *Zofloya*, possesses a rich literary posterity, including the Jane Eyre/Bertha Mason duo in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the female narrator/Rebecca De Winter in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1936)²⁵, and a number of Sand's early heroines. This schema of female doubling enabled Sand to explore the impasses generated by patriarchal binaries, according to which a woman can only be «ménagère ou courtisane»²⁶, as indicated by Proudhon's infamous quote. In *Lélia*, Sand doubles the chaste eponymous heroine with her courtesan sister, Pulchérie. This seemingly binary scheme takes forward the most troubling elements of gothic doubling, namely the unexpected similarities and uneasy slippages of the outwardly opposed female doubles. Lélia and Pulchérie are both figures of excess – one spiritual and the other sexual – and they embody the two types of subversive bodies outlined by Jann Matlock: the hysteric and the prostitute.²⁷ Moreover, the traits of the Radcliffean doubles are redistributed differently by Sand, since Lélia's chastity, instead of indicating conformity to sexual norms, represents a transgressive power. This reversal is accentuated by endowing Pulchérie, the fallen woman, with the virginal heroines' blond hair, and with a number of positive characteristics. Pulchérie is «impitoyable dans son bon sens» (*L*, 477), and is presented as a likeable character whose pragmatism constitutes a valuable form of wisdom: «Je n'ai pas demandé à la vie plus qu'elle ne pouvait me donner. J'ai réduit toutes mes ambitions à savoir jouir de ce qui est» (*L*, 472). This impenitent courtesan refuses to envisage herself as a victim, and seeks to avoid the chains of the female condition by staying outside the confines of marriage.

The ideological implications of this female doubling are made explicit in a long confrontation where the two sisters outline their differing philosophies, thus revealing their «existence problématique comme femme» (*L*, 474). This technique marks Sand's original take on the Radcliffean model, as well as the symbolic dimension of her experimental work. Through this confrontation, Sand challenges the apparently absolute split between body and mind and emphasises the ideological links between the two poles of femininity. In fact the two sisters both experiment actively with the parameters of an independent existence outside of marriage and their encounter takes

²⁵ See Avril HORNER, Sue ZLOSNIK, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination*, New York 1998, 99-127.

²⁶ Pierre-Joseph PROUDHON, «Quelques mots encore sur l'émancipation des femmes», in: *L'Illustration*, 20th January 1849.

²⁷ Jann MATLOCK, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-century France*, New York 1994.

place when their philosophies share a point of convergence: «mes discours ne te font donc plus frémir comme autrefois» (L, 473). Pulchérie's physical debauchery possesses a spiritual dimension and constitutes a «religion du plaisir» (L, 472), whereas Lélia's ascetic mysticism is not exempt of sensuality. Lélia's cerebral libertinism provokes «ces riches extases qui dévorent les cerveaux ascétiques», and an «indicible volupté» (L, 485). The two female figures of debauchery are therefore placed on a comparable level, as parallel explorations of possible identities for the passionate woman.

This uncanny play on the similarities between doubles is pushed to its breaking point through the heroines' transgressive substitution of each other. The literary trope of disguise is thus used to express the mobility and multiplicity of female identity. Pulchérie invites Lélia to don her blue domino costume in order to seek pleasure in the guise of a courtesan, whereas Pulchérie takes advantage of the darkness of the night and the similarity of their voices to replace Lélia in a bed trick with Sténio. This strategy of appropriating the other's identity is similar to that of Victoria in *Zofloya* who disguises herself as her innocent double Lilla in order to seduce Henriquez. Lélia's bed trick troubles identity boundaries in gothic fashion²⁸, since this stratagem enables Pulchérie to become «Lélia elle-même, puisque j'ai possédé le cœur et les sens de Sténio pendant toute une heure» (L, 513). The transgressive and unsettling import of this substitution is indicated by the male characters' reaction: both Henriquez in *Zofloya* and Sténio in *Lélia* end up committing suicide.

At the same time, Sand does not advocate either of the Lélia/Pulchérie options, since both women are marginalised and excluded, and each version of femininity has fallen short of the intended aim. In spite of her sexual emancipation, Pulchérie remains trapped by the dictates of male desire, and her social transgression only serves to attract moral condemnation. *Lélia's* doubled configuration thus crystallises an impasse, since female excess, whatever its form, is destined towards defeat; as Pulchérie indicates: «nous nous sommes mutuellement prêté notre perte» (L, 472). This ideological paradigm is similar to that of *Zofloya*, in which the gothic antiheroine and her ethereal double share the same tragic death in the abyss, thus indicating, as Craciun points out, that «the naturally asexual and domestic woman held up as the alternative ideal is as unnatural as her “degenerate” double».²⁹ In *Lélia* Sand explores the two facets of excess and complexifies the gothic configuration, but she does this in order to explore the impasse of female ventures outside of legitimate spheres.

Sand further innovates on the original gothic model by sparing the immoral woman from the fate of the gothic antiheroine. She thus indicates that in spite of Pulchérie's

²⁸ On the notion of boundaries in the gothic novel, see Fred BOTTING, *Gothic*, London 1996.

²⁹ CRACIUN, *op. cit.*, 134.

fornication, her role as courtesan fits within the socially tolerated niche of utilitarian sexuality, and is therefore more acceptable than Lélia, who is confronted with the non-space of the female philosopher. Sand therefore lets the courtesan Pulchérie survive the tale, whereas the sexually chaste Lélia is killed at the end of the novel. This punitive gothic ending indicates that it is the female intellectual's radicalism and her questioning of women's essentially maternal destiny that is the true social transgression to be purged, and not sexual impurity. In a scene which is highly resonant of Lewis' *The Monk*, the demented monk Magnus strangles Lélia with his rosary beads, thus representing patriarchy's symbolic political suppression of the female voice.³⁰ Sand thus inflects female transgression differently in order to pass a criticism on the censorship of the female artist, but this dystopian ending indicates the limits of Sand's experiment, since she is still trapped in providing a punitive ending for her gothic antiheroine. This 'inevitable' defeat of female transgression indicates a persistent residue of the gothic heritage which Sand is still unable to circumvent, and which serves as a political criticism of her contemporary situation.

Mauprat: the revolutionary ideal in action

The political dimension of Sand's novels becomes more pronounced in *Mauprat* (1837). This novel, set in prerevolutionary France, deals with the story of two cousins of the same age, Bernard and Edmée Mauprat. Bernard is an orphan who falls under the dependence of the evil branch of the family in the castle of Roche-Mauprat, whereas Edmée is raised by the more enlightened branch. When they meet, Bernard falls in love with his cousin, who urges him to educate himself to get rid of the negative influence of his upbringing and become worthy of her love. *Mauprat* enacts the difficult transition from feudal tyranny to an Enlightened state characterised by the ideals of the French Revolution, and the tension between the two regimes has been read in the symbolism of the novel's two antithetical castles³¹: the gothic castle of Roche-Mauprat, and the castle of Sainte-Sévère, which stands for a progressive philosophy under the auspices of Rousseau. Jean-Pierre Lacassagne considers the Roche-Mauprat's affiliation to the gothic model to indicate its symbolism of «l'obsédante présence du mal», in line with the conventional association of the gothic castle with the evils of the Ancien Régime.³² The Mauprats 'Coupe-Jarrets' who inhabit this castle embody the most despicable aspects of the old order – the depraved aristocracy and

³⁰ This explicit affiliation with Lewis' novel combines the episode of the assassination of Antonia, the object of Ambrosio's lust, and that of the strangling of Elvira.

³¹ See Béatrice DIDIER, *George Sand écrivain: «un grand fleuve d'Amérique»*, Paris 1998, 183.

³² See Jean-Pierre Lacassagne's introduction in: George SAND, *Mauprat*, Paris 1981, 20.

the hypocritical clergy – who also constitute the gothic villains of choice. The Mauprat fallen nobles resort to plundering and banditry, spreading fear wherever they go, and the most contemptible member of the family, Jean Mauprat, becomes a scheming Trappist monk worthy of the novels of Lewis and Maturin. The function of the gothic model therefore seems to be that of representing the obstacles needing to be overcome in order to usher in a new age governed by the revolutionary ideals. Critics have read the gothic as a negative model to be transcended through Sand's idealism; Lacassagne evokes Sand's «magistrale déconstruction» of the roman noir, whereas Naginski similarly argues that Sand transforms the 'roman noir' into a 'roman blanc'.³³ The destruction of the gothic castle which opens the novel seems to reinforce this interpretation. However, we would like to nuance this reading by arguing that Sand's remodeling of the gothic's revolutionary import goes beyond a representation of gothic evils to be vanquished. In this progressive and Rousseauist novel, Sand also uses the gothic as an enabling tool to reach her revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, by showing the active ways in which her protagonists negotiate a number of ordeals. She focuses particularly on the struggle for equality between her two formidable characters, Edmée and Bernard, and her strong heroine's quest for liberty. The powerful motif of gothic imprisonment is thus used to represent obstacles to liberty, but liberty is conceived of as an emancipation which goes beyond an escape from imprisonment. Moreover, Sand redistributes the characteristics of the gothic hero and heroine in order to place her two Mauprat protagonists on an equal footing. Finally, the utopian ending of the novel, which brings to mind the happy endings of Radcliffe's gothic novels, deserves a closer look, in order to evaluate the extent to which the revolutionary ideals are fulfilled.

Liberty: the trials of gothic imprisonment

The quest for freedom looms large in this novel; it permeates the concerns of the characters inhabiting this pre-revolutionary society, and the backdrop of the American war of Independence has a key formative impact on the protagonist Bernard. Sand however provides this theme with a more individual inflection, through the heroine's affirmation of the freedom of marriage choice and freedom of action. This assertion emerges most powerfully in the way in which Edmée responds to gothic trials. Her first important formative trial is that of imprisonment, in a sequence marking the first encounter of the two protagonists at the age of seventeen. Edmée loses her way in the

³³ Jean-Pierre LACASSAGNE, *op. cit.*, Isabelle HOOG NAGINSKI, *George Sand, l'écriture ou la vie*, Paris 1999, 234.

forest during a stormy night and falls straight into a trap that leads her to the hall of orgies in the Roche-Mauprat. She is thus in an extremely vulnerable situation, and this «première souffrance de sa vie»³⁴ at the threshold of adulthood constitutes her first test as a gothic heroine. The strategies adopted by gothic heroines are usually limited: resistance to oppression, flight or fainting at key moments, and they usually need to be rescued by the hero in the nick of time. Edmée however, seeks to negotiate her ordeal in more active ways. Bernard immediately notices the difference between this intrepid woman in her riding habit, and the «victimes stupides» (*M*, 90) who usually cross the prison's threshold, since her confident demeanour imposes his respect. Moreover this imprisoning situation brings to the fore Edmée's unsuspected strength and inner resources, as she takes the initiative to change the power balance of gothic imprisonment. Edmée possesses a combative spirit in the manner of the Mauprat, and she actively seeks to preserve not only her dignity, which is the foremost concern of the typical gothic heroine, but also her agency and freedom of action. Equipped with her riding whip, she manages to get hold of Bernard's knife, thus gaining access to masculine weapons and the power associated with them. However her greatest resource is the ingenious way in which she manipulates the situation, by deploying a whole arsenal of persuasive techniques to transform Bernard from potential persecutor into her liberator, and to exert a positive influence on him. Bernard describes their encounter as an intense duel, in which «la victoire fut à elle» (*M*, 105).

Moreover, the sequence of flight from the gothic castle demonstrates Edmée's psychic strength, since she not only saves herself but also Bernard, exclaiming «Je ne te laisserai pas ici, s'écria-t-elle, dussé-je y mourir» (*M*, 106). We later learn that she thus spared him from a horrible murder, since Jean Mauprat planned to poison him that same night. This figure of the heroine liberator is an innovative aspect in Sandian gothic, which she elaborates further in later novels such as *Consuelo* (1842) and *Nanon* (1872). However Edmée needs to face further tests during her escape. In an underground cave linking the castle to the forest – a gothic space par excellence – Bernard relapses into the role of persecutor and threatens to rape Edmée. Faced with this superlative peril, Edmée once more takes the initiative, by stealing Bernard's knife and threatening to kill herself rather than give in. In spite of her bravery, Edmée is still cornered into taking an oath: «Je vous jure de n'être à personne avant d'être à vous» (*M*, 108). The forced oath is one of the traditional persecutions of gothic heroines, who are coerced into becoming nuns, entering a forced marriage, or, as in the case of Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, signing a contract ceding her property to the villain Montoni.

³⁴ George SAND, *Mauprat*, Paris 1981, 95. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are abbreviated as *M*.

At the same time, Edmée stands up to her oppressor and demonstrates her cunning by subtly changing the wording of her promise and assertively demands that it be kept a secret. She thus safeguards a limited freedom of action, even though the only ways out entail desperate measures: «par la porte du couvent ou par celle du cimetière» (*M*, 195).

This forced contract, a gothic «transaction monstrueuse» (*M*, 185) severely restricts Edmée's freedom. As Martine Reid points out, it seems to prefigure the «position paradoxale» of the married woman – elevated on a moral pedestal but deprived of liberty – which Edmée understands particularly well.³⁵ The contractual rights that Bernard tries to assume over her are similar to those of a husband, and Edmée complains that «depuis qu'il a mis le pied ici, je n'ai pas eu un instant de liberté», thus making her «prisonnière dans ma chambre» (*M*, 185). Edmée fiercely refuses to give in, insisting that Bernard should give her back «[s]a liberté et renoncer à des droits barbares» (*M*, 236). Sand shows the unsuitability of a domestic model of male domination and female submission for her two characters endowed with an equally passionate temperament. In fact Edmée declares that: «par la raison que je suis une Mauprat et que j'ai un inflexible orgueil, je ne souffrirai jamais la tyrannie de l'homme, pas plus la violence d'un amant que le soufflet d'un mari» (*M*, 189). Bernard's amorous tyranny gives rise to a «position qui n'est pas tenable» (*M*, 185), and this impasse is only broken by Bernard's six-year departure.

During this period, Edmée undergoes another imprisoning test, but this time it is entirely voluntary. Within the confines of the austere and isolated Château Sainte-Sévère, Edmée expends her energy in feminine occupations like tapestry, which she calls «les amusements de la captivité» (*M*, 277). The topographical opposition between the Roche-Mauprat and Sainte-Sévère, made much of by critics, is therefore undercut by the two castles' analogous imprisoning function. Through the motif of voluntary imprisonment, Sand remodels the traditional gothic trope in order to explore a freedom which goes beyond an escape from physical restraints. Edmée thus exerts the freedom of putting oneself to the test in a bid to exert control over the imprisoning structures that govern women's destiny. The trope of live imprisonment, which Kosofsky Sedgwick places at the heart of the gothic genre³⁶, is thus used by Sand not only to emphasise women's restricted mobility, but also as an enabling strategy adopted by her heroines in order to emerge stronger and gain further agency. Edmée's voluntary imprisonment transforms her, and she gains an inner liberty through self-control: «elle avait vaincu son caractère d'une manière héroïque» (*M*, 277). However the process also turns out to be an extremely trying ordeal: «elle avait fait plus que dompter son

³⁵ Martine REID, «*Mauprat*: mariage et maternité chez Sand», *Romantisme* 76 (1992), 43-59: 46.

³⁶ Eve KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, London 1986, 37-96.

caractère, elle avait changé jusqu'à la circulation de son sang» (*M*, 277). Even though she attains inner freedom, she still hesitates to enter into the marriage contract, since it sets up unequal roles for two characters that are mirror images of each other. However, Sand seeks to redress this situation in the fictional world by providing her two protagonists with gender equality in terms of gothic roles. She thus provides Bernard and Edmée with similar gothic characteristics and formative experiences which emphasise an equality of mettle that transcends gender discriminations.

Equality: the gothic hero and heroine

The traditional gender roles of the gothic novel are actively challenged by Sand in *Mauprat*. The old Bernard as narrator comes across as a strong, virile character. However the depiction of his unhappy childhood as an orphan also places him in the position of the victimised gothic heroine. In a terrifying episode worthy of the nightmarish tradition of Lewis and Maturin, the young Bernard is kidnapped at night by his tyrannical grandfather and forcefully introduced in the gothic world of the Roche-Mauprat. His ill treatment at the hands of his cruel uncles is traditionally the gothic heroine's lot. Thus, if Edmée laments that her position as a wife would be that of a slave, Bernard has also experienced slavery and captivity within the Roche-Mauprat. On the other hand Edmée's apparently idyllic childhood, under the benign supervision of her father Saint Hubert, resembles that of Radcliffe's heroine Emily with her father St Aubert, and the similarity in names suggests an intended allusion to the gothic model.³⁷ However, the spectre of female victimisation still looms large, since the suspicious death by poisoning of Edmée's mother leaves the heroine without a female model. Moreover, it is through a similar poisoning by the same hand that Bernard becomes an orphan, thus putting the hero and heroine in an equally vulnerable position. In his adult phase, Bernard continues to be characterised by a number of the gothic heroine's traits. Like Vivaldi in *The Italian*, Bernard admits to being highly impressionable, having «l'imagination facile à exalter» (*M*, 217). When he believes to have seen the ghost of his uncle Jean in a bedroom in the Roche-Mauprat, he faints in terror, thus indicating that he is not «inaccessible à la peur des choses surnaturelles» (*M*, 295). On the other hand, in spite of a number of scenes where Edmée is scared and vulnerable, the heroine takes on a number of masculine roles from the gothic tradition. We have already mentioned her role of rescuer at the Roche-Mauprat. Bernard emphasises her «humeur guerroyante» (*M*, 337) and her «hardiesse virile» (*M*, 136), and her whip is an apt symbol of her Mauprat masculine aggressiveness.

³⁷ A further resemblance is the name of Edmée's tutor, the abbé Aubert.

While this redistribution of gendered gothic roles serves to put the two Mauprat protagonists on a more egalitarian plane, the comparable nature of their gothic trials emphasises their parallel evolution. Thus Edmée's gothic imprisonment at the Roche-Mauprat constitutes an equally formative experience for the hero, who needs to overcome the effects of his 'gothic' upbringing. The castle's siege by the constabulary is an outward symbol of his inner struggle: «au milieu du tumulte qui se faisait au dedans et au dehors de moi» (*M*, 102). Schedoni's tortured hesitations when confronted with the task of killing Ellena in *The Italian* take on a more profound transformative dimension in Bernard's case. This potential villain, the «brigand farouche de la Roche-Mauprat» (*M*, 100) needs to come to terms with the feelings that Edmée provokes in him, and this step constitutes the beginning of a radical transformation.

In addition, Bernard and Edmée's gothic ordeals uncannily mirror and double each other. Edmée is not the only one to have gone astray in a terrifying nocturnal scene. Following a chilling confrontation with the 'sorcerer' Patience, during which the young Bernard learns «ce que c'est que d'être une fois la victime» (*M*, 73), he spends the night wandering frenetically, «dans des angoisses impossibles à décrire» (*M*, 76). Moreover, Edmée's captivity in the Roche-Mauprat finds its counterpart in Bernard's forced stay at Sainte-Sévère, a supposedly opposite ideological pole. Constrained by the normative behavioural code of polite society, Bernard lives «comme un lion mis en cage», and laments «l'espèce de captivité où [il était] forcé à vivre» (*M*, 132). These two imprisonments constitute a key stage in the characters' developmental itinerary, and Edmée and Bernard respond to it through a similar nervous crisis. Following her adventure at the Roche-Mauprat, Edmée contracts a violent fever, which symbolises the experience's profound impact on her identity. Through this more active configuration of the trope of gothic fainting, the heroine gives outward expression to «les terribles émotions qu'elle avait éprouvées» (*M*, 131), but also assimilates the psychic formative import of the gothic trial. Similarly, Bernard's stay at Sainte-Sévère is followed by a mental shock which exteriorises an inner violence exacerbated by restraint. However this nervous illness, which «[l]e rendit presque fou pendant quelques semaines, idiot ensuite durant quelques jours, et qui enfin se dissipa» (*M*, 204), also constitutes a fortifying salutary experience.

Finally, a climactic gothic sequence which doubles Edmée and Bernard's first encounter enables the characters to face a final test that leads to their marriage and the dénouement. Following a violent confrontation between the two cousins, during which Edmée is shot by Antoine Mauprat, the protagonists undergo a symbolic death that allows their initiatory rebirth. Edmée falls into a state of «inertie complète» (*M*, 390), a mental confinement reminiscent of Elinor's madness in Sophia Lee's *The Recess*, while Bernard experiences the more concrete confinement of the prison cell. During the inquisitorial trial, a device also used in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*

and *The Italian*, Bernard is accused of the classic crimes of the gothic villain: attempted rape and murder of the heroine.³⁸ However this sequence also serves as a crucial test to lift any remaining obstacles; thus Bernard purges the final gothic 'spectres' haunting the Roche-Mauprat, and Edmée emerges from her mental illness to make a public declaration of her feelings for Bernard.

This parallel gothic itinerary of Sand's hero and heroine, which Radcliffe had also started to use in her most mature work *The Italian*, highlights a similar temperament in the two sexes. As Edmée points out, «à un Mauprat, Mauprat et demie» (*M*, 191). Sand thus indicates that the most successful gothic itineraries are those in which the hero and heroine evolve in parallel, and it is this egalitarian gothic configuration which paves the way to the true final union of the protagonists. Through her remodelling of the gothic genre, Sand seeks to restore marriage's original idealism, as opposed to the gothic contract imposed by the 1804 Code.

Fraternity and a happy ending? The utopian dénouement

The final resolution of *Mauprat* highlights the gothic genre's utopianism as well as its limitations. Radcliffe's novels typically end with the celebration of the heroine's marriage in an idyllic fraternal setting, as a fit reward for her gothic tribulations. In *Mauprat*, the resolution's utopianism derives from the advent of the French Revolution as the realisation of the protagonists' enlightened ideals. Sand presents a harmonious, fraternal and socially engaged community, whose principles are guided by Rousseau's benign moral influence. Sand's more radical socialist beliefs can already be discerned in her departure from the gothic convention of the final restitution of heroine's property. Edmée and Bernard give their estates up freely during the Revolution: «Nous fimes de grand cœur, et en le considérant comme un juste sacrifice, l'abandon d'une grande partie de nos biens aux lois de la République» (*M*, 431). The radical side of this configuration is suggested by the fact that it is the heroine who is the staunchest follower of Rousseau's «théories d'égalité absolue» and she even justifies revolutionary excesses on the strength of their «grandeur saintement fanatique» (*M*, 431). In the English gothic novel, the Revolution is linked to the Terror and violent excesses that need to be curbed. The condemnation of the bloodthirsty mob in *The Monk* and *Melmoth the Wanderer* and the punishment of rebels like Ambrosio and Melmoth introduces a cautionary note against revolutionary excesses. Sand on the other hand highlights the transgressive utopianism of the Revolution, whatever the means used.

³⁸ Ambrosio in *The Monk* rapes and murders his sister Antonia.

However *Mauprat*'s utopian conclusion contains persistent latent problems inherited from the gothic genre, which call into question the fulfilment of the revolutionary ideal of equality. Critics have remarked on the silencing effect of the Radcliffian heroine's marriage, since it imposes explicit limits on her agency and individuality. As Michelle Massé points out:

the voice of the heroine as speaking subject is also erased, lost in the epithalamium of fictional closure. In the "real" world of the frame, the woman can exist only in relation to another – usually as a daughter in the beginning, a bride at the end.³⁹

Similarly, Edmée's story seems to end with her marriage, since her subsequent life is summarily described in terms of her fecund motherhood of six children. This silencing effect is reinforced by the fact that the heroine's inner story is filtered through two male narrative frames: Bernard's and the young external narrator.⁴⁰ Embedded narratives are a recurrent formal feature of the gothic novel⁴¹, but in *Mauprat* they serve to question the limits of the representation of the female Other through the male gaze.

These knotty issues call into question the true attainment of gender equality, and indicate a constant tension between Sand's utopian aspirations and the dystopian reality that she inhabited. Sand avows the problematic nature of the task she imposes on herself: «d'incarner un monde idéal dans un monde réel. C'est une grande difficulté».⁴² This tension reveals Sand's lucidity in testing the limits of Revolutionary idealism, and framing it with a realistic consideration of her current context. Sand's dénouement in *Mauprat* is thus coloured by her awareness that Edmée's 1789 utopian aspirations did not come to pass. The French Revolution did not advance women's position, and hopes for gender equality were thwarted by the Napoleonic Code. However, Sand's use of the gothic serves as a fruitful tool for raising key ideological questions, which she would take up time and time again in her literary career. As Robert Miles points out,

³⁹ Michelle Annette MASSÉ, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic*, Ithaca 1992, 11.

⁴⁰ See Scott SIMPKINS, «They Do the Men in Different Voices: Narrative Cross Dressing in Sand and Shelley», *Style* 26 (1992), 400-418.

⁴¹ Horace Walpole uses the device of the discovered manuscript in *The Castle of Otranto*; Radcliffe uses the narrative of a confession in *The Italian*. Lewis' *The Monk* and Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* embed a number of the characters' narratives.

⁴² Letter to Eugène Sue, dated 20th April 1843. GEORGE SAND, *Correspondance*, éd. G. Lubin, Paris 1964-1995, t. VI, 107-108.

the gothic «is best regarded as an enabling question, one to which we cannot expect ready answers, but which, in trying to answer it, pushes us forward».⁴³

George Sand's successful reappropriation and transplantation of the Gothic novel demonstrates the genre's cross-channel and trans-national ideological relevance. From the English Gothic heritage, Sand extracts valuable literary resources in order to tackle problematic issues relating to her socio-historical context – in another country and during a later era. She takes forward the gothic tropes of excess, female doubling and imprisonment, already used to powerful effect by predecessors such as Ann Radcliffe and Mary Wollstonecraft in order to explore the female condition, and provides a different inflection on works by Lewis and Maturin. In evaluating the literary resources available to her, Sand looked beyond national borders to reappropriate a genre already tested for the expression of female victimisation, the exploration of female agency and the ideological repercussions of the French Revolution. Her work therefore needs to be situated in a European Gothic tradition, and attests to the genre's penchant for rewritings and trans-national exchange. If the role of French importations in the development of the English Gothic is starting to be fruitfully reassessed⁴⁴, the other direction of the exchange, of the English Gothic into France needs to be equally taken in consideration: as a rich source of influence which endured beyond the height of the genre's popularity, and which served to express ideologically charged issues.

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⁴³ Robert MILES, *Gothic Writing, 1750-1820: A Genealogy*, London 1993, 4.

⁴⁴ See especially Angela WRIGHT, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror*, Cambridge, 2013.