

**GEORGE ELIOT AND GEORGE SAND :
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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GEORGE ELIOT AND GEORGE SAND: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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University of St. Andrews
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Thesis Abstract

The thesis is a comparative study of George Eliot and George Sand. Numerous references to Sand in Eliot's correspondence, as well as in Lewes's criticism, show that the link between the two female authors was more profound than suspected. Lewes and Sand met and corresponded for a few years and his art theory is greatly indebted to Sand's novels. Sand also exerted a profound influence on Eliot's intellectual and artistic development before Eliot met Lewes. Sand was her "divinity." However, it is Lewes who encouraged Eliot to follow in Sand's footsteps. The thesis is thematic and compares first the impact of Sand's religious novels such as Spiridion and Lélia. Then their social thought is examined, with novels such as Le péche de Monsieur Antoine and Felix Holt, the Radical. The third part deals with their conception of art, with special attention to the doctrine of Realism and to Sand's rustic novels. Their conception of women is also examined as well as their position on the question of woman's liberation. Finally, I compare their views of the complex relationship between femaleness and literature, in the light of recent feminist criticism.

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A Note on the Editions Used

For George Eliot's novels, I have used the Oxford University Press Editions (The World's Classics), with the exception of Romola, Adam Bede and Silas Marner for which I have used Penguin Classics. The majority of George Sand's novels are still out of print, therefore, I have used the old Lévy editions and some of the new reprints such as Editions d'Aujourd'hui and Editions de L'Aurore. In 1989 the latter began a long-awaited complete edition of her novels.

INTRODUCTION

There are few comparative studies of George Eliot.¹ To analyse the influence of a specific author on her mind is a complex task. Eliot was such an "omnivorous reader," as Gordon Haight² remarks, that her intellect reflects a century more than specific authors or currents. However, a comparison between George Eliot and George Sand (1804-76), her illustrious predecessor in literature, is tempting.

Critics and biographers of Eliot both in England and in France have often mentioned Sand. The comparison has naturally varied widely in length and quality according to the cultural preferences and literary expertise of the critic. Sometimes Sand's name was evoked simply because she was another famous woman writing under a male pseudonym. At other times, when the relationship between France and England was at its worst, or when the literary fashion had changed, Sand was used to create a contrast with Eliot.

The early comparisons were often superficial and over-emphasized the differences between the two writers, portraying Sand as an eternal Romantic, a dreamer, and a

¹The only extensive comparative study I have been able to find is Barbara Smalley's George Eliot and Flaubert: Pioneers of the Modern Novel, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974).

²Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: A Biography, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

revolutionary, and describing Eliot as a great intellectual haunted by moral problems. The publication of Daniel Deronda shortly after Sand's death in 1876 was the occasion for several short comparative essays. The Saturday Review remarks that between Eliot and Sand there were several "points of likeness and difference ... full of suggestions about the nature of their art."³ According to the critic, the major differences lay in their style, while they shared a common "love of nature and power of describing it with complete success."⁴ The critic also remarks that Eliot's novels were more melancholy than Sand's, but pointed out that Eliot resembled Sand "in her portraits of the weak and dishonest men who succeed in making themselves acceptable to women."⁵

According to Sidney Colvin, similarities between Sand and Eliot were only superficial. Colvin believed that the two writers were indeed far apart. In his review of Daniel Deronda he wrote: "Their excellences are in few things the same. The flow of George Eliot's writing we have felt is apt to be impeded with excess of thought while of writing which does flow ... George Sand

³Anonymous, "George Sand and George Eliot," The Saturday Review, 4 November 1876, p. 561.

⁴Ibid., p. 562.

⁵Ibid.

is an incomparable mistress. But this is only the sign of deeper differences. George Sand excels in the poetical part of her art. George Eliot excels in the philosophical. Each is equally mistress of human nature and its secrets, but the one more by instincts, the other more by reflection. In everything which is properly matter of the intellect, the English writer is the superior of the French by far."⁶

In the opening pages of her 1883 biography of Eliot, Mathilde Blind further opposed Eliot to Sand. Unfortunately she confined them to narrow clichés, and obscured thereby deeper affinities. According to her, Sand was "impassioned, turbulent, revolutionary." In art she was above all "the great idealist of her sex." Her novels were not "studies of life," but "prose poems." On the contrary, Eliot was "contemplative, observant, and instinctively conservative." In art she was "the great realist of her sex."⁷ Such remarks are not totally false, but they are incomplete and misleading.

In another similar article, Mary Ponsonby in The Nineteenth Century dismissed the similarities as being superficial, and proceeded to show Eliot's originality,

⁶Sidney Colvin, "Daniel Deronda," The Fortnightly Review, 20 (July 1876): 601-616, p. 614.

⁷Mathilde Blind, George Eliot, (London: Allen & Co, 1883), pp. 6-8.

using Sand as a point of contrast. According to her: "George Eliot and George Sand are two noms de plume which I suppose evoke more opposite trains of thought and sets of ideas than it is possible to understand at first sight. There seems little reason to link the two names together."⁸

Ponsonby believed that Sand wrote best when she described her native Berry: "Sand is greatest when she is impersonal ... consider her worship of nature ... and the subtle magic description which pervades her adoration of her beloved Berry."⁹ In contrast, Eliot's genius was "cramped and controlled by reason," and her novels were pervaded by "an overwhelming sense of tragedy and mysterious terror of things."¹⁰ Likewise, in his study of Eliot, George Cooke declared: "If one represents the head, the other represents the heart of woman."¹¹

Among other critics who compared Eliot and Sand was Margaret Oliphant. Her article "Two Cities, Two Books",

⁸Mary Ponsonby, "George Eliot and George Sand," The Nineteenth Century, (October 1901): 607-616, p. 607.

⁹Ibid., p. 613.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 616.

¹¹George Cooke, George Eliot: A Critical Study, (Boston: Osgood, 1883), p. 138.

written for Blackwood's¹² in 1874, compared Florence to Venice and Eliot's Romola to Sand's Consuélo. On the whole, Oliphant was not fond of French novels which, according to her, were "not so safe for general reading as English."¹³ She liked Sand, but still preferred Eliot. Furthermore, Sand, as she said, was a little passé in 1874.

Oliphant's article contains some pertinent remarks about the differences between the two authors. After noticing the "fundamental difference of plan in the two books,"¹⁴ she compares the two heroines: "the two figures are altogether unlike each other."¹⁵ According to her, the character of Consuélo lacks the grandeur and the universality of Romola: "Consuélo belongs to yesterday, to an order of conception which, we fear, no longer holds the first place in the opinion of the world; while Romola ... embodies the last thought of art, the reigning ideal of the moment."¹⁶

Equally interesting is Oliphant's comparison of their artistic principles. She criticizes Eliot for

¹²Margaret Oliphant, "Two Cities, Two Books," Blackwood's, 116 (July 1874): 72-91.

¹³Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 74.

making Romola too idealistic: "She speaks and moves and acts like an enlarged and sublimated impersonation of a girl's ideal woman, an awe-inspiring goddess."¹⁷ In contrast, Oliphant believes that Consuelo is drawn by the hand of a master of realism: "She is of the truest and the highest type of feminine character, real, simple, natural and true, with nothing of the sham or fictitiously great about her."¹⁸

Oliphant also points out the differences in the way in which Sand and Eliot portray love: "Consuelo's love is not of the heroic type of Romola's ... Consuelo loves no ideal in the handsome Anzoletto. She likes his faults, his nature shallower than her own."¹⁹ Oliphant argues that Sand is more realistic in her representation of love. Unlike Romola, Consuelo does not idealize men: "To Romola in her ignorance the beautiful Tito is as a sun-god ... Consuelo knows the imperfection of her lover, knows him weak, not always wise, indolent, a little self-regarding ... never expecting from him any transformation of existence, but only the comfort of mutual support."²⁰

Finally, she concludes that in her portrayal of

¹⁷Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 89.

²⁰Ibid.

love, Sand surpasses Eliot by far: "To our thinking this is a much nobler type of love than the poetical passion which has pretensions so much higher. It is true love, the other being supreme Fancy ... Romola's is the conventional love, Consuelo's the real."²¹ Oliphant's remarks are particularly interesting because they go against the conventional view and present Sand as a realist, in which she is correct. Romola is perhaps not the best example of Eliot's realism, but Oliphant's criticism is worthy of our attention because it shows aspects of Sand and Eliot which previous critics ignored.

The comparison between Eliot and Sand attracted another critic of the period, namely Henry James. James often linked the two authors in his reviews,²² but it is in his article on Daniel Deronda ²³ that he more fully develops his thoughts on Sand and Eliot. Three fictitious characters, Theodora, Constantius and Pulcheria (undoubtedly from Lélia's Pulchérie), argue about the respective defects and merits of the two writers. Constantius notes similarities in content and

²¹Ibid.

²²See Patricia Thomson, George Sand and the Victorians, (London: Macmillan, 1977).

²³Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," in Partial Portraits, (London: Macmillan, 1889), pp. 73-74.

style: "The story of Deronda's life, his mother's story, Mirah's story, are quite the sort of thing one finds in George Sand. But they are not so good as they would be in George Sand."²⁴ Pulcheria, who represents James's point of view, agrees with Constantius but also expresses her preferences for more modern novels: "I really think the two writers very much alike. They are both very voluble, both addicted to moralising and philosophising 'à tout bout de champ,' both inartistic."²⁵ Theodora, who represents a conservative point of view is simply revolted at the idea of comparing Eliot to Sand: "How can you compare George Eliot's novels to that woman? ... George Eliot is pure and George Sand impure."²⁶

Later, when he reviewed John Walter Cross's biography of Eliot, James again compared Eliot to Sand: "George Eliot was not a great letter writer, either in quality or in quantity; she had neither the spirit, the leisure, nor the lightness of mind to conjure with the epistolary pen ... the difference is striking between her habits in this respect and those of Madame George Sand, whose correspondence has lately been collected into six closely printed volumes, which certify afresh

²⁴Ibid., p. 73.

²⁵Ibid., p. 74.

²⁶Ibid.

to her extraordinary energy and facility ... Madame Sand, however indefatigable producer as she was, was not a woman of study ... her English compeer took work more seriously."²⁷ Like most of his contemporaries, James opposed the two women-authors and did not once mention Eliot's admiration for Sand.

In spite of the general tendency to oppose Eliot to Sand there were both in France and in England a few critics who were intrigued by the possible affinities between them. Some of Sand's novels, especially those which took place in her Berry, reminded them of Eliot's, and the publication of John Walter Cross's Life of George Eliot²⁸ confirmed their suspicions and further aroused their curiosity. In several letters Eliot confessed unbounded admiration for Sand and once called her "divinity." For Jules Lemaître, the similarities were striking. Eliot was "le George d'Outre-manche,"²⁹ and the substance of her novels undeniably recalled Sand. Albert Thibaudet, writing for the centenary of Eliot's birth, even declared that if

²⁷Atlantic Monthly, May 1885. in David Carroll (ed), George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 490-504., p. 492.

²⁸John Walter Cross, Life of George Eliot as Related in her Letters and Journals, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwoods, 1885).

²⁹Jules Lemaître, "De l'influence récente des littératures du Nord," Revue Des Deux Mondes 126 (15 December, 1894): 847-72. p. 851.

Eliot had begun writing fiction earlier in life, she would have written very much like Sand: "A vingt ans elle eût probablement écrit comme George Sand."³⁰

Leslie Stephen was also intrigued by the role of Sand in the development of Eliot's thought. In his 1902 biography of Eliot he remarked that, in spite of different writing techniques, Eliot's so-called rustic novels undeniably recalled Sand's: "Much would have to be said of George Sand whom she read with much enthusiasm and in whose stories of French provincial life we may find the nearest parallel in Silas Marner."³¹ Stephen also remarked that Eliot still read Sand in her later years. Edmund Gosse was also puzzled: "If I had the time and space it would be very interesting to study George Eliot's attitude towards that mighty woman."³²

E. Pond³³ pointed out similarities between Adam Bede, Middlemarch and Sand's rustic novels. Felix

³⁰Albert Thibaudet, "Réflexions sur la littérature: Le Centenaire de George Eliot", Nouvelle Revue Française, (1920): 265-279, p. 270.

³¹Leslie Stephen, George Eliot, (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 111.

³²Edmund Gosse, Aspects and Impressions, (London: Cassell, 1922), p. 4., cited in Patricia Thomson, George Sand and the Victorians, (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 153.

³³E. J. Pond, Les idées religieuses et morales de George Eliot, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1927).

Holt's Esther Lyons, and Daniel Deronda's Mirah also recalled Sand's heroines. Marcel Moraud is perhaps the first to have given a more substantial comparative analysis of the two writers. In his study Le romantisme français en Angleterre,³⁴ Moraud correctly remarks that Sand's romantic ideal had a profound and lasting influence on Eliot's life as well as on her early novels, especially The Mill on the Floss. Moraud also suggests that Sand stood behind Eliot's decision to live with Lewes in spite of the immorality of the situation. Moraud also points out the similarities between the hardships of their existence, their common religious enthusiasm, their loss of faith and their rebellious character: "Malgré les différences incontestables, il y avait déjà entre George Sand et George Eliot, à cette époque, de précieux points de contact. Elles avaient l'une et l'autre souffert de la vie, ... elles s'étaient l'une et l'autre passionnément attachées aux idées religieuses, ... elles avaient toutes les deux perdu la foi. Elles étaient l'une et l'autre toutes impressionnables, ... avec une tendance à se rebeller contre toute domination soit masculine, soit sociale."³⁵

Moraud also pays attention to the time when Eliot

³⁴Marcel Moraud, Le romantisme français en Angleterre de 1814 à 1848, (Paris: Champion, 1933).

³⁵Ibid., p. 401.

discovered Sand, a crucial period in her life, after the death of her mother, a time of depression and grief: "George Sand va tout à coup combler ce vide, dont elle s'est plaint dans ses années de jeunesse, et lui offrir une pâture intellectuelle pouvant aller jusqu'à un certain point remplacer la religion à laquelle elle avait renoncé."³⁶ Moraud is not far from the truth when he points out the role of Sand's novels in Eliot's romantic liaison with Lewes: "Si son esprit n'eût pas été saturé des idées romantiques de George Sand sur l'amour et le mariage elle eût peut-être hésité à prendre une décision qui à son époque constituait un scandale énorme."³⁷ Other factors, such as Lewes's intricate family situation, must be taken into consideration but Moraud's remark remains true.

However, Moraud's study is limited to The Mill on the Floss where he sees similarities between Sand's and Eliot's portrayal of passion: "On y reconnaît George Sand à la soudaineté avec laquelle éclate la passion ... comme George Sand, elle excelle à créer cette atmosphère enchantée où se meuvent des personnages emportés par un courant, véritable fatalité contre laquelle ils essaient en vain de lutter."³⁸ Moraud's study is interesting

³⁶Ibid., p. 400.

³⁷Ibid., p. 407.

³⁸Ibid.

because he insists on the Romantic side of Eliot, on which Sand had a profound influence, but it is too limited and cannot account for Eliot's social and aesthetic beliefs.

Patricia Thomson's study George Sand and the Victorians³⁹ shows the importance of Sand's role in English literature of the period and also brings Eliot closer to Sand. Like Moraud, Thomson believes that Sand had a great role in Eliot's intellectual and artistic development, but she goes further than Moraud and declares that Eliot was "deeply and intimately influenced by George Sand from the first novel to the last."⁴⁰ The first merit of her study is to pay serious attention to Eliot's references to Sand: "throughout George Eliot's writings, then, there are many echoes of George Sand, far too many for them to be dismissed as irrelevant,"⁴¹ Thomson's original contribution is to point out the similarities between Sand herself and Eliot's own heroines, and to Lewes's admiration for Sand. She also agrees with Moraud that Sand's novels had a great impact on Eliot's conception of love and marriage. Her comparisons between Sand's autobiography

³⁹Patricia Thomson, George Sand and the Victorians, (London: Macmillan, 1977).

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 160.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 181.

and Maggie Tulliver are illuminating. Thomson does not show Sand's impact on Eliot's later novels but she firmly believes that "initially at least, the Englishwoman was George Sand's disciple."⁴²

In a similar study Paul Blount remarks the admiration of Eliot for Sand, the similarities between their rustic novels. Unlike Thomson, Blount does not clearly indicate the sort of influence Sand had on Eliot. On the whole he remains somewhat inconclusive: "There is no question that people on both sides of the channel thought of these two foremost writers of the day in terms of comparison. Although Sand may have given little thought to Eliot, it is evident that she was often in Eliot's thought."⁴³

We must also mention two doctoral theses which dealt more specifically with the comparison. In 1952 Helen Hudson⁴⁴ conducted the first fully developed thematic study of Eliot and Sand, but left aside the question of influence. More recently Thelma Jurgrau⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid., p. 152.

⁴³Paul Blount, George Sand and the Victorian World, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), p. 110.

⁴⁴Helen Hudson, "George Sand et George Eliot," Université de Dijon, France, 1952.

⁴⁵Thelma Jurgrau, "Pastoral and Rustic in the Country Novels of George Sand and George Eliot," Diss. City University of New York, 1976. I have only read her article "The Linking of the Georges, Sand and Eliot: Critical Convention and Reality," The George Sand

compared their rustic novels. In an article in which she summarized her thesis, Jurgrau emphasized differences more than similarities. According to her, Sand and Eliot were two different women and two different writers: "Eliot would not have written a Romantic novel of the Sand type either at age twenty or twenty-seven, and ... by age thirty-two was still further away from it than ever."⁴⁶ Jurgrau remains convinced that "the differences between Sand and Eliot are more profound than the similarities."⁴⁷ She stresses Sand's "egalitarian idealism" which she opposes to Eliot's "eliticism." Jurgrau agrees with James that there is one common aspect to both writers, namely the fact that they "meet on the moralizing function of art."⁴⁸

The problem with the preceding remarks and comparative studies of Sand and Eliot is that they were limited either to their Romantic days, or their rustic novels. Differences will always exist, but a great many affinities cannot be disclosed unless the social, political and artistic ideal which both Eliot and Lewes

Papers, Conference Proceedings, (New York: AMS Press 1978), pp. 133-147.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 143.

admired in Sand's novels, is more comprehensively studied. The work of Gordon Haight,⁴⁹ that of Georges Lubin,⁵⁰ who discovered a hitherto unsuspected correspondence between Sand and Lewes, not to mention the development of feminist theory, all justify a comprehensive and comparative study of Eliot and Sand.

If we turn to Eliot's own comments on Sand, we find indeed a sincere and profound admiration. She espoused Sand's humanism, with her emphasis on love as a unifying bond between mankind, and accepted her idea that the goal of art was to communicate sympathy. Eliot also loved Sand's truthfulness, the realistic description of the relationships between the sexes, the picturesque portrayals of simple country people, and perhaps above all, her poetic and unaffected language. It is in fact possible to distinguish two phases in Sand's influence on Eliot. The first phase (1839-1854) corresponds to her reading and discussion of Sand with her friends the Brays and Sara Hennel. The second phase begins with her liaison with George Henry Lewes in 1854 and focuses on the critical analysis of Sand's artistic methods. Lewes, himself a great admirer of Sand, had been

⁴⁹Gordon Haight, The George Eliot Letters, 9 vols., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-1978.) They will be referred to here as Letters.

⁵⁰Georges Lubin (ed.), Correspondance de George Sand, 23 vols., (Paris: Garnier, 1964-89) now covers the period 1812-1874. It will be referred to as Corr.

critical of contemporary English female novelists, urging them to be sincere and realistic about their own experiences as women, often referring to Sand or to Jane Austen as the rare but precious examples to follow. Nobody better than Lewes could help Eliot follow the steps of the successful French "George."

The first phase begins with Eliot's own discovery of Sand around 1839. This was a time of crisis and rebellion in her life to which Sand was certainly not a stranger. Sand was then the most widely read French author in spite of the fact that her ideas were considered very dangerous. Indeed there were many who held her views immoral, but all were fascinated by the magic of her style and her rustic realism. Eliot's first reference to Sand in her correspondence is dated 1845, but it is clear that she had been reading her novels for some time. She was then translating Das Leben Jesu,⁵¹ and immersed in Sand's Spiridion, which also dealt with religion. The letter, addressed to her best friend Sara Hennel, mentions Spiridion's Father Alexis, the rebellious scholar, who was then a familiar figure for them: "I am writing to tell you how vexed I am to see the indistinctness of the Greek in the proof. It makes my eyes ache to look at it ... One had need be

⁵¹David F. Strauss, Das Leben Jesu, 1835.

Alexis to read it."⁵² In June 1848, the same Alexis was still in Eliot's mind when she concluded her letter to Sara, comparing their friendship to that of Alexis and Angel, his young disciple: "You are ever with me as Spiridion was with Alexis and Angel."⁵³

Eliot was anxious to know Sara's reaction to Lélia, Sand's most sensual book: "How do you like Lélia of which you have never spoken one word?"⁵⁴ Later, at the time of the French Revolution of February 1848, Eliot read Sand's Lettres d'un voyageur where she found wisdom allied to poetry, especially in the last letter in which Sand justifies the writing of Lélia. Eliot wrote to Sara: "I am reading George Sand's Lettres d'un voyageur with great delight, and hoping that they will some time do you as much good as they do me. In the meantime I think the short letter about Lélia will interest you. It has a very deep meaning to my apprehension. You can send back the pages when you have duly digested them!"⁵⁵

A month later, Eliot told her friend John Sibree that she had found "the ultimatum of human wisdom on the question of human sorrow" in a passage of the same Lettres d'un voyageur which she quoted as follows:

⁵²Letters, I, p. 203.

⁵³Ibid., p. 270.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 241.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 243.

Le bonheur et le malheur
 Nous viennent du même auteur
 Voilà la ressemblance.
 Le bonheur nous rend heureux,
 Et le malheur malheureux,
 Voilà la différence.

Then she added: "I will tell you what George Sand says: Sais-tu bien que tout est dit devant Dieu et les hommes quand l'homme infortuné demande compte de ses maux et qu'il obtienne cette réponse ? Qu'y a-t-il de plus? Rien."⁵⁶ The religious sentiment which pervades the Lettres d'un voyageur deeply moved Eliot.

During those years Eliot continued to discuss Sand with her friends, and to exchange her novels and articles about her. In June 1848, she wrote Cara Bray: "Dear Cara, your husband asked me to send you the newspaper paragraph about George Sand, and I obey, but if you disapprove, utter none of your blasphemy."⁵⁷ It is possible that the article she alluded to concerned Sand's participation in the politics of the new Republic, a time when she was encouraged to run for Parliament. Judging by the tone of her remark, it seems that Eliot approved of Sand's political activities. On this point once again, she was in disagreement with her friend Cara.

But Eliot also read Sand's social novels, those in

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 250-51.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 267.

which she attacked the conventions and advocated socialism. In 1849, after using an image from Sand's Meunier d'Angibault Eliot asked for Cara's comments on Sand's Jacques: "Truly we are looking before and after au jour d'aujourd'hui, as Monsieur Bricolin says. Send me the criticism of Jacques, the morn's morning, only beware there are not too many blasphemies against my divinity."⁵⁸ Eliot's admiration for Sand, the socialist-revolutionary woman who dared criticize marriage and fight injustice, was then at its peak.

In another very informative letter written in February 1849 to Sara Hennel, Eliot attempted again to justify her admiration for Sand, whom Sara seems to have criticized. In order not to cause an argument, Eliot made concessions, declaring that she did not judge Sand's morals, but only her artistic talent: "I should never dream of going to her writings as a moral code or text-book. I don't care whether I agree with her about marriage or not."⁵⁹ To please Sara, Eliot then added that she was always able to control herself, that writers and thinkers were not "oracles" to her. Yet she declared that Sand, like Rousseau, was the writer who "most profoundly" influenced her, "rolled away the waters from their bed raised new mountains and spread

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 275.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 277.

delicious valleys."⁶⁰

It is difficult to ignore such remarks. They prove that Sand had a profound influence on Eliot's emotional and intellectual development. In 1849, Eliot wrote to her friend Sara Hennel: "Rousseau's genius has sent that electric thrill through my intellectual and moral frame which has awakened me to new perceptions, which has made man and nature a fresh world of thought and feeling to me -and this not by teaching me any new belief. It is simply that the rushing mighty wind of his inspiration so quickened my faculties that I have been able to shape more definitely for myself ideas which had previously dwelt as dim "Ahnungen" in my soul- The fire of his genius has so fused together old thoughts and prejudices that I have been ready to make new combinations. It is thus with G. Sand."⁶¹

Sand did not only awaken Eliot's intellectual nature, but also her artistic nature. What struck Eliot in Sand was her realism. It was picturesque, it was daring but always true to experience: "It is sufficient for me as a reason for bowing before her in eternal gratitude to that 'great power of God' manifested in her -that I cannot read six pages of hers without feeling

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid. Also published in W. Cross's biography of Eliot.

that it is given to her to delineate human passion and its results- (and I must say in spite of your judgment), some of the moral instincts and their tendencies- with such truthfulness, such nicety of discrimination, such tragic power and withal such loving gentle humour that one might live a century with nothing but one's own dull faculties and not know so much as those six pages will suggest."⁶²

Eliot learned from Sand to represent her characters with all their emotional or intellectual conflicts. It is Sand's picturesque rustic realism which inspired her to begin her own novels. While traveling in Europe in 1849 Eliot lingered in the same places as Sand's characters. Her prolonged stay in Geneva (July 1849 to March 1850), reminds us of Rousseau, but also Sand's Lettres d'un voyageur and Jacques. Her decision to prolong her stay in Geneva may have been the result of a deeper desire to improve her French and linger on the scenes which aroused her intellectual and artistic curiosity.

Later in her critical articles Eliot still referred to Sand and to her techniques. To her friend Sara she had already mentioned that she found Sand's style "preternatural."⁶³ The simplicity of Sand's country

⁶²Ibid., pp. 277-78.

⁶³Ibid., p. 278.

tales greatly appealed to her. Having read François le champi she declared: "It is simplicity and purity itself."⁶⁴ Eliot began to notice Sand's influence on other English writers such as Charlotte Brontë⁶⁵ and Thackeray.⁶⁶

With Eliot's liaison with Lewes began a new phase in which Sand's artistic techniques were to be discussed and studied more at length. The difference with the first phase is not one of kind but of degree. By then, Eliot was more mature. She had acquired experience as a translator and editor of the Westminster Review. Like Lewes, she was reading Comte whose ideas also exerted a profound influence on her thought. Sand and Comte were certainly unlike and held, in their younger days, very different beliefs on politics and women. However, Comte's later ideas, as reflected in his Catéchisme Positiviste (1852) were less reactionary and anti-feminist than those he held in the 1840's at the time of his correspondence with John Stuart Mill and George

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 330.

⁶⁵After having read Villette in 1853, Eliot wrote to the Brays: "What passion, what fire in her! Quite as much as in George Sand, only the clothing is less voluptuous." Letters, II, p. 91.

⁶⁶Eliot compared Thackeray's The History of Henry Esmond to François le champi: "You remember, Cara, how you disliked François le champi (George Sand's). Well, the story of Esmond is just the same. The hero is in love with the daughter all through the book, and marries the mother at the end." Letters II, p. 67.

Henry Lewes. What appealed to Eliot in Comte was his rational, scientific and encyclopedic system, as well as the concept of compassion for humanity, which in this respect, he shared with Sand.⁶⁷

In any case, Sand was the novelist that Lewes had in mind when he encouraged Eliot to write fiction. The link between Lewes and Sand was, until recently, unsuspected. Lewes corresponded with Sand and even met her, as letters attest. Like Eliot, Lewes was also a fervent admirer of French culture. As a young man, he studied for a year in France, in Brittany.

Unfortunately, as his biographer David Williams⁶⁸ remarks, information about his early whereabouts is scanty. It seems that he discovered Sand around 1839-40, shortly before his marriage. An 1842 letter from John Stuart Mill to Lewes shows that Lewes had just taken up correspondence with Sand: "My dear Lewes, I return Sand's letter which it was very pleasant to have an opportunity of reading. I have no right or claim to send any message to her but I should be very willing she should know that there are other warm admirers of her

⁶⁷Sand's novel Spiridion (1839) contains passages which are reminiscent of Comte's ideas, namely of his evolution of humanity into three stages, metaphysical, theological, and positive. Leroux, who remains Sand's most direct influence was a member, like Comte, of the Saint-Simonian reunions in 1828.

⁶⁸David Williams, Mr. George Eliot: A Biography of George Henry Lewes, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983).

writings and of herself even in this canting land, of whom, I am neither the only nor the best."⁶⁹

The correspondence between Lewes and Sand lasted throughout the 1840's as Sand's letters show. Unfortunately most of it has not been found. Recently Georges Lubin published one of the early letters from Sand to Lewes. The letter, dated May 1st 1843, is written in French and shows that their discussions concerned literary and philosophical topics. In it Sand acknowledged receipt of Lewes's letters, thanked his wife Agnes for her kind words, and proceeded to tell them about herself, her children and her art. She declared in her characteristic humble way, that if her novels moved them it was mainly because she had deeply felt the sorrows and the joys of life in her soul: "Si vous avez été ému quelquefois en me lisant ce n'est pas que j'aie du talent, c'est que j'ai de l'émotion et de la sympathie moi-même dans le coeur."⁷⁰ Then she wrote about her "master" Pierre Leroux and their common ideal of humanity, charity, equality and fraternity: "Ces principes et cette vérité je les avais bien en moi dès ma naissance."⁷¹ Sand also asked Lewes to find

⁶⁹F.E. Mineka (ed), The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, (London: Routledge), vol. XIII, p. 557.

⁷⁰Georges Lubin, "La correspondance retrouvée," Présence de George Sand, 15 (October 1982): 32-33.

⁷¹Ibid. p. 33.

historical material concerning the Hussites for her new novel (Consuélo.)

The only letter from Lewes to Sand which has been found is in English and unfortunately undated. It was written when Lewes was in Paris (1845?) and only expressed his desire to meet her. He wondered if she ever received the article he wrote about her and then asked for an interview: "I suppose it never reached you. Accept it as a feeble expression of my admiration for your genius. I am here only for a few days, and need not tell you how pleased I should be if your engagements would allow you time to see me for half an hour. That you have no time for visits of curiosity I am aware; but you too well know my sentiments towards you, not to be assured that whatever curiosity I may have to see the femme célèbre my great desire is to press the hand and hear the voice of one of whom I have long considered a friend. My wife begged me, if I had the good fortune of seeing you, to say a thousand sweet things for her."⁷²

Lewes met Sand and they became good friends as her correspondence shows. According to her, Lewes was a

⁷²Georges Lubin (ed), Correspondance de George Sand, vol. VII., pp. 644-645. Underlining is Lewes's. The manuscript is in the Bibliothèque Historique de la ville de Paris (Fonds Sand). Lewes wrote two articles for the Foreign Quarterly Review: "Balzac and George Sand," 33 (July, 1844): 264-298, and "George Sand's recent novels," 37 (April, 1846): 21-36. His letter does not specify which article he sent her, but it must be the first since, by April 1846, she had already met him.

good man. He was learned, knew her novels better than herself and was more French than English in character. He also knew most of the people with whom she had ties in England. In a letter of April 1846 she gave the following description of him: "Je crois que Lewes pourra t'être utile aussi. Il connaît beaucoup de gens distingués, et il l'est lui-même. Il est l'auteur d'une histoire de la philosophie qui a eu un grand succès, de poésies, de critiques, etc. TU L'AS VU, il est fort aimable et plus français qu'anglais par le caractère. Il sait mes ouvrages par coeur et connaît les Lettres d'un voyageur beaucoup mieux que moi. C'est pourquoi je vous nomme à lui Charles et Eugénie, car il m'a demandé de vos nouvelles à tous. Je n'ai jamais vu sa femme, mais elle m'a écrit des amitiés charmantes. C'est une famille très unie, et qui t'offrira le seul sans-gêne que je puisse te citer à Londres. Il connaît Mme Grote, Macready le tragédien, Mazzini, les seules personnes avec lesquelles je sois en relation à Londres."⁷³

Unfortunately very little else is known about the relationship between Lewes and Sand since the rest of their correspondence has not been found. Their relationship seems to have ceased around the time Lewes met Eliot in 1852.

Lewes's conception of art owes a great debt to

⁷³Ibid., pp. 320-321. Capital letters mine.

Sand. He wrote at least four articles⁷⁴ on her, defending her ideas, showing how they had been misinterpreted, praising her as the best example of realism in art, and encouraging female writers to follow in her footsteps. According to him Sand was "not only the most remarkable woman, but the most remarkable writer of the present century."⁷⁵

Sand even inspired some of his own novels. Although there is little similarity in plot or character, the influence of Sand is recognizable in Lewes's arguments in favour of realism in literature. His first novel, Ranthorpe, was anonymously published in 1847 but written in 1842. It is the story of a young poet, Percy, who becomes a famous writer and playwright. The subject matter recalls Balzac's Illusions perdues, but certain passages are more reminiscent of Sand. For instance, the struggle between Percy's father who is strongly opposed to his son's admiration for art and poetry is reminiscent of scenes between Cardonnet and his son Emile in Le péché de Monsieur Antoine. Percy's statement: "Poetry can never die"⁷⁶ is exactly that

⁷⁴Besides the two articles mentioned in note 72 Lewes also wrote: "Continental Literati: George Sand," The Monthly Magazine, 7 (1842): 578-591, and "François le champi," The Atheneum, May 20th, 1848, p. 502.

⁷⁵"Continental Literati: George Sand", op. cit., p. 578.

⁷⁶Barbara Smalley (ed), Ranthorpe, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974), p. 35.

which Sand makes in André: "La poésie ne peut pas mourir."⁷⁷

Likewise, what Lewes says in the preface to his second novel, Three Sisters of Fortune,⁷⁸ is very reminiscent of Sand's aesthetic principles: "It was a choice between truth of passion and character, on the one hand, and on the other, didactic clearness. I could not hesitate in choosing the former ... Intellect is not the highest faculty in man ... Life is not Science ... the moral nature of man is more sacred in my eyes than his intellectual nature."⁷⁹

Lewes was very unhappy about the rather negative reaction of English critics to Sand. Besides his own articles in which he explained that she was, contrary to what critics said, a moral writer, he thought that her novels ought to be adapted to the English taste. He suggested that her translators should tone down the passionate scenes of her novels so as not to offend Victorian readers, especially young women. He worked in close association with Elisa Ashurst who translated several of her novels, and himself adapted Sand's Le

⁷⁷George Sand, André, (Paris: Perrotin, 1842) p. 49.

⁷⁸G. H. Lewes, Three Sisters of Fortune; or Rose Blanche and Violet, (London, 1848). The title of the book also recalls a novel which Sand wrote with Jules Sandeau in 1831, Rose et Blanche.

⁷⁹Op. cit. (New York: Harper, 1848), preface. Lewes's underlining.

secrétaire intime for Fraser's Magazine in 1844.⁸⁰ In a note Lewes announced that his intention was to adapt Sand for an English audience: "Not defaced by any of those faults so offensive to English tastes ... it has been, however, deemed necessary to soften the colouring of one or two scenes and omit others as superfluous. By this means the female reader is enabled to enjoy a novel of the celebrated George Sand, without danger and without disgust."⁸¹

In Lewes's version Princess Cavalcanti, the heroine of Le secrétaire intime, comes out transformed. Lewes deprives her of all her manly and intellectual attributes. She does not smoke cigars but instead drinks chocolate! She no longer studies political economy or German metaphysics. The sensuous descriptions of her body and costumes in which Sand was provocative are toned down or omitted. For instance Sand's description of Ginetta combing her mistress's hair in the presence of Saint-Julien her newly appointed secretary: "Le peigne doré de Ginetta se jouait en éclairs dans ce fleuve d'ébène, tantôt faisant voltiger de légères tresses sur les épaules de la princesse tantôt posant sur sa poitrine de grandes masses

⁸⁰"The State Murder: A tale", Fraser's Magazine, 30 (October-November 1844): 394-412, 563-571.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 394.

semblables à des écharpes de jais; et puis rassemblant tout ce trésor sous son peigne immense, elle le faisait ruisseler aux lumières comme un flot d'encre ... sa jupe et son pantalon de mousseline blanche, sa ceinture en torsade de soie, liée autour des reins et tombant jusqu'aux genoux; Saint-Julien ne pouvait pas la regarder sans une admiration qu'il combattait en vain."⁸²

The same scene in Lewes's translation becomes: "As he saw Ginetta winding the golden comb through its luxuriance, now making it dance upon her shoulders, now holding it up in the air, and hiding the comb in its thick tresses, he could compare the princess to nothing but the vision of a dream. He gradually sank into the chair and contemplated her in breathless silence."⁸³

Also Lewes's Saint-Julien does not have "un corps souple et mince comme celui d'une femme"⁸⁴ but simply a "slender, delicate form."⁸⁵ Lewes's idea was vigorously criticized by Giuseppe Mazzini, who declared that it was a betrayal of Sand, and consequently instructed Eliza

⁸²Le secrétaire intime, (Paris: Perrotin, 1882), pp. 188-89.

⁸³"The State Murder: A Tale," op. cit., p. 399.

⁸⁴Le secrétaire intime, op. cit., p. 177.

⁸⁵"The State Murder: A Tale," op. cit., p. 396.

Ashurst and E. Larken not to follow Lewes's example.⁸⁶

From Eliot's correspondence, articles, and notebooks, we know that Eliot read Indiana, André, Lélia, Jacques, Lettres d'un voyageur, François le champi, Le meunier d'Angibault, Lucrezia Floriani, and Le marquis de Villemer. But she also read several others. In 1852 she asked the Brays to send her "Geo. Sand's works."⁸⁷ In their library Eliot and Lewes had a copy of Mauprat and La petite fadette. Lewes's criticism shows that he had a thorough knowledge of her works.

However, if Sand had a profound influence on Eliot, the two writers and the two women certainly differed in many aspects. Without going as far as Jerome Thale who remarked that Eliot "was no Sand,"⁸⁸ we can safely declare that Sand had a broader experience of life. Married and then separated, she raised two children and adopted a third. In 1848 she played an important

⁸⁶"Une jeune femme, M. Hays a entrepris une traduction complète de vos écrits ... Mr. Lewes, littérateur Anglais que vous connaissez et qui se dit votre ami, a invité Miss Hays, par une lettre dans laquelle il affirme n'être que votre interprète, à des changements qui rendraient, selon lui, vos travaux plus conformes au goût anglais. Il me semble que ce n'est pas de cela qu'il s'agit; mais bien de rendre le goût anglais plus conforme au vôtre." Sand, Corr. VII, p. 604.

⁸⁷Letters, II, p. 31.

⁸⁸Jerome Thale. The Novels of George Eliot, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 3.

political role. She wrote over a hundred novels, short stories, and several plays. She wrote in simple language, quickly, and with ease.

Eliot's life was not nearly as exciting. Unlike Sand, who had aristocratic blood, Eliot belonged to a middle-class family. Before she met Lewes in 1852 she took care of her aging father, exhausted herself at arduous translations and edited the Westminster Review. From 1854 onwards she spent her life with Lewes, happy but for some time estranged from society because of the immorality of their union. The same circumstances prevented her from knowing the joys of motherhood.⁸⁹ Eliot came to writing much later than Sand, at the age of thirty-eight. She wrote eight novels, two short stories, and some poetry. Unlike Sand, Eliot did not play an active social role but, due to the circumstances of her union, preferred to remain distant from political life. Eliot seems to have written with great pains. Her style is often impeded by her great erudition. It is not likely that Sand ever heard of Eliot. Although not wholly unknown to French critics in the 1860's, her vogue in France did not start until the 1880's.

⁸⁹The problem seems to have come from Lewes's entangled family situation. Having already several children of his own, and having endorsed the paternity of those fathered by Thornton Hunt, it is easily understandable that he preferred not to have any more children. It is difficult to know Eliot's reaction, but she was certainly saddened.

The object of this thesis is to compare the two writers in a comprehensive way, following what Thomson calls "the integral influence of George Sand on the actual way that George Eliot thought."⁹⁰ First I shall deal with their religious sentiment, then their social beliefs, two essential aspects which conditioned the rest of their thought. Then I shall examine their conception of art and their conception of gender. Finally I shall discuss the question of feminism and the relevance of recent feminist literary criticism to their art.

⁹⁰Patricia Thomson, George Sand and the Victorians, op. cit., p. 181.

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT

Religious sentiment is perhaps the first link between Sand and Eliot. Their novels are characterized by a profound love of nature and of mankind. They are not religious in a strict sense, for they are concerned neither with theology nor metaphysics. They do not subscribe to any dogma, nor do they seek to glorify the power of God. But their thought was pervaded by a religious sentiment represented by a yearning for a new faith, and an emphasis on moral earnestness and compassion. At the origin of their thought lies a profound belief in the unity of existence, and their novels express a synthetic or organic vision of life and denounce indifference, egotism, and materialism: in other words, any attempt to divide and isolate man from nature and from his fellow-beings. Francine Mallet is therefore correct when she points out that Sand's fundamental attitude towards life is eminently religious: "Tout pour elle est religieux."¹

Eliot's religious sentiment was sometimes blurred by strong positivist overtones and scientific rigour, but it inevitably lay at the basis of her thought. In Sand's novels, Eliot found the best expression of the problems her mind was trying to solve. There she found

¹Francine Mallet, George Sand, (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p. 174.

the same love of nature she admired in Rousseau, a poetic quality comparable to that of her favourite poet Wordsworth, and the need for a religion of humanity which also characterized Comte. However unlike Comte, Eliot's belief in the religion of humanity was less dogmatic and did not argue in favour of a revival of Catholicism. Her love of country scenes and rustic people bring Eliot closer to Wordsworth and Sand. In Sand as in Eliot we find the same desire to reject dogmatic theology, to go back to the essential teachings of Christ, as well as a profound admiration and respect for the noble prophets, who taught compassion and love. Sand's early novels helped to precipitate Eliot's crisis of faith and contributed to her equivocal attitude towards religion which perhaps Jerome Thale best circumscribes when he says that she was "dissatisfied with faith, yet eager for its poetry, for its power to animate men's souls."²

Sand's and Eliot's religious sentiment did not develop in a vacuum but evolved in close association with their times and reflected the conflicts engendered by social, political, and scientific progress. Their thought was so closely allied to that of their

²Jerome Thale, The Novels of George Eliot, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 5.

contemporaries that a short presentation of the religious movements which marked their formative years will help to understand better the originality of their thought. In nineteenth-century France and England Christianity was, on the whole, deeply shaken, and for Sand as for Eliot the problem which presented itself was how to harmonize social and political progress with more traditional values.

In France, the Revolution of 1789 had put an end to the Ancien Régime. All birth privileges were abolished, the class-system and the power of the Church were profoundly transformed. Church land was sold, tithes abolished and the clergy, dispossessed of its titles, became controlled and employed by the state. The links with Rome were cut and priests were asked to swear an oath of fidelity to the state. Freedom of worship was guaranteed to Protestants and Jews. Convents and monasteries were closed except for those devoted to teaching. In 1795 the Directoire proclaimed the separation of Church and State and attempted to de-christianize the Republic by changing calendars and organizing a veritable cult of Reason.

However, Catholicism during the nineteenth century made a strong come-back. First, Napoléon I recognized

it as the official religion,³ resumed ties with Rome by the Concordat of 1801, but always kept the clergy under his control. Then the Restoration (1814-1830) sought a return to pre-revolutionary order, and proclaimed Catholicism the state religion⁴ despite the rather large number of Protestants.⁵ Back from exile, the nobles regained some of their privileges⁶ and the Catholic church regained power. Churches began to post lists of non-communicants and those who lived outside the bounds of marriage. Sacrilege became a legal offence punishable by imprisonment or death.

³"La religion catholique apostolique et romaine est la religion de la grande majorité des français." Concordat of 1801. Cited in Pierre Villard, Histoire des institutions publiques de la France. (Paris: Dalloz, 1983), p. 90.

⁴Article 5: "Chacun professe sa religion avec une égale liberté, et obtient pour son culte la même protection." Article 6: "Cependant la religion catholique, apostolique et romaine est la religion de l'état." Article 7: "Les ministres de la religion catholique, apostolique et romaine, et ceux des autres cultes chrétiens, reçoivent seuls des traitements du Trésor Royal." Les constitutions de la France depuis 1789, (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), p. 219.

⁵According to Philip Spencer, in 1815 there were approximately 700 000 Protestants in France. In 1847 there were 2 million Catholics. Politics of Belief in Nineteenth Century-France, (London: Faber & Faber, 1953), p. 25.

⁶Article 71: "La noblesse ancienne reprend ses titres. La nouvelle conserve les siens. Le Roi fait des nobles à volonté; mais il ne leur accorde que des rangs et des honneurs, sans aucune exemption des charges et des devoirs de la société." Les constitutions de la France depuis 1789, (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), p. 224.

Slowly the power and claims of the restored church angered the growing middle class and rekindled their old Voltairian spirit. According to Philip Spencer: "Failing to recognize and cope with the growing power of the bourgeoisie the Church committed itself to preserving the old order and the bourgeois already liberal in inclination, became automatically anti-clerical."⁷ By the end of the reign of Charles X, anti-clericalism was at its peak, and the Revolution of July 1830 was animated by strong anti-religious feelings. Churches and Episcopal palaces were pillaged and sacked. The Constitution of 1830 maintained the privilege of nobles but proclaimed freedom of worship. Catholicism was no longer the state religion.

During the July Monarchy (1830-48) characterized by the growth of Capitalism, the need for a spiritual ideal made itself felt among the intellectuals and artists. Contrary to the preceding revolution, that of February 1848 was accompanied with religious enthusiasm. The revolutionaries, followers of Saint-Simon, Fourier or Cabet, were religious. As Spencer remarks: "They respected the Church. They honoured religion. They glorified the Trinity as they invoked Lamennais and

⁷Philip Spencer, Politics of Unbelief in Nineteenth Century France, op. cit., p. 24.

Leroux."⁸ The new Constitution of 1848 guaranteed a salary to priests of all religions.⁹ However the Second Republic was short lived and the Second Empire (1852-70) was marked by a politics of laissez-faire towards religion, which permitted Catholics to strengthen their position. Catholicism became more powerful than it had been under the Restoration. The Catholic church was allowed to accept gifts and legacies. Its budget was increased and the state recognized the new religious congregations.¹⁰

Catholics began to impose their rule on the morals and the arts by condemning Molière's play Tartuffe, closing down taverns on Sunday, attempting to impose religious marriage and to enforce Sunday observance. They organized synods and councils and preached a return to orthodoxy. By the same token, Republicans became more and more anti-clerical. They denounced the clergy's immorality, its greed for power, and its

⁸Ibid., p. 119.

⁹Article 7: "Chacun professe librement sa religion, et reçoit de l'Etat, pour l'exercice de son culte, une égale protection. Les ministres soit des cultes actuellement reconnus par la loi, soit ceux qui seraient reconnus à l'avenir, ont droit de recevoir un traitement de l'état." Les constitutions de la France depuis 1789, op. cit., p. 265.

¹⁰According to Philip Spencer, 982 congregations were authorized. Politics of Unbelief in Nineteenth Century-France, op. cit.

financial fraud. The Third Republic (1870-1940) was marked by very hostile politics toward religion. Divorce was re-established (1884), religious congregations were controlled and then forbidden to teach (1880-1904.) Finally in 1905, separation of church and state was proclaimed.

The state of religion in Victorian England was different. On the whole most Victorians believed themselves to be good church people. As John Moorman remarks: "Mid-Victorian England was fundamentally religious. People went to church on Sundays and said their prayers and read their Bible at home."¹¹ Unlike France, England was fundamentally Protestant and suspicious of other continental denominations such as Lutherans and Catholics. If French religious attitude was marked by its Gallicanism or attitude of independence vis-à-vis Rome, then English religious life was marked by its Puritan background: "The churchman of those days had in him a streak of puritanism."¹² Duty more than freedom or equality, played a major role in Victorian life, and pleasure was always suspicious and immoral: "Mid-Victorian religion was, therefore,

¹¹John Moorman, A History of the Church in England, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1961), p. 390.

¹²Ibid.

essentially respectable, closely bound up with morality and duty, a matter of good behaviour, piety and righteousness."¹³ It was only at the end of the century that religion began to lose its grip on the Victorians.

However, despite the differences, there were many resemblances between the economic and political situations of the two nations. In France, as in England, there were signs that church reforms were necessary. Science and philosophy criticized the literal interpretation of the Scriptures, while political necessities imposed more practical reforms. For intellectuals the grounds of traditional faith and knowledge were seriously undermined. In 1854 Mill wrote: "The multitude of thoughts only breeds increase of uncertainty. Those who should be the guides of the rest, see too many sides to every question ... that they feel no assurance of the truth of anything."¹⁴

Science began to contest theology and Christian metaphysics. Geologists and naturalists began to doubt the argument of design according to which man was at the

¹³Ibid., p. 391.

¹⁴Cited by Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 13.

centre of creation. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire¹⁵ had already abandoned the philosophy of creationism according to which species were distinct and absolute entities. In the 1830's he entered into contact with Sand and asked her if she was willing to use his ideas in her novels. Sand answered that she admired his philosophy of nature but turned him down.¹⁶ Saint-Hilaire had more luck with Balzac. Physiologists agreed with naturalists. Gall, and especially Bichat¹⁷ whom Middlemarch's young doctor Lydgate admired, were convinced that life was much more complex than hitherto suspected, and also challenged the idea that Man was the inevitable goal of creation.

The discoveries of the age of the earth and the

¹⁵Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844) treated all species as manifestations of an archetypical form and assumed that new conditions explained the growth and transformation of one species into another. Cuvier on the contrary granted the adaptation of species to the external conditions, but left the problem of the origin of species a mystery. In 1830, the debate between the two naturalists created an uproar in Paris.

¹⁶Saint-Hilaire's work seems to have left Sand puzzled. She declared that she did not understand it, but she admired his concept of continuity in nature: "Le continuum, la chaîne universelle non interrompue, l'équilibre et l'accord joignant par d'innombrables anneaux et par une suite insensible la nature inerte à la nature animée." Corr. III, p. 833.

¹⁷Franz Gall (1758-1828) German physiologist, inventor of phrenology which attracted both Sand and Eliot. Xavier Bichat (1771-1802) French anatomist, author of Anatomie Générale.

study of fossils brought new evidence which conflicted with the creation as explained in Genesis. Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830) showed that far from being completed in six days, the creation of the world covered several million years. Robert Chambers's Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1843-46) declared that all species evolved by transmutation from lower forms. All these ideas finally found their best expression in the doctrine of evolution as formulated by Darwin's Origin of Species (1859). His theory struck a deadly blow to the idea that creation had a particular goal and that the advance of life represented the unfolding of a divine plan, showing that species evolved from one another. Darwin's book was in a way the culmination of several decades of scientific and social theories which in their respective disciplines all contributed to do away with pre-existing dogmas.

Sand knew about Darwin, but he does not seem to have influenced her in any way. Darwin's Origin had been translated in French in 1862 but came to France at a time when the Catholic church was making a come-back and his ideas met with a strong opposition. Darwin's ideas had more impact on Eliot, although she found his book "ill-written and sadly wanting in illustrative

facts."¹⁸ Darwin's theory interested Eliot but ultimately it failed to satisfy her need for a metaphysics, which was also Sand's criticism: "To me the Development theory and all other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared to the mystery that lies under the processes."¹⁹

In the nineteenth century scholars also looked more closely and scientifically at the Bible and attempted to rationalize and de-mystify it. Religious exegesis, especially in Protestant countries, became more objective. In 1835 David Strauss published his Das Leben Jesu (translated by Eliot in 1846) and claimed: "It was time to substitute a new mode of considering the life of Jesus in the place of antiquated systems of supernaturalism and naturalism."²⁰ According to him, critical exegesis meant "the liberation of the feelings and intellect from certain religious and dogmatical presuppositions."²¹ Against dogma which encouraged

¹⁸Letters, III, p. 227.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰David Friedrich Strauss, The Life of Jesus, critically examined, translated by Marian Evans from the fourth German edition 1840, 2 vols., (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1860), vol. I, p. 3.

²¹Ibid., p. 4.

"bigotry and fanaticism" Strauss opposed "the seriousness of science,"²² which in his opinion presented no threat to Christianity but only helped do away with erroneous interpretations. The goal of his study was to determine "to what extent the ground on which we stand in the gospels is historical."²³ Sand read Strauss in Emile Littré's translation in 1863.²⁴ She agreed with the fundamental assumptions of Strauss's work but she reproached him, as well as Ernest Renan, for his materialistic tendencies.

Ludwig Feuerbach is another example of the new criticism. His approach was synthetic, and aimed at reuniting reason with feeling. While Strauss was concerned with the historical truth of the Bible, Feuerbach's approach was more philosophical. His book Das Wesen des Christenthums (1841), which Eliot translated in 1854, was not only a new interpretation of Christianity but also included a general reflection of the nature of religious sentiment. In the preface to the second edition of Das Wesen des Christenthums (in

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Emile Littré, Comte's most fervent disciple, had translated Strauss's book in 1839. Sand read the 1853 or 1856 re-edition of his translation. See Corr, XVII, p. 133.

Eliot's translation) Feuerbach declared that his intention was to write "an empirical historico-philosophical analysis, a solution to the enigma of the Christian religion."²⁵ Feuerbach's analysis is characterized by a desire to maintain a harmony between the empirical and the rational traditions. He aimed at a synthesis between Hume, Kant and Hegel. According to him "the antithesis of divine and human is altogether illusory."²⁶ Feuerbach criticized German idealism and especially Hegel and brought philosophy back from the realm of the Absolute to that of concrete reality: "For my thought I require the senses."²⁷

Such ideas are also characteristic of Eliot and Sand. It is not known whether Sand knew Feuerbach's work. She did not know German, and it is more likely, as David Evans²⁸ suggests, that Feuerbach was influenced by Leroux whose ideas were popular amongst German intellectual circles. Feuerbach's philosophy of

²⁵Ludwig Feuerbach, Das Wesen des Christentums was first published in 1841. Eliot used the second edition of 1843. Her translation The Essence of Christianity was first published in 1854 with her name, Marian Evans.

²⁶Ibid., p. 13.

²⁷The Essence of Christianity, translated by George Eliot, (New York: Harper, 1957), preface.

²⁸David Owen Evans, Le socialisme romantique: Pierre Leroux et ses contemporains, (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1948.)

religion is indeed very reminiscent of Leroux. According to Feuerbach, God is the reflection of man's perfection: "Every being is in and by itself infinite, has its God, its highest conceivable being, in itself."²⁹ But he also stressed the importance of sentiment and subjectivity in the religious attitude. Man has God within himself and it is up to him to realize it: "God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of man."³⁰ With Feuerbach, religion left the grips of traditional metaphysics and ceased to be expressed in terms of "noumena" or absolutes. It became the expression of humanity: "Religion has no material exclusively its own."³¹

Besides the advances of the natural sciences and of the works of critical exegesis, political and economic situations gave birth to a current of ideas which longed to reform the church. With the advent of political equality and the growth of capitalism came conflicts with the more traditional and rigorous hierarchy of the church. Intellectuals and artists alike aspired to a new spiritual ideal. One of the most important religious thinkers of the period, who also exerted a

²⁹The Essence of Christianity, op. cit., p. 7.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 12-13.

³¹Ibid., p. 22.

considerable influence on Sand, was a priest: Félicité de Lamennais. After his widely-read Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion³², in which he expressed his dissatisfaction with the loss of power of the Catholic Church and his royalist affinities, Lamennais became interested in social reforms. He advocated a complete separation of church and state. Pope Gregory XVI condemned his ideas. Lamennais soon abandoned Christianity and became a political activist, founded an influential newspaper L'Avenir in 1831, and then managed Le Monde in which Sand collaborated (Lettres à Marcie 1836.) His Paroles d'un croyant (1834) scandalized public opinion and the conservatives. In it Lamennais criticized the bourgeois order and demanded more equality, encouraging people to fight for their rights: "Nous avons résolu de combattre le méchant ... combattez et ne craignez rien."³³ He claimed that the lack of freedom was a social injustice: "C'est l'injustice qui détruit la liberté."³⁴ Lamennais was one of the leaders of the movement for equality and compassion: "Dieu n'a fait ni petits ni grands, ni

³²Hugues Félicité Robert de Lamennais, Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion, 4 vols. (1817-1823.)

³³Paroles d'un croyant, (Paris: Renduel, 1834), p. 80.

³⁴Ibid., p. 116.

maîtres ni esclaves, ni roi ni sujets: il a fait tous les hommes égaux."³⁵

Another movement which was influential between 1830 and 1840 was Saint-Simonism. Leroux and Comte, and to some extent Sand's ideas owe a great debt to the discussion which animated the group of the followers of Saint-Simon. The roots of Saint-Simonian philosophy go back to Saint-Simon, Bentham and Owen. Originally concerned with economical and political reforms, the movement, especially under the leadership of Enfantin in 1831, became a religious sect with its apostles, missionaries, and rituals. The Saint-Simonians were Deists. They believed in God, but defined him as love: "Dieu, c'est l'infini, l'amour infini se manifestant comme esprit et matière, intelligence et force, sagesse et beauté."³⁶ Although their movement disbanded soon after 1837, their ideal of love, freedom and co-operation had by then exerted a profound influence on the major social thinkers of the century.

The importance of this movement is echoed in Eliot's Middlemarch when she tells of young Lydgate's stay in Paris. in 1830. Lydgate was attracted to the

³⁵Ibid., p. 31.

³⁶Sébastien Charléty, Essai sur l'histoire du saint-simonisme, (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p. 73.

Saint-Simonian doctrine. However, he found fault with it and he would have liked to amend in his own way: "He had thought of joining the Saint-Simonians when he was in Paris, in order to turn them against some of their own doctrines."³⁷ On the contrary his friend Trawley who was also studying in Paris with him, "was hot on the French social systems, and talked of going to the Backwoods to found a sort of Pythagorean community."³⁸ Although Eliot shows that Lydgate was not a disciple of Saint-Simonian philosophy, his conception of the medical profession and his need for reforms may have been originally influenced by Saint-Simonian ideas.

Allied to the Saint-Simonians are two other thinkers whose thought was deeply concerned with the loss of faith, namely Pierre Leroux and Auguste Comte. Leroux, now forgotten, was in his day a well respected and influential thinker.³⁹ Sand met him in 1835, a year before Lamennais, became an adept of his philosophy and their friendship lasted until his death in 1871. Leroux

³⁷Middlemarch, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 123.

³⁸Ibid., p. 142.

³⁹According to David Owen Evans, Le socialisme romantique: Pierre Leroux et ses contemporains, op. cit., Leroux (1797-1871) was a respected thinker amongst the young intellectuals of the time such as Heine, Kingsley, Mazzini, and the young Hegelians.

believed in the principles of Liberté Fraternité and Egalité. For a year he belonged to the Saint-Simonian movement, went to Belgium on a mission, but left them in 1831 with Bazard. He was the opponent of materialism and his thought is characterized by a desire for spiritual oneness: "L'esprit humain est un."⁴⁰ He refused to separate religion from society. His frame of mind was synthetic: "La pensée humaine est une, et elle est à la fois sociale et religieuse, c'est à dire qu'elle a deux faces qui se correspondent et s'engendrent mutuellement."⁴¹

Leroux considered himself above all a religious man.⁴² He believed in the virtues of compassion and sacrifice, but reproached Catholicism for founding a system of morals on devotion and abnegation. He accused Catholicism of defending the Ancien Régime, and criticized its refusal to adapt to a changing world: "On voudrait faire tenir le monde agrandi des modernes dans l'étroit horizon d'une religion faite il y a deux mille

⁴⁰Pierre Leroux, Oeuvres, (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1978), preface.

⁴¹"Aux philosophes", Revue Encyclopédique August 1831, in Oeuvres, op. cit., p. 13.

⁴²"On est avant tout en présence d'une pensée religieuse," correctly remarks David Owen Evans, le socialisme romantique: Pierre Leroux et ses contemporains, op. cit., p. 5.

ans."⁴³ However, Leroux admired the religious force behind early Christianity, its ideas of brotherhood and community, and equality. He denounced the materialistic trend of the times and advocated a religion of humanity, free of dogma and sectarian spirit.

Sand always acknowledged her debt to Leroux.⁴⁴ She dedicated several of her novels to him.⁴⁵ As she explained to Lewes,⁴⁶ she was attracted to Leroux because they shared the same ideal which he successfully expressed in simple and clear language in his writings. Leroux was also attracted to Sand for the same reasons, and it is likely that she played an important role in

⁴³"Aux Artistes," Oeuvres, op. cit., p. 76.

⁴⁴"La seule philosophie qui soit claire comme le jour et qui parle au coeur comme l'Évangile ... je m'y suis plongée et je m'y suis transformée; j'y ai trouvé le calme, la force, la foi, l'espérance, et l'amour patient et persévérant de l'humanité." Corr. cit. by Francine Mallet, George Sand, (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p. 171. In 1840 she was, "de plus en plus attachée à Pierre Leroux et de plus en plus éclairée par ses croyances." Corr. V, p. 135. Of Leroux's book De l'Humanité she said it was "un beau livre" Corr. V, p. 209. Again in 1842 she wrote: "Je crois à la vie éternelle, à l'humanité éternelle, au progrès éternel ... j'ai embrassé à cet égard les croyances de M. Pierre Leroux ... elles ont entièrement résolu mes doutes et fondé ma foi religieuse." Corr. VI, p. 757.

⁴⁵Spiridion, (1839) and Le sept cordes de la lyre, (1840).

⁴⁶Georges Lubin, "La correspondance retrouvée", Présence de George Sand, 15 (October 1982): 32-33. See introduction.

his theories.⁴⁷ He was a fervent admirer of her novels, before she had even heard of him. In one of his early articles he referred to her as "une femme de génie."⁴⁸ Eliot called Leroux "a dreamy genius" after meeting him in 1852 while he was in exile in London.⁴⁹

Like Leroux, Comte took part in the meetings of the Saint-Simonians in 1826-28. Secretary of Saint-Simon, he was the author of most of the articles of the Saint-Simonian newspaper Le Producteur in its early days. Comte left the Saint-Simonians before the 1831 Schism and accused them of stealing his ideas. Comte's system is closer to the Saint-Simonians than to Leroux's. He is by far more conservative and an opponent of freedom and equality. However, his system and particularly his Catéchisme Positiviste (1852) revolves around the need for faith and unity. In his late years Comte called his

⁴⁷Critics often overemphasized the importance of Leroux's influence, sometimes attributing to Leroux the writing of certain passages of her novels (Spiridion), and overlook the fact that at the origin of their friendship there was a profound affinity of nature and ideas. As Jean-Pierre Lacassagne correctly remarks: "D'instinct Sand rejoignait Leroux dans la recherche d'une synthèse." Histoire d'une Amitié: Pierre Leroux et George Sand, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), p. 8.

⁴⁸"Essai sur la poésie de notre époque," preface to his translation of Werther, in 1839, Oeuvres, op. cit., p. 439.

⁴⁹Letters, II, p. 5.

Positivism "une grande construction religieuse."⁵⁰

Like the Saint-Simonians, Comte abandoned metaphysics and theology, but maintained the necessity of a system of morals based on renunciation: "La religion consiste donc à régler chaque nature individuelle et à rallier toutes les individualités."⁵¹ Comte defined religion as the union of the objective world and the subjective world, the complementarity of love and faith: "Afin de constituer une harmonie complète et durable, il faut, en effet, lier le dedans par l'amour et le relier au dehors par la foi."⁵² Comte acknowledged the existence of God and, like Feuerbach, he focused his attention on the concrete and the real world: "Le dogme fondamental de la religion universelle consiste donc dans l'existence constatée d'un ordre immuable auquel sont soumis les événements de tous genres ... Un tel ordre ne peut être que constaté, jamais expliqué."⁵³ Comte's new religion was an effort to synthesize all religions and to show their common fund of ideas: "Le positivisme dissipe naturellement

⁵⁰Ibid. p. 14.

⁵¹Catéchisme Positiviste ou sommaire exposition de la Religion Universelle, (Paris: Larousse, 1890) third edition, p. 44.

⁵²Ibid., p. 48.

⁵³Ibid., p. 54.

l'antagonisme mutuel des différentes religions antérieures, en formant son propre domaine du fond commun auquel toutes se rapportent instinctivement."⁵⁴

Comte proposed a religion which unites body and soul. Like Feuerbach's, his philosophy purports to be a happy medium between strict empiricism and mysticism. He rejected pure contemplative life and advocated social participation. The basis of his faith was "vivre pour autrui." In his universal religion, the clergy play an active advising role in the state. They regulate its activity. They must not govern, and must take vows of poverty and renounce material possessions. They must marry and cannot preach before the age of forty-two.

More conservative than Leroux's, Comte's universal religion went nevertheless beyond Catholicism: "Le positivisme élimine irrévocablement le Catholicisme."⁵⁵ In contrast to Leroux, Comte maintained the necessity of renunciation. Positive religion was elitist and based on a belief in natural inequality and in hierarchy. Unlike Leroux, Comte had a deep respect for tradition, and a hatred of revolution and disorder.

His Positivism was an attempt to return to a moral order based on pre-revolutionary traditions. Positive

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 63-64.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 13.

religion does not overthrow the Catholic tradition. On the contrary, "Elle fonde l'avenir sur le passé."⁵⁶ Comte was a bitter opponent of Protestantism. However his Positivism was to purify and develop the spirit of Catholicism: "Il épure cette institution en même temps qu'il la développe."⁵⁷ Comte shared with Leroux, the Saint-Simonians, and Feuerbach, an empirical attitude which abandoned abstract concepts for more concrete situations. He maintained God but abandoned theology to focus his attention on social phenomena: "L'Humanité se substitue définitivement à Dieu sans jamais oublier ses services provisoires."⁵⁸

Comte's philosophy began to be influential in England in the 1840's. Harriet Martineau, Frederick Harrison, Richard Congreve, John Stuart Mill, Charles Bray and Lewes all sympathized with his doctrine. Eliot was no exception and her notebooks in the Nuneaton Public Library contain several passages copied from his books in the original French or in the English translation. In 1867 she wrote to Mrs. Congreve: "My gratitude increases continually for the illumination

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 95.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 380.

Comte has contributed to my life."⁵⁹ However Comte's influence on Eliot belongs to a later phase, and her admiration of his system was not uncritical. She often referred to the one-sided aspect of Comte's system, a criticism certainly addressed to his conservative ideas on sexual difference and the role of women.

If we turn to England, we find a relatively calmer political and religious situation. On the whole, most Victorians were content to be Christians and to be Protestants. Owen was one of the few to openly criticize not only Christianity but all religions. According to him, religions were a hindrance to progress. They held erroneous beliefs which were "directly opposed to the divine, unchanging laws of human nature."⁶⁰ Owen accused religions of being the cause of all social misbehaviour. They were "sources of vice, disunion and misery"⁶¹ and perpetuated "the most unnatural fables, and the most absurd and contradictory doctrines."⁶²

Unlike France, Mid-Victorian England was

⁵⁹Letters, IV, p. 333.

⁶⁰Robert Owen, Speech to prove that the Principles of religions are erroneous, and how their Practice is injurious to the Human Race, Cincinnati, 1829, microfilm. p. 16.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶²*Ibid.*

characterized by the absence of anticlericalism and by a cleavage between the Church of England and Dissenters, or Church and Chapel. Protestantism faced new problems due to the changes in the economic and political situations. English religion had to adapt itself to new developments. The question of Ireland lay behind Catholic emancipation in 1829. The repeal of the Corporation and Test Act in 1828 gave Dissenters access to public offices. The Civil and Marriage Act of 1836 gave them the right to hold marriage services in their own chapels. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge, strongholds of the Anglican Church, abolished religious tests in 1854 and 1856.

The French revolution of 1830 caused fear in England and eventually precipitated the 1832 Reform. For many intellectuals faith in Protestantism and even in Christianity seemed greatly undermined. In 1833 Carlyle remarked: "The church is a widow without jointure; public principle is gone; private honesty is going; society, in short, is falling in pieces; and a time of unmixed evil is come upon us."⁶³ Carlyle was also one of Eliot's favourite authors. In her review of his Life of John Sterling (1851), she spoke of the "rich

⁶³The Edinburgh Review, 98 (1832): 420-438. Cited by Richard Pankhurst, The Saint-Simonians, Mill, and Carlyle, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1958), p. 29.

lights of Carlyle's mind."⁶⁴

Indeed the political scene began to change. Most Catholics saw no obstacle in taking their oath of allegiance to the government and to the Anglican Church, and in May 1830 the first Catholic member of Parliament took his seat in the House of Commons. During the Coronation of King William IV in 1830 a Catholic bishop, the first since 1689, attended the ceremony. The number of Dissenters increased and in 1851 came near that of the Anglicans.⁶⁵ However, unlike in France, religious life in Victorian England was rather well-controlled. During the reign of Victoria, the government did not encourage religious zeal. According to Owen Chadwick: "Melbourne was amusedly anticlerical, Peel administratively anticlerical, Russell anticlerical in the heart."⁶⁶ Religious problems were remedied by reforms, thus avoiding the bitter conflicts between Church and intellectuals which then characterized France.

⁶⁴Essays, p. 49. In his introduction to Eliot's Essays, Thomas Pinney also remarks: "Though she shared Carlyle's "awful sense of the mystery of existence", the Germany she discovered was not his." p. 7

⁶⁵Based on a study in Wales and England, Thomas Mann's census of March 1851 gave the following figures. Anglicans: 5, 292,551. Roman Catholics: 383,630. Dissenters: 4,536, 264. see Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, 2 vols., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), vol. I, p. 365.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 233.

However, Victorian England had its young intellectuals who were losing faith in Protestantism and even in Christianity as a whole. French ideas, those of the Saint-Simonians or Comte, had their English disciples. Between 1829 and 1835 Saint-Simonian ideas found a few understanding ears. As Harriet Martineau remarks: "Attempts were made to laugh it down; but ... from the nobleness of its social rule, from its vision of religious appeal with social sympathy, and from the humbling and embarrassing condition of the religious world at the time, the disciples of Saint-Simon were not few in England, and their quality was of no mean order."⁶⁷

Mill and Carlyle were amongst those sympathizers. Mill, in France in 1830, met with Enfantin and D'Eichthal with whom he had been in correspondence, and upon his return to England became the propagator of Saint-Simonian ideas. His articles were always critical but full of admiring respect for their ideal. Together with Carlyle, Mill received the first Saint-Simonian missionaries in London in 1831. Carlyle was moved by the humanitarian aspect of their ideal, but did not like the religious aspect of their doctrine. In those days

⁶⁷Harriet Martineau, A History of the Thirty Years' Peace. Cited by Richard Pankhurst, The Saint-Simonians, Mill, and Carlyle, op. cit., p. 139.

Mill declared: "I am not a Saint Simonist, nor at all likely to become one, je tiens bureau de Saint Simonisme chez moi."⁶⁸ Carlyle translated Saint Simon's Nouveau Christianisme in 1831 but found no publisher.

The influence of Saint-Simonism was not limited to Carlyle and Mill, but was also felt amongst the workers and partisans of Owen. As Richard Pankhurst showed, Saint-Simonians not only advocated a new religion and believed that "traditional Christianity was no longer in harmony with the needs of humanity," but they deplored the lack of social concern: "For by paying attention only to the spiritual side of man it had ignored or treated the material with contempt."⁶⁹ Their ideal was reminiscent of Utilitarian philosophy, and as Pankhurst correctly observes: "It did not propound abstract metaphysical ideas, but sought to organize society in such a manner as to achieve the highest possible degree of happiness during this life time."⁷⁰ Another sympathizer with the Saint-Simonian doctrine was James Elisahna Smith, who translated Le Nouveau Christianisme and published it in his newspaper The Shepherd in 1834.

Lamennais's ideas found an echo in English

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁰Ibid.

intellectual circles, especially among the members of the Oxford Movement.⁷¹ "When he heard of Lamennais he took up his views with great eagerness"⁷² declared John Henry Newman of Richard Hurrell Froude. Newman and Froude were in Rome in 1832 a month after Lamennais's visit, and in many respects their ideas are reminiscent of Lamennais. Both believed that the Church should be freed from the grip of the state: "The Church is essentially a popular institution and the past English union of it with the State has been a happy anomaly."⁷³ Lamennais dreamed of restoring the Christian ideal.

Froude and Newman criticized the Reformation, hated the word "Protestant," and looked to Rome for inspiration. Unlike Lamennais, they were less concerned with social problems, but they strove to recover the spiritual force of early Christianity with its celibate and contemplative life, its monasteries, and religious communities dedicated to the pursuit of their ideal. They insisted on the fundamental unity of the Christian and tried to bring Protestantism closer to Roman

⁷¹W. G. Rose: "It is just possible that C. Dawson is right in thinking that the idea for the Tracts came from the Avenir." Lamennais and England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 97. Allusion to Christopher Dawson's The Spirit of the Oxford Movement, (London: Sheer and Ward, 1934).

⁷²Ibid., p. 101.

⁷³Ibid., p. 100.

Catholicism. As W. Rose remarks: "Newman's ideas on democracy came consciously near to Lamennais's, especially in his later years ... the principal difference between them lay in Lamennais's tendency to rebellion."⁷⁴

In spite of the fact that England and France were divided by different religious traditions, movements such as Saint-Simonism and that of the Tractarians showed that a new religious ideal was felt on both sides of the Channel. The Oxford movement forced English religious life out of its parochialism, and made an effort to tie it back again to its continental origins. Leroux's philosophy had also a few followers in England, especially amongst the Christian Socialists. For Charles Kingsley, Leroux was "a blessed dawn."⁷⁵ Sand herself was a favourite of John Ludlow.⁷⁶ The religious enthusiasm of the French Revolution of February 1848 encouraged Frederick Denison Maurice and Kingsley to promote a Christian version of Socialism, one which would do away with class differences, and replace a capitalist economy by brotherhood and co-operative

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁵Cited by David Owen Evans, Le socialisme romantique: Pierre Leroux et ses contemporains, op. cit., p. 47. Note 5.

⁷⁶Torben Christensen, Origin and History of Christian Socialism (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1962), p. 43. Note 34.

associations.

Such was the context in which Sand's and Eliot's thought developed. As for the Saint-Simonians, Fourier, Leroux or Comte, it is difficult to separate the religious from the social elements of their thought. On the whole however, it is characterized by the doctrine of compassion and Christianity remains their major source. Therefore it seems justified to analyse the development of their religious sentiment first and then to see how they associated it with social reforms. Sand's religious sentiment, which is based on the concept of compassion or sympathy, appealed to Eliot long before she even thought of becoming an artist.

Sand and Eliot were brought up in different religious environments. Sand came from a family where anti-clericalism was a tradition. Having lost her father at the age of four, young Aurore was brought up by her paternal grandmother, Madame Dupin de Franceuil⁷⁷ and by her mother Sophie Victoire, daughter of a Parisian bird-merchant. Her grandmother was a Deist in the fashion of Voltaire and did not insist on religious education. Sand was first brought up at home in Nohant with tutors. Her mother showed no particular interest in religious matters either.

⁷⁷She was the illegitimate grand-daughter of King August II of Sax (1670-1733) and King of Poland.

Sand's position on religion owes a great debt to her family, but also to the country surroundings in which she grew up. Sand spent her childhood in the province of Berry and from an early age she developed a deep and lasting love of nature and the simple ways of rustic people. It is in her native and provincial Berry that her religious sensitivity was formed and it is not surprising that she felt a deep sympathy for Rousseau, whom her grandmother had met in her younger days.

However, to the Voltairian spirit that she inherited from her grandmother, and her love of nature, we must add an adolescent phase of religious fervour. To give her grand-daughter the education appropriate to her class Madame de Franceuil sent young Aurore to the Couvent des Dames Anglaises, one of the best schools in Paris, and known for its rather liberal education. The years she spent there from 1817 to 1820 also profoundly marked her. Sand's descriptions of religious and monastic life as found in Lélia, Spiridion or Mademoiselle la Quintinie are not the product of her imagination but are all based upon her own experience of convent life.

When she entered the convent, young Aurore was ignorant of Catholic rituals. Like Lucie, the protagonist of Mademoiselle de la Quintinie, she was a pagan: "J'étais sans religion aucune quand ma tante me

fit envoyer à ce couvent de Paris."⁷⁸ In her Histoire de ma vie Sand mentions that she did not even know how to cross herself. The convent, founded by English and Irish Catholics fleeing Cromwell, had been used as a jail during the French Revolution, and her own mother and aunt had temporarily been held prisoners there. Many boarders were English, Irish and Scottish, the nuns were all English-speaking and taught both in English and French. The atmosphere was English and recalled the England of Charles I: "De belles gravures anglaises vous représentaient la chevaleresque figure de Charles Ier à tous les âges de la vie et tous les membres de la famille papiste."⁷⁹

Sand's description of her convent days is very informative but it is also, like most autobiographies, over-dramatized, and we can feel that Sand gives her religious devotion a much more serious tone than it actually had. "Poetical", "mystical", and "contemplative" are terms which Sand gladly used to describe her state of mind.⁸⁰ Sand liked to give a

⁷⁸George Sand, Mademoiselle la Quintinie, (Genève: Slatkine, 1979), p. 104.

⁷⁹Histoire de ma vie, (Paris: Stock, 1960), p. 145.

⁸⁰In her autobiography she declares: "Mystique soit! Il n'y a pas une très grande variété de types intellectuels dans l'espèce humaine, et j'appartiens à ce type-là." Oeuvres Autobiographiques, 2 vols., (Paris: Gallimard, 1970-1972), vol. II, p. 95.

peaceful image of herself, certainly a reaction against the constant attacks of conservative critics who, both in England and in France, described her as an immoral woman with revolutionary tendencies.

However, it remains true that at the age of fifteen Sand underwent a religious crisis. Sand describes it as a veritable mystical experience. It was sudden and unexpected and she entered into direct communication with God: "Je devins dévote: cela se fit tout d'un coup ... l'idéal religieux et ce que les chrétiens appellent la grâce vint me trouver et s'emparer de moi comme par surprise."⁸¹ She had begun to read a life of the saints, and had been quite surprised to find in it more poetry than she expected: "J'y trouvai plus de poésie que d'absurdité".⁸² Her devotion grew deeper when she contemplated, in church, a painting by Titian representing Christ on his knees with his arms resting on an angel. She was moved by the sentiment of his intense suffering: "En cherchant machinalement ces masses grandioses et confuses, je cherchais le sens profond de cette agonie du Christ, le secret de cette douleur volontaire si cuisante, et je commençais à y pressentir quelque chose de plus grand et de plus

⁸¹Ibid., p. 191.

⁸²Ibid., p. 192.

profond que ce qui m'avait été expliqué."⁸³ She then began to ponder upon the nature and meaning of suffering.

The ideal of the apostle, the poetry and simplicity of the psalms and the example of some of the most dedicated nuns, such as Sister Helen, "une véritable sainte comme je les avais rêvées", all contributed to encourage her in her new faith: "Je sentis que j'aimais Dieu, que ma pensée embrassait et acceptait pleinement cet idéal de justice, de tendresse et de sainteté."⁸⁴ Being of a passionate nature, Aurore was irresistibly drawn by ascetic practices: "Ma dévotion eut tout le caractère d'une passion."⁸⁵ Sand describes herself as Saint Theresa, burning with the desire to revive the ideal of the apostles: "Je brûlais littéralement comme une sainte Thérèse; je ne dormais plus, je marchais sans m'apercevoir du mouvement de mon corps ... je me sentais pas la langueur du jeûne, je portais autour du cou un chapelet de filigrane qui m'écorchait en guise de cilice ... je vivais dans l'extase, mon corps était insensible, il n'existait plus."⁸⁶

The example of Sister Helen, a true mystic, who

⁸³Ibid., p. 193.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 199.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 202.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 207.

gladly accepted the hardest and most menial chores, exalted her imagination and Sand began to think of taking vows: "Je serai religieuse, et non pas dame de choeur, vivant dans la simplicité et dans une béate oisiveté. Je serai soeur converse, servante écrasée de fatigue, balayeuse de tombeaux."⁸⁷ But Sand's health soon deteriorated and she became ill: "J'avais des spasmes d'estomac insupportables, plus de sommeil ni d'appétit."⁸⁸

Her mystical phase lasted but a few months. Mother Alicia and Father Prémord, her confessor, thought that she was too young to take vows. He sympathized with her need for an ideal but finally discouraged her from pursuing her ambitions. Furthermore, English tradition in the convent did not allow a French girl to join the order. According to Sand, Mother Alicia was also afraid of being accused of indoctrinating her: "Votre mère n'y consentira pas volontiers, votre grand'mère encore moins. Elle diront que nous vous avons entraînée, et ce n'est pas du tout notre intention ni notre manière d'agir."⁸⁹

Therefore, she encouraged Sand to apply her enthusiasm to life in the world, where there was

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 215.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 227.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 215.

suffering to be relieved and children to raise: "Si vous désirez souffrir, soyez tranquille, la vie vous servira à souhait, et peut-être trouverez vous, si votre ardeur de sacrifice persiste, que c'est dans le monde, et non dans le couvent qu'il faut aller chercher votre martyre."⁹⁰ Father Prémord's advice was similar. He dissuaded her from persisting in her ascetic practices and told her never to separate the body from the spirit: "Je veux que vous viviez pleinement et librement de corps et d'esprit."⁹¹ Sand left the convent.

Looking back on her mystical phase Sand remarked that it was not truly religious, but that it was only the expression of a natural desire for sympathy and an occupation: "J'avais quinze ans. Tous mes besoins étaient dans mon coeur, et mon coeur s'ennuyait ... il me fallait aimer hors de moi."⁹² This was in fact different from a true vocation and devotion to God. Her true nature was neither passive nor submissive. She was not a devotee: "Je n'avais pas de vocation véritable."⁹³ Philosophers and poets attracted her more than saints, and her favourite authors, Chateaubriand, Leibniz, Plato, and Rousseau developed in her a taste for unity

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 217.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 232.

⁹²Ibid., p. 191.

⁹³Ibid., p. 218.

and widened her understanding of religion. Her Catholic days were over.

However, Sand never forgot her monastic experience. She learned the strength of ascetic practice, the benefits of contemplation, and the joy and the friendship of life in a small community: "La vie en commun est l'idéal du bonheur entre gens qui s'aiment. Je l'ai senti au couvent, je ne l'ai jamais oublié; mais il faut à tout être pensant ses heures de solitude et de recueillement ... C'est à ce prix-là seulement qu'il goûte la douceur de l'association."⁹⁴ Novels such as Les sept cordes de la lyre and Consuelo bear the marks of her mystical experience. In the 1840's, as the social questions became more pressing, her mysticism gave way to more practical and political concerns.

It is true to remark along with Thomson⁹⁵ that Dorothea Brooke bears a certain resemblance to young Aurore. The two share the same passionate nature, the same need to understand the world, the same desire to be useful and to serve the world. However, there are also great differences between them. Aurore renounces out of compassion for humanity, whereas Dorothea is infatuated

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 188.

⁹⁵"I have given this detailed account of Aurore Dupin's adolescence because it seems to me to offer striking evidence of George Eliot's indebtedness to literary precedent rather than autobiography or imagination." George Sand and the Victorians, op. cit., p. 163.

with the idea of renunciation. She loves to renounce and thinks highly of herself. The nature of their devotion is quite different. Dorothea's asceticism is not genuine.

Perhaps Romola, "the golden-tressed Aurora" as Eliot calls her, comes closer to Sand. Like her, she was raised in a pagan manner and undergoes a profound religious transformation through images of suffering and agony. On the whole Eliot's heroines, Dinah, Dorothea, Romola and Gwendolen learn the importance of compassion through the hard experiences of life. Virginia Woolf is not altogether mistaken, when she says that Eliot's heroines are above all looking for a religion.⁹⁶ Sand's heroines are compassionate by nature, Eliot's become truly sympathetic through the hardships of existence. Eliot shows that the growth of their nature was stifled or channeled into unsuitable paths by constraining social conditions.

However, Sand's autobiography also contains several portraits of English religious women as well as some interesting remarks about their cultural characteristics. Sand believed that underneath their apparent docility English women hid powerful passions:

⁹⁶"That is their problem. They cannot live without religion and they start out on their search for one when they are little girls." "George Eliot," Times Literary Supplement, November 20th 1919. See Michele Barrett (ed.), Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing, (London: Harcourt Brace, 1977), p. 159.

"Le caractère des Anglaises est plus bouillant que le nôtre. Leurs instincts ont plus d'animalité dans tous les genres. Elles sont moins maîtresses que nous de leur sentiments et de leur passions. Mais elles sont plus maîtresses de leurs mouvements."⁹⁷ Sand's remark may have encouraged Eliot to develop the importance of emotions in a woman's life. Her heroines do behave in the way described by Sand, showing the conflict between their impulses and passions, and the conventions imposed by the code of Victorian morals. Eliot makes sure to mention Maggie's furious bouts of anger, Dorothea's pagan and sensuous enjoyment of horseback riding, Gwendolen's impulsive killing of her sister's canary bird, and the pleasure she takes in hitting a target in archery.

The attention that Thomson drew to Sand's autobiography as a possible source for Eliot's novels is interesting, but Sand herself does not seem to have been a model. However, insofar as Sand's autobiography presented several portraits of women in search of fulfilment it was certainly influential. Thomson pointed in the right direction, but we cannot overlook the fact that Eliot's heroines are also the product of her own experience of life.

Unlike Sand, Eliot received a rigorous religious

⁹⁷Histoire de ma vie, op. cit., p. 172.

education. Her father was a rather strict Anglican. According to Gordon Haight: "Religion in the Evans family had been of the old fashioned high and dry sort."⁹⁸ In Eliot's family there also were Dissenters. One of her aunts was a Methodist preacher and inspired Eliot's portrait of Dinah Morris in Adam Bede. Eliot's biographers describe her as a rather religious girl. According to George Cooke: "Up to the age of fourteen she was a most devoted believer in Christianity."⁹⁹ Haight believes that her religious education was rather free from zeal and did not particularly encourage her to develop devotion. The first teachers at school had been Evangelicals: "Moderation and good sense seems to have animated the place with a tone that held adolescent religious yearnings within reasonable bounds."¹⁰⁰ At her other school near Coventry, Baptists seem to have taught her a similar moderate approach to religion. Her correspondence shows that up to the age of thirty she mainly read religious books. She read about the history of Christianity and even thought of writing a chart of ecclesiastical history. Later Eliot learned Greek,

⁹⁸Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 8.

⁹⁹George Cooke, George Eliot: A Critical Study, (Boston: Osgood, 1883), p. 11.

¹⁰⁰Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography, op. cit., p. 19.

Latin, Hebrew and furthered her religious education by studying Oriental religions, especially Buddhism. Although Sand was also interested in the history of religions and was likewise knowledgeable about Oriental traditions, Eliot approached the problem in a more scholarly way.

The presence of Dissenters, whose belief may have imparted to Eliot a desire for simplicity and a taste for independence, is an interesting point of comparison with Sand's background. However, Eliot's loss of faith in orthodox religion was a veritable transformation in her life and had dramatic consequences for her family. Soon after they moved to Foleshill in 1841, Eliot began to show signs of rebellion and in 1842 she stopped going to church, which alarmed and deeply wounded her father. After living a few months away from him, she wrote a letter in which she explained the reasons for her decision, declaring that she considered the Scriptures as "histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction." According to her, she was not rebellious because she still respected "the moral teaching of Jesus himself" but she disagreed with the traditional interpretation of the Bible: "I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to his materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and

social happiness." Eliot concludes that according to her new understanding she could not resume her traditional religious duties: "I could not without vile hypocrisy and miserable truckling to the smile of the world for the sake of my supposed interests, profess to join in worship which I wholly disapprove."¹⁰¹

As we have seen, in 1842 the religion of the Victorians was undergoing severe criticism and reforms and as Eliot mentioned to her father, a decision like hers was not then so uncommon. In Foleshill Eliot had made the acquaintance of the Brays and the Hennels, who were Unitarians. Charles Bray¹⁰² was a successful ribbon-manufacturer. He admired Owen and Comte¹⁰³ and had recently expressed his own ideas in a book entitled The Philosophy of Necessity (1841) which Eliot had read.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰²In his autobiography Charles Bray (1811-1884) declared that he was responsible for Eliot's loss of faith: "I may claim to have laid down the base of that philosophy which she afterwards retained." Phases of Opinion and Experience during a long life: An Autobiography, (London: Longmans, Green & co, 1884), p. 73. This is however only partly correct for in her letter to her father Eliot also declared: "I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined visibly to unite myself with Unitarians more than any other class of believers." Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁰³Some of his ideas are directly taken from Comte, especially those concerning the fact that man cannot know the "absolute": "Neither the beginning nor the end of things .. but only the order in which one event follows another." Cited by J. F. Harrison, The Quest for the New Moral World, (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 243.

The Brays were intellectuals and represented for Eliot the major cultural interest in the vicinity. They read Sand and may have lent Eliot some of her novels, possibly Spiridion which was the first of Sand's novels to be translated into English. Spiridion was the book which Eliot read while she was translating Strauss and to which she referred again in 1848. Sand's book was a major influence on the religious and philosophical development of Eliot's thought.

Spiridion is a philosophical novel which examines the fundamental aspects of the concept of religion. It is a critical analysis of the nature of religious sentiment from its early historical development to the present. But it is also a prophetic book which announces, like the Saint-Simonians, Leroux, or Comte the advent of future religion, associating past and present social reforms and advocating freedom, compassion and tolerance. It has no particular denomination but proclaims itself to be the religion of humanity.

The novel takes place at the time of the French Revolution of 1789 in a Benedictine monastery. Angel, who in many ways recalls Sand, is a young novice who joined the monastery hoping to find brotherhood and love. But his quest is in vain. He remains lonely and the other monks show him no compassion. In the midst of

his despair Angel meets Father Alexis, a monk whose beliefs and religious behaviour greatly differ from those of the rest of the community. Most of the novel describes Alexis's religious quest as well as the history of the founding of the monastery under Father Spiridion.

Lélia is another book which is greatly concerned with religious quest and the problem of faith. It is however, much more pessimistic in tone than Spiridion and corresponds to the early disillusionment and doubt which characterized Sand's thought before she read Leroux. Lélia is haughty and aristocratic in nature. She flees society to take refuge in a convent, where she hopes to find happiness in devotion to God. However, she is constantly haunted by doubts and leaves the convent to go back to society. Her sister Pulchérie, a simple and common courtesan, finally convinces her that she is mistaken in pursuing her ideal away from the world.

One common aspect that Eliot shares with Sand and which she found in her novels is the notion of tolerance. According to them, religious sentiment must be tolerant. They criticized the idea that truth was the prerogative of one particular religion, and they remained profoundly anti-dogmatic. Sand's criticism was mainly directed towards Catholicism which represented

for her the epitome of intolerance and dogma. As the power of Catholicism grew stronger under the first decade of the Second Empire, her attacks against Rome became more severe, as is demonstrated in Mademoiselle la Quintinie, a novel in which religion is presented as the major obstacle between Henry and Lucie. Lucie's own mother falls in love with her confessor Father Moreali and finally dies for him, abandoning Lucie to her sister. Unlike Spiridion, Mademoiselle la Quintinie is limited to a criticism of the Catholic church and of Catholic political power. The freethinkers, Henry Lemontier and his son finally convince Lucie that Catholicism is at the root of all her troubles. Father Moreali confesses his love for Lucie's mother. Lucie renounces her Catholicism and marries Henry.

Sand was an ardent partisan of freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. Intolerance is an aspect which she had already condemned in Spiridion. Alexis accuses the Catholic priest of being the agent of the imperialistic power of Rome: "Il a considéré le monde comme une conquête réservée à ses missionnaires, les hommes étrangers à sa foi comme des brutes."¹⁰⁴ Alexis also condemns the dogmatic attitude of the church concerning the discoveries of geology, and its literal way of interpreting the Scriptures: "Hors de l'église

¹⁰⁴Spiridion, op. cit., p. 123.

point de salut, hors de la Genèse point de science. Il n'y a donc pas de milieu pour le catholique: il faut qu'il reste ou qu'il devienne incrédule. Il faut que sa religion soit la seule vraie, ou que toutes les religions soient fausses."¹⁰⁵ In Mademoiselle la Quintinie, Lemontier declares that religious tolerance is one of the principles of democracy: "Le droit égal pour chacun de nous de proclamer sa religion et de la pratiquer."¹⁰⁶

Sand denounces the paradoxes of Catholic politics which on the one hand reprimand the people for their lack of religious enthusiasm and on the other hand restrain this very enthusiasm by limiting its scope and condemning all other unorthodox beliefs: "Vous prétendez que les philosophes n'ont point de religion ... vous damnez Platon ... vous nous reprochez de ne point avoir d'Eglise ni de culte, sans vous apercevoir que vous nous défendez d'en avoir qui ne soient pas des vôtres et le jour où une centaine d'adeptes d'une religion nouvelle se réuniraient pour bâtir ou dédier un temple en France, vous le feriez fermer par l'autorité civile."¹⁰⁷

Another aspect of Sand's criticism concerns priests. Sand is anti-clerical. The monks she

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Mademoiselle de la Quintinie, op. cit., p. 316.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 216.

describes in Spiridion or Mademoiselle la Quintinie are far from being examples of tolerance and compassion. The very nature of their vocation is under attack. Spiridion's Benedictine monk, Donatien, is portrayed as a power-obsessed man whose main concern is to obtain absolute control of the monastery and to exert his power over the monks. In Mademoiselle la Quintinie, Lemontier denounces the abuse of political power of the priest and expresses concern for the future of democracy, art, and family: "Si tu es homme de science il t'empêchera d'avoir une tribune pour professer; homme de lettres, il te fera railler ... artiste il te fera siffler ... homme politique il te fermera tous les chemins de l'action ... époux et père il te disputera la confiance de ta femme et le respect de tes enfants."¹⁰⁸ For Sand as for Lemontier, there is no other alternative but to fight the tyranny of Catholicism: "Sois homme et lutte; il n'y a pas de milieu."¹⁰⁹

Sand also criticized religion from the standpoint of a sociologist or historian of ideas. Before Strauss and Feuerbach, she was opposed to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures and adopted, after Leroux, the belief in the necessity of a synthesis of the truths contained in the Christian tradition. Alexis

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 70.

sees three phases in the development of Christianity, the time of the enthusiasm of the apostles, the formation of the church, and the Reformation marked by the preponderance of reflective spirit. Each phase is characterized by a marked progress on the former, but each exhibits special qualities which the new religion proposes to assimilate. The religion Alexis aspires to will be comprehensive and will develop a synthesis of the three successive phases: "Plus nous arriverons à nous manifester simultanément sous ces trois faces de notre humanité, plus nous approcherons de la perfection divine."¹¹⁰ On this aspect Leroux and Sand differed from Comte and the Saint-Simonians, neither of whom insisted on the need for such a synthesis. Comte was particularly opposed to the Reformation and remained closer to Catholicism.

Before Feuerbach, Sand also denounced the mythological aspect of religions, showing that it corresponded to a less developed phase of humanity. In several of her novels she attacked rituals and ceremonies. In Mademoiselle la Quintinie Emile is revolted by the little heart and cross pierced with a sword and stained with blood deposited in a shrine, a gory remembrance of something foreign to religious sentiment: "De pareil symboles m'ont toujours semblé

¹¹⁰Spiridion, op. cit., p. 259.

exprimer tout autre chose que des idées religieuses, et je cherche en vain dans la vraie doctrine chrétienne quelque trait qui s'y rapporte."¹¹¹

Sand did not believe in hell or paradise: "Pour l'homme qui a réfléchi, qui a senti, qui a été au fond de toutes les réalités de la vie, il n'y a point de salut, point de consolation, point d'espoir dans vos livres et dans vos traditions,"¹¹² says Sténio the young poet in Lélia. Lélia ridicules the priest who comes to her when she is sick. Sand rejected the devil, hell and damnation as futile and perverted, and she always defended the freedom to end one's life. Her protagonists Indiana and Jacques commit suicide. In Jeanne she showed how Christian mythology had incorporated pagan legends to exercise more power over the rustic people.

Sand's novels also express a nostalgia for a time when there were true and sincere religious ideals: when monks, unlike those of Spiridion, were truly concerned by the suffering of their fellow-beings. The monks in Angel's monastery do not represent the religious ideal he yearns for. They are mainly concerned with ritual and are very suspicious of religious zeal. They are petty, envious of their hierarchical superiors and

¹¹¹ Mademoiselle la Quintinie, op. cit., p. 55.

¹¹² Lélia, (Genève: Editions de Crémille, 1970), p. 13.

jealous of their neighbours: "J'ai vu un esprit de lucre et de domination poussé et soutenu par un esprit de conspiration ... contre toute espèce d'institutions ayant la liberté pour base."¹¹³ Sand believed that it was important to retrieve the original religious enthusiasm which dogmas and wealth had stifled: "Cette population des serviteurs de Dieu ... s'est donnée à l'esprit mercantile ... Non, Dieu n'est plus là, et cela devait arriver."¹¹⁴

According to Sand, the religion of her time was characterized by the absence of ideals and of sincerity. It was only a poor remnant of a religion and had lost the revolutionary spirit which characterized Christ's message. Sand also deplored the fact that the Church preached passivity and submissiveness and ignored the concept of equality. Such narrow-minded interpretation of religion is represented by Lucie's father: "La religion! il en faut! Point de famille sans religion! c'est la base de la société, c'est le frein de la femme, la tranquillité du mari, l'exemple des enfants."¹¹⁵ Father Moreali is a fanatic but through his character Sand levels some of the most virulent criticism of the bourgeois conception of religion: "Ce monde imprudent

¹¹³Spiridion, op. cit., p. 100.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Mademoiselle la Quintinie, op. cit., p 167.

qui encombre les églises, ces femmes dépravées qui assiègent le confessionnal, ces personnages qui se courbent en ricanant devant les autels ... ils sont cyniques ... ils ne croient en rien, ils ne respectent rien. La religion est un manteau, non pour cacher leur vices, ils ne se donnent pas tant de peine, mais pour les couvrir d'une insolente impunité."¹¹⁶

Eliot also denounced the dogmatic and narrow-minded understanding of religion. Her criticism is directed toward Protestantism and is therefore slightly different from Sand's. Eliot is not anti-clerical, but she criticizes the Puritan ethics of Protestantism with which she grew up. Like her, Dorothea received a Puritan education, which not only gave her an inadequate intellectual education, but forced her into a role for which she was not fit.

The spirit of Protestant education is also under attack in Scenes of Clerical Life where she describes Antony Wybrow as a character obsessed by a sense of duty: "He dressed expensively, because it was a duty he owed to his position; ... from a sense of duty he adapted himself to Sir Christopher's inflexible will ... he took care of his health from a sense of duty."¹¹⁷ In

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 107.

¹¹⁷Scenes of Clerical Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 103.

spite of his dutiful life, Anthony dies of a heart attack. Duty plays a large role in the life of Nancy Lammeter, in Silas Marner. Nancy's religious education was greatly defective. It consisted of a "theory pieced together out of narrow social traditions, fragments of church doctrine imperfectly understood, and girlish reasonings on her small experience."¹¹⁸ This explains her superstitious beliefs: "She would have given up making a purchase at a particular place if, on three successive times, rain, or some other cause of Heaven's sending, had formed an obstacle."¹¹⁹ But worst of all, Nancy is obsessed by guilt. She constantly tries to analyse her actions and is worried about their purity and morality. Nancy "had made it a habit with her to scrutinize her past feelings and actions with self-questioning solicitude."¹²⁰

As in Dorothea's case, Eliot shows that such moral habits are encouraged by the absence of adequate social outlets. Nancy's moral and religious habits become quite compulsive after she marries and finds herself childless, "asking herself continually whether she had been in any respect blamable."¹²¹ Eliot believed that a

¹¹⁸Silas Marner (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 217.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 214.

¹²¹Ibid.

tradition which encouraged introspection was basically unhealthy: "This excessive rumination and self-questioning is perhaps a morbid habit."¹²² Eliot criticized Protestantism for founding a system of morals based on guilt. Her novels show that the fault is not always within one's self, but comes also from without, from imperfect social structures. Eliot always excuses the faults of her characters to show that they often are only the victims of an unjust society.

Like Sand, although perhaps more discreetly, Eliot accuses Protestantism of preventing people from being spontaneous. Again, Nancy is a good example of such education: "On all the duties and properties of life, from filial behaviour to the arrangements of the evening toilet, pretty Nancy Lammeter, by the time she was three-and-twenty, had her unalterable little code, and had formed every one of her habits in strict accordance with that code."¹²³ Nancy is quite a contrast with the young and happy Catholic Tessa in Romola. Tessa does not mind being mischievous because she can always go to confession: "I am not so frightened after I've been to confession."¹²⁴

Eliot's criticism of Protestantism is also present

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., p. 216.

¹²⁴Romola, (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 160.

in her description of Methodism in Adam Bede. There she shows the narrow-minded and old-fashioned approach to religion, dividing Methodists into two categories, "the ecstatic and the bilious."¹²⁵ The stranger who observed the scene, "felt sure that her face would be mantled with the smile of conscious saintship, or else charged with denunciatory bitterness."¹²⁶ Eliot denounces the Puritan streak of Protestant sects, which made poor Bessy Cranage feel guilty for wearing earrings. Her description of Methodism may be picturesque but it is nevertheless critical and like Sand, Eliot believed that it corresponded to a more primitive phase of the history of humanity: "They believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions; they drew lots, and sought for Divine guidance by opening the Bible at hazard; having a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures."¹²⁷

Next to the old-fashioned forms of religion, Eliot also criticized the absence of a sincere ideal which characterized people such as the Cohens in Daniel Deronda, the Dodsons or the Tullivers in The Mill on the Floss. Like Sand, Eliot denounced the lack of enthusiasm, compassion, and the absence of ideals.

¹²⁵Adam Bede, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 66.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 82.

Religion for such people consisted in "revering whatever was customary and respectable."¹²⁸ Romola's world is not entirely without fault either. The opulence of Florentine society in which she grew up had already begun to stifle religious sentiment and compassion.

If Sand attacked Catholicism, Eliot criticized Evangelicalism and all the other Protestant sects which interpreted the Scriptures in a literal way and rejected Catholicism as mistaken. In a very virulent anonymous article "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming" Eliot showed the faulty reasoning on which Evangelicalism was based. She denounced the narrow-minded attitude which declared that the Pope was the enemy and held Protestantism as the true Christianity. Her criticism of Evangelicalism is clearly directed to the dogmatic aspect of all religions. Eliot accuses Dr. Cumming of "intellectual and moral distortion,"¹²⁹ and denounces the perverted logic of his conception of truth: "Minds fettered by this doctrine no longer inquire concerning a proposition whether it is attested by sufficient evidence, but whether it accords with Scripture; they do not search for facts, as such, but for facts that will bear out their doctrine. They become accustomed to reject the

¹²⁸The Mill on the Floss, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 273.

¹²⁹Westminster Review, 64 (October, 1855): 436-462, in Essays, p. 166.

more direct evidence in favour of the less direct ... It is easy to see that this mental habit blunts not only the perception of truth, but the sense of truthfulness."¹³⁰

Sand's novels imparted to Eliot the sense that originally religion was close to life, that it drew its substance from the senses and from the relationship with other fellow beings. Both argue that ultimately dogmatic Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, fails because it is based on an erroneous conception of life. They also show that strict devotion to God leads to fanaticism, and we find in Eliot a similar criticism of the ascetic or mystic ideal. In Mademoiselle la Quintinie Father Moreali and his teacher Father Onorio represent the dangers of fanaticism. They believe in absolute separation of body and soul: "Divorce absolu avec toutes les satisfactions charnelles, hymen absolu avec la vie spirituelle," and teach absolute devotion to God: "Dieu avant tout, avant le progrès, avant la civilisation, avant la famille."¹³¹

Sand refuses such an interpretation of life and turns to nature for a model. Unlike the Christian God, nature is changing and imperfect and also appeals to the whole of man, to his senses as well as to his intellect:

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 167.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 114.

"Le spectacle de la nature parle à toutes les facultés. Il pénètre par tous les pores comme par toutes les idées. Au sentiment tout intellectuel de l'admiration, l'aspect des campagnes ajoute le plaisir sensuel."¹³² Nature is the concrete expression of God, whose being can be felt but not understood. Oneness with God is only possible through nature and love: "La nature est sainte ... ses lois sont la plus belle manifestation que Dieu nous ait donnée de son existence, de sa sagesse et de sa bonté."¹³³

Sand's criticism of religious devotion and ascetic practices as represented in Lélia and Spiridion offered Eliot matter for reflection. Eliot's novels also show the dangers of religious zeal and discuss the notions of resignation and sacrifice, their role in life and their relationship to fulfilment. Romola, for instance, is set at the end of the 15th century, a time when there was a movement for a strict religious and moral revival in Florence, when the new Pope Angelico "was to come by-and-by and bring in a new order of things, to purify the Church from simony, and the lives of the clergy from scandal -a state of affairs too different from what

¹³²Lettres d'un Voyageur, (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), p. 43.

¹³³Ibid., p. 315.

existed under Innocent the Eighth."¹³⁴

These were the times when the Dominican monks under the leadership of Girolamo Savonarola preached a return to austerity. As Monna Brigida remarks: "The Dominicans were trying to turn the world upside down."¹³⁵ Like Father Moreali in Mademoiselle la Quintinie, Savonarola represents the dogmatic tradition within the church. According to Monna: "All their talk is, that we are to go back to the old ways ... and how we ought to keep to the rules the Signory laid down heaven knows when, that we are not to wear this and that, and not to eat this and that."¹³⁶

Savonarola stands for the reactionary movement which ignores progress and preaches a return to traditions, to purity and morality. Insofar as he criticizes materialism and hypocrisy, Eliot agrees with him, as when he denounces "the worldliness and vicious habits of the clergy"¹³⁷ and tells the people that "God will not have silver crucifixes and starving stomachs."¹³⁸ However, like Sand, Eliot does not wish a return to tradition as Savonarola preaches and she

¹³⁴Romola, op. cit., p. 48.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 179.

¹³⁶Ibid., pp. 176-77.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 49.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 411.

remarks in passing: "The Frate carried his doctrine rather too far for elderly ears."¹³⁹ There is something fanatic about him which Eliot despises. Like Father Orion in Spiridion, Savonarola is above all thirsty for power.

Eliot believes that reason has a role to play in religion. Like Alexis, she thinks that even if the intellect is limited it is nevertheless necessary in the quest for truth. Science and reason do away with the more primitive form of religion, with idolatry. In Romola Catholic rituals and symbolism are made to appear barbarous and reminiscent of the dark ages of humanity: "Hideous smoked Madonnas; fleshless saints in mosaic, staring down in idiotic astonishment and rebuke from the apse; skin-clad skeletons hanging on crosses, or stuck all over with arrows, or stretched on gridirons; women and monks with heads aside in perpetual lamentation."¹⁴⁰

Eliot also shows that asceticism is based upon a mistaken conception of life. It is misguided education. Dino Barto in Romola has chosen the mystic path, that which forsakes the world and its duties to seek bliss and oneness with God. Like Sand in Spiridion and in Lélia, Eliot believes that mysticism is a delusion. She admires the strength and the will of the mystic, but

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 77.

thinks that ultimately it is a mistaken path because as Bardo remarks, "it eludes all rules of human duty as it eludes all argument."¹⁴¹ Mysticism is a danger for a young and sensitive nature such as Dino's. According to his father, Dino is endowed with "a disposition from the very first to turn away his eyes from the clear lights of reason and philosophy."¹⁴² Naturally Dino falls prey to Savonarola's powerful personality which appealed to his sentiments.

Like Savonarola, Dino lives by visions, he is undoubtedly "deluded by debasing fanatical dreams,"¹⁴³ as his father remarks. From the point of view of Bardo, the stoic philosopher, which is also partly that of Eliot, it is useless to "howl at midnight with besotted friars."¹⁴⁴ Dino's education is at fault because he has never been shown any compassion. Dino is moved by Savonarola, who appeals to his heart. The picture of ascetic and contemplative life which comes out of Romola is negative. What attracted Bardo to Tito was his sound scholarship and also the fact that he was a sensible person. "You see no visions, I trust, my young

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 99.

friend?"¹⁴⁵ Bardo asks Tito. Tito received the same sort of upbringing as Romola: "He had been nurtured in contempt for the tales of priests whose impudent lives were a proverb."¹⁴⁶

But the real criticism of mysticism which Eliot makes is that it takes man away from his fellow-beings. What is truly tragic about Dino, and about Sand's Lélia, is the fact that his religious quest led him away from social and especially filial duties. This ultimately caused both his father's death and his own. Dino's quest is not only illusory but is also quite immoral. He has neither desire to see his father, nor is he drawn to his sister by filial feelings. Absorbed by his mystical practices he lost the sense of duty and feeling for what was near him. And to Romola's question: "What is this religion of yours, that places visions before natural duties?"¹⁴⁷ Dino finds no answer. The sole purpose of his visit to his sister, is to communicate his vision and to beg her to continue his quest.

As with Sand, but in a less outspoken way, Eliot shows that the senses and pleasure are part of life, and that although never to be taken as an end in themselves they must not be repressed. Asceticism is an error

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 211.

because it attempts to renounce the senses. Sand showed that the senses and the passions are essential elements of life, and that instead of being repressed or ignored they must be fulfilled. Sand insists on the fundamental unity of body and soul, and believes that mystics fail to realize that nature forbids the repression of instincts and duties. Eliot follows Sand in her belief that body and soul are united. She does not linger as much as Sand on the role of love between men and women, but she shows that passions must be given a proper outlet and that channelling them into unsuitable paths is not the solution. For instance, Nancy Lammeter's habit of controlling her emotions and impulses, the persistence with which she tries to regulate her life according to an artificial code of social behaviour leaves her barren.

Furthermore, both Sand and Eliot believe that mysticism is escapism. The mystic escapes his social duties. Mystics are concerned with their own happiness and salvation, which is fundamentally selfish. Like *Lélia*, Dino forsakes the world because he believes he can find pure unadulterated happiness in God. What enticed him was the promise of eternal bliss and ecstasy. He was not only trying to escape filial duties but also the reality of life and death, namely suffering. As Sand showed in *Lélia*, suffering is an

essential and inevitable aspect of life. Eliot's novels also argue that suffering must be accepted, and develop more than Sand's the necessity of sacrifice and resignation.

Lélia is egocentric and haughty. She aspires to leave the world and has no sympathy for her fellow-beings. Dino shares her ideal of contemplative life: "I felt that there was a life of perfect love and purity for the soul; in which there would be no uneasy hunger after pleasure, no tormenting questions, no fear of suffering."¹⁴⁸ Dino errs in believing that sacrifice means renouncing the world and achieving personal fulfilment: "To attain that I must forsake the world: I must have no affection, no hope ... I must live with my fellow-beings only as human souls related to the eternal unseen life."¹⁴⁹ On the contrary Savonarola maintains that: "God is near and not afar off."¹⁵⁰ In Romola Eliot shows that one of the strong points of Savonarola's religious sentiment was his concern with social and concrete reality, with the suffering of poor people of Florence. Unlike other visionaries, Savonarola's prophetic gift was "a mighty beacon shining

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 291.

far out for the warning and guidance of men."¹⁵¹

Both Sand and Eliot discuss fulfilment. Sand stresses the importance of the senses and the futility of pure spiritual aspirations. Religious sentiment need not repress the senses. On the contrary the senses are divine attributes and reflect God's nature. Her novels argue that religious feeling needs the participation of the senses. Sand believes that there is no incompatibility between them. In themselves ascetic practices are futile and not truly religious. Religious sentiment is the expression of the fullness of life and must draw human beings toward each other. In Spiridion Alexis warns Angel that the ascetic ideal he aspires to is a delusion. According to him, narrow-minded resignation annihilates all moral instinct. Monks are the antithesis of life and the religion they preach is only a poor remnant of truth. It consists in futile practices and contains no message of sympathy: "Ils veulent t'abrutir, effacer en toi par la persécution toute notion de juste et de l'injuste ... t'habituer à vivre brutalement dans l'amour et l'estime de toi seul, à te passer de sympathie ... à mépriser toute amitié ... te dégoûter de la prière, te forcer à mentir ou à trahir tes frères dans la confession, te rendre envieux, sournois, calomniateur ... pervers, stupide et infâme

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 270.

... tuer tout noble instinct ... ils veulent en un mot faire de toi un moine."¹⁵² Such religion isolates individuals instead of bringing them closer together.

Eliot's remarks concerning the nature of renunciation in her novels are reminiscent of Sand's arguments in Lélia and Spiridion. For instance the dialogue between Philip and Maggie in the Mill on the Floss recalls the conversations between Alexis and Angel or Lélia and Pulchérie: "You are shutting yourself up in narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dulness all the highest powers of your nature ... stupefaction is not resignation: and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance -to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you ... you are not resigned: you are only trying to stupefy yourself."¹⁵³ However, Eliot shows that Maggie's renunciation is not natural, but mainly imposed on her by social structures. She could not do otherwise but to repress her desire for a fuller life than was expected of her.

Other Sandian beliefs concerning the nature of sacrifice may be found in the dialogues between Tito and Romola, and between Will Ladislaw and Dorothea. Philip,

¹⁵²Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁵³The Mill on the Floss, op. cit., p. 329.

Tito and Will attempt to show the role of the senses. Romola comes out of her intellectual education and learns the nature of feeling. Dorothea eventually realises that intellect in itself is insufficient to bring fulfilment. However, her need to do good is not a Sandian characteristic, but reveals her Puritan education. Dorothea's nature is characterized by her rather strict Puritan education and a typical lack of intellectual training: "I should like to make life beautiful ... I cannot help believing in glorious things in a blind sort of way."¹⁵⁴ Will points out its dangers and calls her ideal, "the fanaticism of sympathy."¹⁵⁵

Philip and Will represent Eliot's belief in the importance of sensual fulfilment and enjoyment. They show that in order to understand life one must not refrain from pleasure. As Will tells Dorothea: "The best piety is to enjoy --when you can ... enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight --in art or in anything else."¹⁵⁶ Like Sand, Eliot attempts to show the truth of feeling and the role

¹⁵⁴Middlemarch, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 179.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

of the senses in feeling. Feeling is "an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects."¹⁵⁷ Eliot does not go as far as Sand, and she criticizes Philip, Tito and Will, for a certain lack of understanding of duty and sacrifice. However Eliot follows Sand in approaching religious sentiment synthetically, giving as much importance to feeling as to intellect: "The fundamental faith for man is faith in the result of a brave, honest, and steady use of all his faculties."¹⁵⁸ True religious sentiment is a harmony between feeling and the intellect. Pure intellect as illustrated by Casaubon and Bardo is barren. Feeling itself as represented by Dinah is also insufficient.

Both Sand and Eliot show that, to seek God outside the world of one's fellow-beings is an error. It is Sand who showed Eliot the importance of associating social duties with religious vocation. Eliot also believes that God is in the world in the form of men, and the way to be truly religious is to express care and brotherly love or sympathy, which is the essential message of Sand's Spiridion. Alexis tells Angel to go back to the world, to work and to accept the reality of suffering. Religious feeling also means fulfilment of social duties: "La foi est perdue sur la terre, et le

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁵⁸Essays, op. cit., p. 189.

vice impuni. Accepte le travail et la douleur; car vivre, c'est travailler et souffrir."¹⁵⁹ However, in Sand social duty takes the form of justice. Angel is soon convinced and decides to give up the frock to go fight social injustice in the world: "Je déchirerai cette robe blanche, emblème menteur d'une vie de pureté. Je retournerai à la vie du monde."¹⁶⁰ On the contrary, Dorothea's ideal "was not to claim justice, but to give tenderness."¹⁶¹ Characteristic of Eliot is a reluctance to confuse social and political commitment with religious duties. She shows how the two interact, but her message emphasizes a form of sympathy which ideally would be unspoilt by political concerns.

Nevertheless, it is Sand who showed Eliot the importance of feeling in religious sentiment. According to Sand, religion cannot be imposed from without. It must spring from the heart, from the innermost faculties of man, and for her, man is a social animal. Sand refuses to believe, like Hobbes, that war was a natural state for man. Eliot shares Sand's belief in the sociability of man and insists that religious feeling transcends dogmas: "Human nature is stronger and wider than religious systems ... there perhaps has been no

¹⁵⁹Spiridion, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 166.

perversion more obstructive of true moral development than this substitution of a reverence to the glory of God for the direct promptings of the sympathetic feelings."¹⁶²

Both Sand and Eliot define religious feeling as sympathy. Like Sand, Eliot interprets Christianity in a moral and poetic way. Religious sentiment is opposed to Church doctrines. According to her, dogmas "neutralize the human sympathies; The stream of feeling will be diverted from its natural current in order to feed an artificial canal."¹⁶³ Sand believes that God revealed himself to the individual through nature. Her novels insist on the role of nature as the seat of goodness. For Eliot, nature is less poetic and has little relation to human laws. In this respect she is less romantic than Sand, but like Sand she believes that God is the expression of man's natural sympathy for his fellow-beings: "The idea of God is really moral in its influence --it really cherishes all that is best and loveliest in man-- only when God is contemplated as sympathizing with the pure elements of human feeling."¹⁶⁴

Sand's religious conception is fundamentally

¹⁶²Essays, op. cit., p. 187.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

grounded in a worship of nature. Eliot emphasizes the social bond. However, for both of them, the essence of religious feeling is compassion. Sand calls it "la fraternité" and Eliot "sympathy." Therefore, they reduce religion to ethics. According to them, religion must first be concerned with men and not with abstract concepts. This is an aspect which they share with the Saint-Simonians as well as the Positivists. Lélia and Spiridion emphasize the human side of Jesus Christ, as well as the moral content of his teachings. However, moral perfection for Eliot takes a more personal aspect. Eliot emphasizes the egotistic nature of man and her novels show that failure to consider others is the real sin: "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves."¹⁶⁵ Eliot excels in showing the development of egotism in a character's life, and how it is encouraged by imperfect social structures. Therefore, in her novels Eliot shows the importance of noble disinterested actions, such as represented by Dinah, Dorothea, Mordecai, and Romola. Sand preaches love and justice. Eliot shows the pernicious effects of egotism.

Both Sand and Eliot aspired to recover the fundamental message of Christianity and the original enthusiasm which characterizes religious movements.

¹⁶⁵Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 173.

They moved away from theology and mythology. Their religious ideals contrast with those of the Church. In Mademoiselle la Quintinie Sand attacks the priests, "les sectateurs de toute religion qui cloue la pensée humaine sur un dogme immobile et sans avenir."¹⁶⁶ In contrast, art and science are closer to the truth because they study nature: "Ceux qui croient approcher de la perfection en violant les lois de la nature, soit par excès, soit par abstinence, ne peuvent être sur la voie d'une recherche sérieuse."¹⁶⁷ According to Sand, science and art point to the inter-relatedness of life. Therefore, God lies in the feeling of sympathy for people. Lucie moves away from the convent, where her education directed her and opens herself to the world: "On ne trouve pas Dieu dans le sommeil du coeur et dans la solitude de l'esprit."¹⁶⁸ Sand rejected the old mythological aspects of religion, which according to her represent a primitive form of religion. She refused to believe in hell and paradise, in a better after-life and in the necessity of confession: "Ils mentent ... ceux qui disent qu'il faut mourir à tout pour apercevoir le ciel. Non il faut vivre à tout pour voir qu'il est

¹⁶⁶Mademoiselle la Quintinie, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 197.

partout, en nous-mêmes aussi bien que dans l'infini."¹⁶⁹

Her new religious ideal is based on equality, which according to her Christ taught, and admits neither hierarchy nor intermediary between God and men: "Le temps de l'idolâtrie est passé, et jamais aucun homme sous le prétexte d'être un dieu, jamais aucun symbole sous le prétexte d'être une idée, ne fera fléchir le genou d'un homme véritable."¹⁷⁰

Her religious ideal, which in 1848 she calls Republican Christianity, is not sectarian and admits other religious traditions: "Le Christianisme républicain ne s'absorbe dans aucune secte; il constitue dans les idées, dans les sentiments et dans les actes, à l'état de religion universelle; il ne répudie aucune nuance et ne s'en laisse imposer aucune; il s'abandonne à tous les développements progressistes; il ferme l'oreille aux vieilles controverses."¹⁷¹ It is tolerant, open-minded and believes in progress. It aims at universality.

However, Sand's "religion de l'humanité" is grounded in the Christian tradition. Jesus Christ remains the symbol of her ideal of brotherhood, freedom

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁷⁰Souvenirs de 1848, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 113.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 112.

and equality. What was important for her was the fact that Jesus was a man: "Nous sommes persuadés, quant à nous, que Jésus a existé, que sa doctrine a été recueillie oralement et fidèlement transmise."¹⁷² Sand believed that Jesus was a remarkable person and does not deny his miraculous powers: "Il a vraiment guéri les malades."¹⁷³ However she refuses to associate religion with miracles and prefers a more reasonable and scientific explanation: "Nous ne faisons pas trop la guerre aux miracles de Jésus. La science physiologique nous a appris que la foi, l'émotion, une forte commotion dans l'ordre moral, guérissaient les maladies du corps; et sous ce rapport, la nature a encore de merveilleux secrets à nous révéler."¹⁷⁴

Hence for Sand, Christianity was above all concerned with man's happiness in this world: "L'Évangile, pour nous, c'est l'esprit de Jésus, c'est sa parole, c'est sa révélation de l'éternelle vérité. C'est cette grande découverte de la loi d'égalité et de fraternité."¹⁷⁵ Brotherhood and equality play an essential role in Sand's religious ideal. The religion she aspires to has neither saints nor priests: "Quels

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 109-110.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 110.

sont les prêtres? nous le sommes tous. Quels sont ses saints et ses martyrs? Jésus et tous ceux qui, avant et après lui, depuis le commencement du monde jusqu'à nos jours, ont souffert et péri pour la vérité."¹⁷⁶

According to her, celibacy contradicts the laws of nature and further alienates the priest from society: "Il méconnaît et transgresse les premiers devoirs de l'humanité."¹⁷⁷

Sand's religious ideal was an attempt to reconstruct the essential message of Christianity in the light of modern social theory. Alexis does not reject Christianity as a whole, but wishes to go back to its origins: "Cette religion n'abjurera pas le Christianisme, mais elle en dépouillera les formes."¹⁷⁸ Like the Saint-Simonians, Leroux and Comte, Sand maintained that she was not innovative but only stated that her ideal further developed Christ's message: "Elle sera au Christianisme ce que la fille est à la mère ... Cette religion fille de l'Évangile, ne reniera point sa mère, mais elle continuera son oeuvre; et ce que sa mère n'aura pas compris elle l'expliquera."¹⁷⁹ Again, as the new reformers, to the exception of Fourier, Sand

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Spiridion, op. cit., p. 259.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

maintained that her new religion did not consist in creating a new faith but in retrieving the original enthusiasm of Christianity. As Emile remarks: "Il s'agit donc, entre autres choses ... de dégager la sublime doctrine évangélique de la chape de plomb qui l'écrase."¹⁸⁰

From what has been mentioned, it becomes clear that Sand's religious ideal is a form of Protestantism. In fact Sand admired the spirit of the Reformation: "La réforme fut une de ces protestations spontanée qui ouvre une soupape de sûreté à l'étouffement universel."¹⁸¹ She had her own grandchildren baptized by a Protestant minister. Like Protestants, she refused to acknowledge the authority of the Pope, and dreamed of re-creating a society based on of the teaching of Christ, emphasizing the direct relationship of man to God. She was also opposed to the celibacy of priests and rejected confession. However, belief in the evil nature of man, guilt, obsessive individual moral purity and the fear of pleasure remain foreign to her. Like Protestantism, Sand's religious ideal brings God closer to mankind: "Il y'a donc au-dessus de tous les cultes un culte suprême, celui de l'humanité, c'est à dire de la vraie charité chrétienne, qui respecte jusqu'aux portes du tombeau,

¹⁸⁰Mademoiselle la Quintinie, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 150.

jusqu'au-delà, la liberté de la conscience."¹⁸²

Sand's novels also discuss the role of the intellect and reason in her religious ideal. According to her, intellect is insufficient to bring about sympathy. Unguided intellectual endeavours isolate individuals. Alexis confesses that his intellectual interest in the sciences and in philosophy have led him to solitude: "La raison isolée est froide, elle tend à l'égoïsme et cesse d'être la raison vraie."¹⁸³

Intellect must never be separated from feeling. Eliot's novels also contain a criticism of scholarly research. Bardo and Casaubon are good examples of misguided understanding of life. They have lost touch with the people. Casaubon is a phantom-like character. His mind is "weighted with unpublished matter."¹⁸⁴ He has no interest in concrete living beings. He is "a Bat of erudition"¹⁸⁵ and "a dried-up pedant."¹⁸⁶ In fact he is the antithesis of life. He is "unchangeable as bone."¹⁸⁷ Casaubon shows no interest in Dorothea's project to build cottages for the poor.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁸³Souvenirs de 1848, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁸⁴Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 163.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 162.

Dino and Lydgate criticize such narrow-minded intellectual endeavours. Dino soon realizes that his father's concern with philosophy and the classics removed him from the real world, "like one busy picking shining stones in a mine, while there was a world dying of plague above him."¹⁸⁸ He insists that for his father's intellect to be effective, it must be applied to concrete situations: "I told him the studies he wished me to live for were either childish trifling, -- dead toys -- or else they must be made warm and living by pulses that beat to worldly ambitions and fleshly lusts."¹⁸⁹ Bardo commits the same error as Alexis. By isolating themselves in their ivory tower both forgot to feel for their fellow-beings. Unlike Alexis, Bardo has nothing but contempt for the people, that "mixed multitude from which they had always lived apart."¹⁹⁰

To the barrenness of isolated Reason Eliot opposes the warmth of feeling. Lydgate is not a scholar, but he is a man of science and in his research he is always in contact with people. He is a character which has no equivalent in Sand and reflects Eliot's interest and belief in the sciences. However, Lydgate's ideal is reminiscent of Sand. It is never separated from the

¹⁸⁸ Romola, op. cit., p. 211.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 210.

social good, and Eliot reminds us that Lydgate studied in Paris at a time when social theories developed. Lydgate is ambitious, but his ambitions do not alienate him from people. Unlike Bardo and Causaubon, he is not lost in the past, but is concerned with the present. His ideal presents a modern synthesis of science and sympathy, "the most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and the social good."¹⁹¹ In contrast to Casaubon, Lydgate is "an emotional creature, with a flesh-and-blood sense of fellowship."¹⁹² His endeavours do not lead him away from people: "He cared not only for "cases", but for John and Elisabeth."¹⁹³

Eliot also believed in the primordial role of feeling. Like Sand, she had faith in love. Dinah's education is certainly deficient and her preaching naive, but it comes from her heart. She has a sincere sympathy for human sorrows: "It is possible, thank Heaven! to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings."¹⁹⁴ She emphasizes Dinah's enthusiasm, insisting on "the simple things she said" and "the quiet depth of conviction with which she spoke."¹⁹⁵ Eliot

¹⁹¹Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Adam Bede, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 82.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 71.

shows the positive effects of Methodism, the fact that it brought the poor farmers closer together, enlarged their consciousness, piqued their curiosity, and above all gave them an ideal. To the people of Dinah and Seth's times, Methodism "linked their thoughts with the past, lifted their imagination above the sordid details of their own narrow lives, and suffused their souls with the sense of a pitying, loving, infinite Presence, sweet as summer to the houseless needy."¹⁹⁶

If Sand's ideal religion recalls Protestantism, Eliot's recalls Catholicism. There are aspects of Catholicism which Eliot seems to admire, notably the doctrine of confession. Tessa's life is made so simple and free, by the simple fact that she allows herself to be mischievous, because she knows she can go to confession: "I am not so frightened after I've been to confession."¹⁹⁷ Sympathy in Eliot's novels is often brought about by a sort of confession, as takes place between Janet and Mr. Tryan in Scenes of Clerical Life, between Hetty and Dinah in Adam Bede and Mr. Lyons and Esther in Felix Holt.

Like Sand, Eliot does not reject mysticism altogether. Eliot has a certain respect for visionaries. According to her, prophets contribute by

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁹⁷Romola, op. cit., p. 161.

their very sensitive nature, to balance the material concerns of an epoch. This is made obvious in Romola, where Savonarola came into power at a time when materialism was at its peak in Florence. According to Eliot, mythology and rituals have a role to play in society. They are especially useful in keeping up tradition and in communicating it to the masses. In Romola Cennini declares: "The great bond of our Republic is expressing itself in ancient symbols, without which the vulgar would be conscious of nothing beyond their own petty wants of back and stomach, and never rise to the sense of community in religion and law. There has been no great people without processions."¹⁹⁸ However, Eliot is more conservative than Sand. Mordecai in Daniel Deronda speaks of "a degradation deep down below the memory that has withered into superstition" and wants to "revive the organic centre."¹⁹⁹ The dialogues between Daniel and Mordecai recall the long philosophical discussions between Alexis and Angel. Mordecai and Alexis are Daniel's and Angel's respective mentors. They show them the right path. Like Angel, Daniel is thankful: "It is through your inspiration that I have discerned what may be my life's task. It is you

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁹⁹Daniel Deronda, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 454.

who have given shape to what, I believe, was an inherited yearning -the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts in many ancestors."²⁰⁰

Eliot admired the great religious enthusiasm, such as characterized the Middle Ages, when Christians went to Jerusalem to defend their faith, or when they built cathedrals: "That was a time of colour, when the sunlight fell on glancing steel and floating banners; a time of adventure and fierce struggle --nay, of living, religious art and religious enthusiasm; for were not cathedrals built in those days, and did not great emperors leave their Western palaces to die before the infidel strongholds in the sacred East?"²⁰¹ Such epochs contrast with what Eliot calls "our own vulgar era,"²⁰² where material values have replaced noble ideals. Like Sand, Eliot describes the great moving force behind prophets as poetic. Mordecai, for instance, "was more poetical than a social reformer."²⁰³ Unlike the Cohens or the Tullivers, whose religious life is characterized by a passive conformity to rituals, Daniel's life is animated by an ideal.

Eliot also shows, at times, a nostalgia for great

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 642.

²⁰¹The Mill on the Floss, op. cit., p. 271.

²⁰²Ibid.

²⁰³Daniel Deronda, op. cit., p. 435.

religious festivals with dancing and music such as we find in Sand's La petite fadette or in La mare au diable. For instance, in Romola Eliot admires the enthusiasm exhibited at festivals: "There were weddings and the grandest gatherings, with so much piping, music and song, with balls and feasts and gladness and ornament, that this earth might have been mistaken for Paradise!"²⁰⁴ In passages such as these, Eliot betrays again her preference for religions which do not emphasize the negation of the senses, and she seizes the opportunity to criticize Puritan ethics. Her religious ideal celebrates life in all its aspects, spiritual as well as sensual. In Romola she speaks of that "innocent picturesque merriment which is never wanting among a people with quick animal spirits and sensitive organs: there was not the heavy sottishness which belongs to the thicker northern blood."²⁰⁵ Eliot's description of Protestantism is generally critical. In Middlemarch Mr. Hawley the lawyer remarks that "sick people can't bear so much praying and preaching... the methodistical sort of religion is bad for the spirits."²⁰⁶ Unlike Protestantism, Eliot's novels do not emphasize the evil aspect of man, but show that evil is often socially

²⁰⁴Romola, op. cit., p. 133.

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 253.

²⁰⁶Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 151.

determined. No one is intrinsically evil in her novels. On the whole, it is society which is at fault, "for the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within."²⁰⁷

To conclude, Sand's religious ideal as represented in Spiridion and Lélia showed the necessity of reinterpreting the Scriptures in a more objective way and of going back to the original meaning of Christianity. Her ideal was part of the great religious and social revival which characterized French thought at the beginning of the July Monarchy. This explains certain similarities with Comte, the Saint-Simonians, and Leroux. In Sand's novels Eliot found the ideal she was looking for, namely the simple expression of what Strauss and Feuerbach were striving after: the truth of feeling and the error of absolute systems. The influence of Sand's religious ideal left indelible marks in Eliot's novels. Dinah, Dorothea, Romola and Mordecai all recall the need to live for an ideal.

Eliot also found in Sand's novels a sound philosophical analysis of the aims and role of intellectual pursuit and the infinite powers of feeling. Like Fanchon, Maggie struggles against a world where there is no love. "You have no pity: you have no sense of your own imperfection and your sins. It is a sin to

²⁰⁷The Mill on the Floss, op. cit., p. 401.

be hard,"²⁰⁸ she tells Tom. Eliot teaches her characters how to feel for others, how to come out of their individual selves to become more compassionate. Suffering plays a larger role in Eliot. The main difference with Sand, lies perhaps in Eliot's hesitation to link social rights with her moral and religious ideal. Sand's religious ideal presupposes social and political equality. Eliot's remains essentially moral. Eliot is more interested in the great poetic force of and beauty of religious enthusiasm, than in its political consequences. She shares with Sand the need for compassion but her ideal is dominated by a nostalgia for the past; whereas Sand is above all interested in the present.

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 347.

CHAPTER TWO
SOCIAL THOUGHT

Religious sentiment and the doctrine of sympathy became the basis of Sand's and Eliot's social and political philosophy. They lived at a time of great political turmoil and their novels not only reflect this, but are embedded in its very nature. Their novels also describe the influence of the Industrial Revolution which profoundly altered traditional social structures, increasing the number of a newly rich middle-class, and introducing a new category into the lower classes, the factory worker.

Politically the nineteenth century was marked by a slow progression towards political freedom and the extension of the franchise. Sand spent her childhood under the Napoleonic Empire and her early years of married life during the Restoration period (1815-30) which was marked by an effort to return to the Ancien Régime. During those years there was little democracy. Political power was in the hands of a strong government, divided between the king and the two assemblies, the Chambre des Pairs and the Chambre des Députés. Members of Parliament were taken from the recently returned aristocracy or the rich bourgeoisie. In the first house, they were nominated for life by the king and in the second house, they were elected by an electoral college made up of rich bourgeois (to become a deputy one had to pay a tax of at least 1000 francs.)

According to Henri Sée¹ only 16,000 French people were then eligible. Electors were also taken from amongst the rich since they were required to pay a tax of at least 300 francs. Their number was estimated at 80,000 for a population of twenty-eight million.

Sand was critical of the Restoration regime and applauded the Revolution of July 1830. The new Charter, voted by the assemblies, lowered the minimum age of deputies from forty to thirty years old and that of electors to twenty-five. Property qualification was lowered to 500 francs for deputies and to 200 francs for electors. These reforms increased the number of voters from 166,183 in 1830 to 240,983 in 1846,² but in fact only gave power to the petite bourgeoisie, or merchant class, and were insufficient to bring political power to the people.

It was the Revolution of February 1848 which instituted a Republic with universal suffrage for all males over twenty-one years of age and abolished the Chambre des Pairs. The New Republic was governed by the Assemblée Nationale and a president elected for four years. The new Constitution, which both Sand and Eliot supported, advocated freedom of education, abolished the

¹Henri Sée, Histoire économique de la France, 2 vols., (Paris: Armand Colin, 1942).

²Maurice Duverger, Le système politique français, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), p. 83.

death penalty and officially condemned slavery. The Second Empire (1852-70) maintained universal franchise, but power was shared by Napoleon III and the rich bourgeoisie. However, the last years of his reign were marked by an effort toward liberal reforms such as the right to strike in 1864. Sand also lived through the uprising of the Commune and the Prussian war of 1870, and the last days of her life were spent in the early years of Third Republic (1870-1940.)

George Eliot spent her childhood and adolescence during the reigns of George III, William IV and the rest of her life under that of Queen Victoria. Compared to France, social reform in England, especially universal franchise, advanced at a much slower pace. England had a longer experience of democracy, and the 1832 Reform Bill brought a much larger portion of the middle class to power than in France. At the beginning of the century only five percent of the population was eligible to vote.³ After 1832, the number of electors was approximately five times that of France (721,000.) The new qualifications gave the vote in the counties to occupants as distinct from owners, and to lease-holders of ten pounds a year or fifty pounds of annual rent, and in the boroughs to householders occupying a house of ten

³Robert Malcolm Punnett, British Government and Politics, (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 38.

pounds of value per year. The Reform Bill increased the voting population by 300,000. However, it was still only a small minority which had political power, approximately one seventh of the male population. The Reform Act of 1867 gave the vote in the borough to all occupants of a house regardless of its value, provided they paid rates directly, and in the county to all occupants of a house rated not less than twelve pounds a year. This increased the number of voters by another one million. The voting population was now two million. By the Ballot Act of 1872, voting was made secret, which discouraged the traditional bribery, further controlled by the Corrupt Act in 1883. Finally, the County Franchise Act in 1884, made voting qualifications in the counties the same as in the boroughs, which gave the vote to agricultural labourers and miners. The voting population was now over four million, or approximately twenty-eight percent of the adult population.⁴

Sand and Eliot also witnessed the Industrial Revolution and their novels illustrate the drastic change which it imposed on society. In France, industrial progress and the use of machinery developed at a slower pace than in England. On the whole, the economy of France during the nineteenth century remained largely agricultural. The population of France

⁴Ibid., p. 39.

consisted largely of peasants. In 1830, seventy-five percent of the population lived off the land.

Industrial progress seems to have had little impact since, in 1883, peasants still represented sixty-five percent of the population.⁵ Since the Revolution of 1789 French peasants could own land, but rich landowners were rare and the majority of the peasant population was made up of small farmers and itinerant daily workers. Their work was hard but employment was secure.

Sand was one of the first writers to take a real interest in the condition of the peasants. As she showed in her novels, the main characteristic of the peasant was his regionalism. First, his culture and language differed greatly from Parisian life. At home he spoke his dialect and only rarely used French. He was thoroughly attached to his idiom, customs and traditions and only reluctantly accepted Parisian standards. It was only after the educational reforms of 1880 and then World War I that the world of peasants began to change drastically. Cultural isolation, illiteracy, as well as divisions between themselves, for a long time prevented the peasants from having the consciousness of belonging to the same class.

The condition of workers also attracted both Sand's and Eliot's interest. In 1861, Sand wrote one of the

⁵Henri Sée, Histoire économique de la France op. cit.

first industrial novels, La ville noire, and in 1866, Eliot wrote Felix Holt, the Radical in which she represented the industrial working class for the first time. The world of the workers was different from that of the peasants. Differences existed between France and England and consisted mainly in the much larger proportion of factory workers in the latter. According to Sée, in 1851, France had a million workers and artisans. However, these still constituted only a small portion of the people and the labour force. The movement away from the land to the large industrial centres was slower to develop in France than in England and never reached the same proportions. On the whole, France was less industrialized than England. In 1848, there were only 1500 miles of railway in France and 6000 in England. In England, there was more coal and it was of better quality than in France, which also had to import most of its machinery from England. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and Navigation Acts of 1824 and 1849 allowed for more foreign competition and helped England's trade to develop.

In France, the Revolution of 1789 abolished guilds but Napoléon imposed the mandatory livret or record of a worker's past employment, without which an employer could not hire him. Workers' associations were forbidden. Machinery brought women and small children

to work. The new conditions were hard, demanding between twelve and sixteen hours of work a day. Over-production was common and fierce foreign competition, often between England and France, caused unemployment. Workers became slowly conscious of being part of a class, and unlike peasants became politically active, protesting the introduction of machines and demonstrating for better wages and fewer working hours. Strikes were numerous and were often severely repressed.

However, reforms were obtained. In 1841, child labour was forbidden before the age of eight, and children between the ages of eight and twelve were limited to eight hours of work per day. Gradually, workers began to unite and in 1864 they were granted the right to strike. In England, the Factory Act of 1833 improved the condition of workers, prohibiting the employment of children less than nine years of age. In 1842, the Collieries and Mines Act prohibited the employment of women and girls, and of boys of less than ten years of age. The successive acts of 1844 and 1874, limited the number of hours for women and children in the textile industry to twelve hours and six hours respectively, and finally prohibited the employment of children under ten years of age. With the Education Act of 1876, children under ten years of age had to be sent to school full-time.

In France, workers began to unite around Auguste Blanqui or Etienne Cabet. In England, the Combination Acts of 1799, which prohibited the union of workers were repealed in 1824, allowing workers to form trade unions and to strike, and in 1835, to argue collectively with their employers about salaries and hours. As in France, the gap between the middle class and the working class encouraged the union of workers. In England workers united and their union was known as Chartism. Workers demanded universal suffrage, vote by ballot, annual Parliaments, payment of M.P.s and equal electoral districts.

Sand and Eliot also grew up at a time of numerous social theories, with more or less radical solutions for the problems of the day. Social theories, in France, had perhaps a more universal intent and were less directly concerned with practical application. England, on the other hand, was marked by a long tradition of empiricism, which favoured economic expansion and the development of commercial interests and considered intellectual endeavour useless. As Walter Houghton remarks: "Middle-class and upper-class society was permeated by scornful or frightened views of intellectual life, both speculative and artistic."⁶

⁶Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 110.

However, England had its intellectuals in spite of the unfavourable attitude of the upper class, and France had its own brand of practical men.

In England, Robert Owen advocated social and educational reforms to improve the condition of factory workers and limit their working hours. His method was rational and gave a large role to the influence of the environment on character: "Man ... never did, nor is it possible he ever can, form his own character."⁷ Owen advocated practical reforms which would provide a better environment and would eventually improve man's moral standards: "In those characters which now exhibit crime, the fault is most obviously not in the individual, but the defect proceeds from the system in which those individuals have been trained. Withdraw those circumstances which tend to create crime in the human character, and crime will not be created."⁸

Owen did not believe in revolutions and advocated slow and gradual changes, "without war and bloodshed, nay without disturbing anything which exists."⁹ However, he rejected privileges of birth and believed in the natural equality of men. According to him,

⁷Robert Owen, A New View of Society, (London: Cadell & Davies, 1813), p. 23.

⁸Ibid., p. 29.

⁹Ibid., p. 18.

education was the best solution to social problems:

"Human nature ... is one and the same in all; it is without exception universally plastic, and by judicious training, the infants of any one class in the world may be readily formed into men of any other class."¹⁰

Owen's method was social rather than political. He admired Bentham and believed that the goal of government was to control order and eventually promote happiness:

"That government is best, which in practice creates the greatest happiness to the greatest number, including those who govern and those who obey."¹¹ However, unlike Bentham, Owen was not directly concerned with government.

Economically Owen was opposed to the competition engendered by laissez-faire and instead advocated cooperation. His ideal villages were composed of approximately 1,200 people, each having an equal share of the land and the full product of his labour. Although Owen planned on using some manufacturing in his communities, his economic system relied for the most part on agriculture. Owen remained the dominant figure of social thought until the late 1840's, and his ideas had an influence not only on other intellectuals in England and France but also amongst the English workers.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 85.

¹¹Ibid., p. 67.

Besides his own colony at New Harmony (1824-27) in America, other Owenite communities, largely inspired by him, but each differently structured, were created in Scotland at Orbiston (1825-27), under Abraham Combe, in Ireland, at Ralahine (1831-33) with John Vandeleur, and in Hampshire at Queenwood (1839-45.) However brief these experiments were, they nevertheless show that the desire to counterbalance the growing individualism engendered by the industrial revolution was very strong. Eliot met Owen in September 1843 but seems to have been disappointed: "I think if his system prospers it will be in spite of its founder, and not because of his advocacy; but I dare say one should even begin to like him if he were known long enough to erase the first impression."¹² Unfortunately we have no comment on her second meeting with him in 1851.

The Saint-Simonian doctrine was born in Paris during the last years of the Restoration. It was the result of the discussions of journalists, engineers, professors, and economists who found inspiration in the work of the late Comte de Saint-Simon. They were originally concerned with practical and scientific reforms. According to them, the best way to organize society was through a scientific development of the economy. For the most part, they were representative of

¹²Letters, I, p. 161.

the middle-class and did not believe in social or political equality. Instead, their system proposed reward through work and merit: "Dans une société scientifiquement organisée le sentiment d'oppression n'ayant nulle place ne saurait éveiller le sentiment correspondant de délivrance et de liberté."¹³

However, like Owen, they emphasized the need for fraternity and rejected the competition created by capitalism, proposing instead a more scientific and collective approach to economy: "Exploitation savante, réglée, fraternelle du globe, dirigée par le pouvoir scientifique."¹⁴ Like Owen, the Saint-Simonians were amongst the first to denounce the individualism engendered by the economy of laissez-faire. In reality their system did not promote fraternity but encouraged individualism. Their motto was: "Chacun sera placé suivant sa capacité et récompensé suivant ses oeuvres."¹⁵ However, they also advocated the abolition of private property and inheritance, and were partisans of the socialization of the means of production.

Fraternity was a concept which was developed by Enfantin, who after 1831, gave the movement a more

¹³Sébastien Charléty, Essai sur l'histoire du saint-simonisme, (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p. 41.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 107.

religious direction, criticizing the family unit and encouraging communal living. The Saint-Simonians who participated in the Revolution of July 1830 were accused of immoral conduct in their commune and tried in 1832. The sect soon lost popularity and finally separated after their communal experiment in Egypt in 1837. For Sand, the Saint-Simonians represented the philosophy of materialism. She knew several of them, corresponded with D'Eichtal and Pereire, and in 1863 she encouraged Enfantin's effort to obtain bank loans for workers and artists,¹⁶ but she always maintained a very critical attitude towards the fundamental tenets of their system.

Charles Fourier's theories also attracted several intellectuals and, after 1837, many disillusioned Saint-Simonians as well. Although some of his works were published as early as 1808, he was only discovered in the late 1830's. Fourier's ideas were opposed to those of Owen and the Saint-Simonians, especially after Enfantin refused to loan him funds. Fourier's doctrine was very eccentric and complex, but on the whole it can be defined as liberation through absolute materialism, wealth and the senses (gastronomy and sexual pleasure.) From the onset, it was opposed to Owen and the Saint-Simonians who by comparison were conservative, but there are similarities with them. Like Owen, Fourier rejected

¹⁶Corr, XVII, p. 467.

the family unit and traditional marriage, and economically, he was opposed to communal property. Unlike Owen or the Saint-Simonians, Fourier did not believe in fraternity. His system did not advocate social or political equality either. Fourier wanted a radical change through absolute materialism. According to him, true freedom is material: "Que veut le peuple? il demande avant tout la bonne chère."¹⁷ Unlike Owen, Fourier had no particular sympathy for the people.

In his ideal community Fourier maintained class divisions which according to him were necessary for the proper functioning of any social order: "Dieu y a distribué les animaux, végétaux et minéraux par groupes et séries."¹⁸ Classes were for him a way of preventing uniformity and boredom: "Tout dans la nature veut la variété."¹⁹ Fourier was also opposed to egalitarian principles: "l'égalité est l'antipathique de l'harmonie."²⁰ In his system he proposed to make all classes proportionally wealthy: "il enrichit proportionnellement les 3 classes."²¹ He was staunchly

¹⁷La fausse industrie, in Oeuvres Complètes, 11 vols., (Paris: Anthropos, 1967), vol. VIII, p. 387.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 355.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 366.

²⁰Ibid., p. 198.

²¹Ibid., p. 413.

opposed to the abolition of private property.

Fourier also developed the idea of small agricultural villages or "phalanstères," composed of a thousand members where each was to work without constraint and for a small number of hours a day, "en courtes séances par des groupes libres et joyeux."²² Like Saint-Simon, Fourier had a great number of disciples, such as Victor Considérant who took an active part in political life.

Fourier's anti-democratic ideal could not appeal to Sand, and she even condemned his doctrine of sexual liberation. In 1844, she wrote: "La doctrine de Fourier. C'est parce qu'elle n'applique nullement nos principes ... que nous ne l'aimons pas et que nous ne la voulons pas ... nous les trouvons anti-religieux, et nous les sentons non pas seulement inconciliables, mais opposés diamétralement aux nôtres."²³ Eliot had heard of Fourier. In 1843, she wrote: "There is a lady here who admires Fourier and has lent me a book of him and his isms, but heaven knows I shall have no time to read it."²⁴ Little else is known about what she thought of Fourier. One might suppose that her comments would have been similar to those of Sand, especially concerning his lack of sympathy.

²²Ibid., p. 12.

²³Corr, VI, p. 457.

²⁴Letters, I, p. 168.

The 1840's saw the rise of another important social theory, that of Etienne Cabet. Unlike the Saint-Simonians and the Fourierists, Cabet was of working-class origin. His father was a cooper. Cabet went into law and was soon drawn to Republican ideas. He devoted his life to the cause of the workers. After a forced exile in England in 1837 during which he met Owen, he returned to France and wrote a very influential book entitled Voyage en Icarie (1842) followed by Le Vrai Christianisme (1846.) Cabet's ideas were immensely popular and his weekly newspaper Le Populaire (1841) widely read amongst the working class.

Unlike the Saint-Simonians and Fourier who attracted mostly the educated middle-class, professors, engineers and doctors, Cabet's disciples came from the "le peuple." They were artisans, shoemakers, tailors, and bakers. His social ideas were animated by a sincere love of the people and a clear understanding of their problems. Cabet advocated republican principles of equality and freedom but he also insisted on the necessity of fraternity. He proposed an economic system based on communal means of production and was a firm opponent of laissez-faire. Like Owen, the Saint-Simonians and the Fourierists, he also founded a commune, first in Texas in 1849, but eventually returned to play an active role in politics of the opposition

during the Second Republic. Sand found Cabet's Icarie too idealistic: "Fantaisies généreuses et naïves."²⁵ Eliot had read Icarie, but made few comments on Cabet's ideas.²⁶

Such social reformers came to be known as Socialists. The term appeared in England in the Co-operative Magazine in 1827 in reference to Owen.²⁷ In France it is credited to Leroux who used the term in 1833 to denounce the other extreme form of politics or "exagération de l'idée d'association"²⁸ at the time directed against the partisans of Babeuf and Buonarroti. However, Leroux declared he was a socialist if the term meant "la réforme sociale et de solidarité" without constraining individual freedom: "En définitive, adopter soit l'individualisme, soit le socialisme, c'est ne pas comprendre la vie. La vie consiste essentiellement dans

²⁵Souvenirs de 1848, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 199.

²⁶Letters, II, p. 59 and p. 262.

²⁷November 1827: "The chief question on this point, however, between the modern (or Mill and Malthus) Political Economists, and the Communists or Socialists, is, whether it is more beneficial that this capital should be individual or in common." Cited by R. G. Garnett, Co-operation and the Owenite socialist communities in Britain, 1824-45, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), p. 38, note 79.

²⁸"De l'individualisme et du Socialisme", Revue Encyclopédique, October 1833. In David Owen Evans, Le socialisme romantique: Pierre Leroux et ses contemporains, (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1848), p. 376.

la relation divine et nécessaire d'êtres individuels et libres. L'individualisme ne comprend pas la vie, car il nie cette relation. Le socialisme absolu ne la comprend pas davantage, car en faussant cette relation il la détruit."²⁹

Socialism was not yet coherently defined. Marx was still unknown in spite of his Communist Manifesto of 1847. In its early years the term "socialism" was loosely applied to the movement for social reform. In the 1840's and 1850's, its meaning was still vague. According to George Weill: "En 1849 le mot était imprécis et n'avait point un sens exclusivement économique ... il désigne à la fois une tendance à l'association, à la fraternité générale, et un ensemble de mesures, très mal définies, qui doivent combattre la misère."³⁰ In 1850, the philosopher Charles Renouvrier defined it as "une doctrine ou plutôt un ensemble de doctrines dont l'esprit commun consiste à reconnaître à la personne de l'Etat des devoirs et des droits plus étendus que par le passé, et à resserrer les liens de solidarité qui unissent tous les citoyens, tous les membres de la République."³¹

²⁹Ibid., p. 380.

³⁰Georges Weill, Histoire du parti républicain en France 1814-1870, (Paris: Alcan, 1928), p. 243.

³¹ Ibid., p. 254.

However, in both countries, the term came to be associated with the political consciousness of the working class. In the 1840's, as the workers began to unite, Socialism became synonymous in England with Chartism. In France the term was often replaced by "Communism", to denote Cabet's followers and those who favoured not only social reforms based on community of goods but also encouraged active political participation. Within these movements there were radical groups who advocated non-violent action as did, for instance, William Lovett for the Chartists and Cabet, and those who believed in revolutionary action such as O'Connor or the followers of Buonarroti such as Auguste Blanqui or Jean-Jacques Pillot.

Marx had no faith in cooperation and fraternity. He criticized pacifists for their naivety, called their socialism "utopian" and pointed out the error of a system based on "pleasant abstraction from class antagonisms" and on a "sentimental equalization of class interest."³² Marx's work has no direct bearing on the present study. Eliot seems to have ignored him. Sand did not know German and most of Marx's works were not translated into French until the 1880's and 1890's by

³²Karl Marx, The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850, (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 44.

Jules Guesde, Gabriel Deville and Georges Sorel.³³ It is possible that Sand and Marx briefly met when he was in Paris in 1844, but his influence, to which I will return in the conclusion of this chapter, is unlikely.

Sand's social and political thought belongs to the Republican and democratic ideal of her time. She was a partisan of the tradition of Liberté, Egalité and above all of Fraternité. According to her, the Revolution of 1789 was only the first step towards social justice and the doctrines of freedom and equality which the revolutionaries proclaimed were insufficient to bring about a solid foundation for a new social order. Something else was needed which would link people together again and make them look up to God, which Sand calls "la fraternité." Although Sand recognized the importance of equality and freedom, her social and political ideal rests essentially on the doctrine of fraternity, which Pierre Huguenin, hero of Le compagnon du tour de France summarizes in a few words: "Je voudrais que tous les hommes vécussent ensemble comme des frères ... sans cela la liberté ne nous ferait aucun

³³Capital was translated in 1872. Although one translation of the Communist Manifesto appeared in New York in 1872, it was not published in France until 1885. See Michael Kelly, Modern French Marxism, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 14.

bien."³⁴

According to Sand, God created all human beings equal, but not identical, and their freedom was limited by their duties. Hence, stronger individuals have a larger share of duties. In 1863 she wrote: "Les forts, les puissants, les intelligents auraient une part de devoirs plus considérable à remplir envers les faibles."³⁵ Such was God's intention when he gave man intelligence: "Dieu ne vous impose pas ce devoir, il vous l'infuse en vous donnant l'intelligence."³⁶ Sand defines humanity in moral terms. According to her, Man is not simply a rational creature. He is above all a being who can feel sympathy for his fellow-beings and sacrifice his own self for that of others: "Notre supériorité intellectuelle consiste avant tout dans le sentiment de solidarité qu'on appelle d'un beau nom: le dévouement."³⁷

Sand's social doctrine, which in the 1840's she called Socialism or Communism, was therefore based on the devotion or sacrifice which fraternity demands. In 1848 she wrote: "Comment s'appelle la religion? Elle

³⁴Le compagnon du tour de France, (Plan de la tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1977), p. 166.

³⁵Corr, XX, p. 579.

³⁶Ibid., p. 577.

³⁷Ibid., p. 578.

s'appelle République. Quelle est sa formule? Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité."³⁸ The fundamental basis of her social system is religious, and even Christian. Sand saw in Christ the first advocate of equality and fraternity: "Jésus était le premier et l'immortel apôtre de l'égalité."³⁹ As we have seen, according to Sand, Jesus came from the people and took up the cause of the poor and the exploited: "Jésus enfant du peuple, martyr de la vérité, victime dévouée pour la cause du faible du pauvre et de l'esclave."⁴⁰

Sand believed that originally man was a social animal. According to her, God did not intend man to live in solitude. She agreed with Rousseau about the original goodness of man but she believed his conception of the state of nature was too naive: "fausse et romanesque."⁴¹ According to her, the Golden Age described by Rousseau never existed: "Il n'y a point eu d'âge d'or dans la forêt primitive de Rousseau."⁴² However, Sand equally disagreed with the materialist philosophers who, like Hobbes, believed that in the

³⁸"La question de demain," La vraie république, May 10th, 1848, in Georges Lubin (ed.), Souvenirs de 1848, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 109.

³⁹Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 80.

⁴²Ibid.

state of nature men were at war with each other:

"L'homme n'a pas été créé, dans des fins divines, pour vivre seul, encore moins pour vivre en lutte avec ses semblables."⁴³ Sand always pointed out that man's nature was more complex than previous philosophers thought and that it could only be explained by the social and political world in which he lived. Sand believed that, to some extent, one could not understand man without studying his social environment: "L'homme n'est ni bon ni méchant dans les conditions de l'isolement, il n'existe pas à l'état d'homme."⁴⁴

According to Sand, since God created all men free and equal, the duty of government was to preserve freedom and equality. She always believed that the best form of government was a democracy. She argued that political and social privileges were not natural but only the consequence of historical and economic forces. According to her, political power must never be in the hands of only one man, but equally distributed amongst the people: "L'autorité remise entre les mains d'un seul. C'est là un principe que je ne puis admettre."⁴⁵ Sand believed that monarchy belonged to a less developed

⁴³Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵"A Lamennais," La vraie république, May 4th, 1848, in Georges Lubin (ed.), Souvenirs de 1848, op. cit, p. 81.

stage of culture: "Aux époques où le génie de l'humanité se résume dans un seul, l'humanité est à l'état d'enfance."⁴⁶

Sand's hatred of the feudal system appears in several novels, such as Jeanne and Le marquis de Villemer, but it is perhaps Mauprat, set at the time of the Revolution of 1789, which contains her most severe criticism of feudalism. The Mauprat family she describes belong to a race of country lords in a remote province of the centre of France, who refuse to accept the precepts of 1789 and the Rights of Man and continue to rule as despots over the land, exploiting and abusing poor farmers, killing their debtors and government controllers. Sand was very familiar with the feudal system because, according to her, in the isolated provinces such as her own Berry, old customs and traditional ways of life lingered on, unaffected by the great political decisions made by Paris: "Aucune province de France n'a conservé plus de vieilles traditions et souffert plus longtemps les abus de la féodalité. Nulle part ailleurs peut-être on a maintenu, comme on l'a fait chez nous jusqu'ici, le titre de seigneur de la commune à certains châtelains."⁴⁷ The Mauprat are the descendants of that race of ruthless

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Mauprat, (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), p. 46.

nobles which, according to Sand, ruled over the remote provinces from time immemorial: "Race de petits tyrans féodaux dont la France avait été couverte et infestée pendant tant de siècles."⁴⁸

Eliot's social and political thought is also characterized by her religious sentiment. Like Sand, she contemplates politics from a religious and moral point of view. She refrains from speaking about equality, but she shares Sand's doctrine of fraternity. At the time of the French revolution of February 1848, Eliot was reading Sand's Lettres d'un voyageur, "with great delight." Sand's book infused her mind with new ideas and Eliot advised her friend Sara to read it. Eliot could not contain her enthusiasm and admiration for the Revolution. In a letter to her friend John Sibree she declares: "I write to tell you that I join in your happiness about the French Revolution ... I would consent to have a year clipped off my life for the sake of witnessing such a scene as that of men of the barricades bowing to the image of Christ, 'who first taught fraternity to men'."⁴⁹

Eliot's reaction is not surprising when we consider the religious character of the prophets who made the 1848 revolution possible. Sand's novels greatly

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁹Letters, I, p. 254.

contributed to the propagation of the socialist ideal. During that year, Eliot also read Sand's socialist novel Le meunier d'Angibault. The birth of the new Socialist Republic seemed to be a dream come true. Eliot's enthusiasm for the French Republic was accompanied by applause at the fall of the monarchy and the bourgeois regime which characterized it: "I have little patience with people who can find the time to pity Louis Philippe and his moustached sons."⁵⁰ For her, as for Sand, it was evident that monarchy was a form of government which was the least favourable to fraternity. In the same letter, she wrote: "Certainly our decayed monarchs should be pensioned off: we should have a hospital for them, or a sort of zoological garden where these worn out humbugs may be preserved."⁵¹

Eliot was not a keen admirer of the English political system and she criticized monarchy as a form of government. She could not be made to feel sympathy for the exiled French king when most of the population suffered from economic want: "For heaven's sake preserve me from sentimentalizing over a pampered old man when the earth has its millions of unfed souls and bodies."⁵² Eliot was disillusioned with English politics and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

deplored the lack of fraternal spirit between the social classes. For her, English political life was still too rigorous and dominated by material interest. She did not think people were ready to co-operate, and remained skeptical about the possibility of changes like those which occurred in France: "A revolutionary movement would be simply put down. Our military have no notion of fraternizing."⁵³

Eliot's novels also show that man is conditioned by his environment. Eliot believed that the first determining factor was nature. Determinism is a major characteristic of her thought, and one which she found developed in Sand's Lettres d'un voyageur and to which she refers as the "ultimatum of human wisdom."⁵⁴

Contrary to the theory of laissez-faire economics, Eliot did not believe that one was absolutely free to determine one's life: "Nature never makes a ferret in the shape of a mastiff,"⁵⁵ says Mr. Irwine in Adam Bede. In Scenes of Clerical Life she compares Nature to a mechanism which regulates the world with precision in which even changes are foreseen. She mentions the "inexorable ticking of the clock" and refers to "the

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Letters, I, p. 251.

⁵⁵Adam Bede, (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 108.

great clockwork of nature."⁵⁶ Her novels give the impression that nature has little sympathy for man. Nature seems to be regulated like a machine and acts in "calm inexorable ways."⁵⁷

The second determining factor, one on which she insists, is the social and political milieu: "There is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life."⁵⁸ Sand's early novels such as Indiana, Valentine and Jacques showed that people were victims of the social order, giving a pessimistic and fatalistic view of existence. Sand's early fatalism changed when she met Leroux and became his disciple. She became convinced that man could act to improve his condition. Eliot remained deeply influenced by the tragic representation of life she found in Sand's early novels. Eliot's determinism is not strict and her novels show that heredity and environment interact creating thereby an infinite number of unique situations in which man can make choices. Ultimately, it is such choices which determine the course of his life. Nevertheless, fraternity is necessary because it is the best way to counter-balance the rigour of nature and of the social

⁵⁶Scenes of Clerical Life, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 104.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 113.

⁵⁸Felix Holt, the Radical, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 43.

order. It is this sympathy which again characterizes Eliot's social thought.

For Eliot as for Sand, the existing social order is only the product of historical forces and therefore will eventually evolve. In Mauprat Sand portrays the last days of the feudal system, Eliot in Felix Holt shows how economic and political forces at work in society affect the class system. Eliot is severe towards those who have no sympathy for others and cannot go beyond the limits of their class. Her novels criticize the political and social order which tends to keep people away from each other. Like Sand, Eliot was opposed to the traditional class system. The portrait she draws of Mrs. Transome shows her critical attitude vis-à-vis traditional class values. Mrs. Transome comes from a family whose members have "old-fashioned notions."⁵⁹ She is not evil but is definitely characterized by a thirst for power and a lack of sympathy for people outside her class: "She was master, had come from a high family, and had a spirit -you might see it in her eye and the way she sat her horse."⁶⁰ Mrs. Transome is not a Mauprat, but she has "a high-born imperious air which would have marked her as an object of hatred and

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 10.

reviling by a revolutionary mob."⁶¹ However, like the Mauprat, Mrs. Transome enjoys every privilege of her rank: "She liked every little sign of power her lot had left her. She liked that a tenant should stand bareheaded below her as she sat on horseback."⁶² She must rule and be a master: "She liked to insist that work done without her orders should be undone from beginning to end. She liked to be curtsied and bowed to by all the congregation ... she liked to change a labourer's medicine fetched from the doctor, and substitute a prescription of her own."⁶³

Mrs. Transome is not a very sympathetic woman and neither is her brother Reverend John Lingon, who attributes the fall of "good old Toryism" to Catholic emancipation, and rejects the doctrine of the Rights of Man as a "ridiculous monstrosity."⁶⁴ However, he is more disillusioned than his sister and is ready to compromise to defend his ideal: "If the mob can't be turned back, a man of family must try and head the mob, and save a few bones and hearths, and keep the country up on its last legs as long as he can."⁶⁵ He is less

⁶¹Ibid., p. 26.

⁶²Ibid., p. 28.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 30.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 31.

repulsed by Harold's radicalism than Mrs. Transome. Mrs. Transome does not feel any sympathy for the less fortunate. Despite the circumstances, she remains "unshaken, keeping down the obtrusiveness of the vulgar and the discontent of the poor."⁶⁶

In 1848, Eliot would have liked to see a change in England comparable to the one which took place in France. She deplored the absence of political commitment and ideal amongst the English social reformers: "Here there is so much larger a proportion of selfish radicalism and unsatisfied, brute sensuality (in the agricultural and mining districts especially) than of perception or desire of justice."⁶⁷ According to her, the English working classes lacked the ideal which the French had: "I should have no hope of good from any imitative movement at home. Our working classes are eminently inferior to the mass of the French people. In France the mind of the people is highly electrified - they are full of ideas on social reform -not merely an acting out of Sancho Panza's favourite proverb, 'Yesterday for you, to-day for me.' The revolutionary animus extended over the whole nation, and embraced the rural population -not merely as with us, the artisans of

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁷Letters, I, p. 254.

the towns."⁶⁸ Eliot's judgement is certainly exaggerated but it shows the influence of Sand's rustic novels such as Le meunier d'Angibault and Le péché de Monsieur Antoine in which she developed her social theory.

Neither Sand nor Eliot advocated revolution. Eliot had a particular hatred of disorderly behaviour. Both loved the people, but Eliot was more reluctant to accept political equality. Sand advocated the fusion of all classes. Eliot demanded more sympathy between the classes but thought that a class-system was inevitable: "No society is made up of a single class."⁶⁹ Eliot advocated duty rather than freedom. According to her, a classless society was an impossible dream. Classes were part of the good functioning of the social order: "No society ever stood long in the world without getting to be composed of different classes."⁷⁰

Unlike Sand, who emphasized freedom and equality, Eliot preached the need for order: "The nature of things in this world has been determined for us beforehand, and in such a way that no ship can be expected to sail well on a difficult voyage, and reach the right port, unless

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹"Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," Blackwood's 103 (January 1868). In Essays, op. cit., p. 420.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 420.

it is well manned."⁷¹ Eliot was not opposed to reforms provided they were reasonable and moral. According to her, political wisdom consists in finding out what sort of changes are possible given the circumstances: "A fool or idiot is one who expects things to happen that can never happen."⁷²

Both Sand and Eliot criticized the egotistic spirit which characterized the middle class. In La ville noire (1863) Sand describes the effects of the Industrial Revolution. The novel takes place in an industrial city amongst steel workers and shows the evil consequences of capitalist system which lured young peasants from their villages to the city, promising them happiness. Sand's novel contains a bitter criticism of the bourgeoisie. In this novel Sand no longer believes in a classless society. She is willing to accept a certain amount of difference, but insists that each class must respect the other. According to her, each class must be successful by its own means without imitating the other class: "Le goût de réussir dans son état par des moyens qui n'ont rien de ridicule."⁷³

The ideas expressed in Eliot's Felix Holt are very

⁷¹Essays, op. cit., p. 422.

⁷²Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 248.

⁷³La ville noire, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 90.

similar. Felix loves the people and he wants to stick to his own class. Like Sand, Eliot shows that one must be proud of one's social origin. Felix has a hatred of commerce: "I have my heritage -an order I belong to. I have the blood of a line of handicraftsmen in my veins, and I want to stand up for the lot of the handicraftsman as a good lot, in which a man may be better trained to all the best functions of his nature than if he belonged to the grimacing set who have visiting-cards, and are proud to be thought richer than their neighbours."⁷⁴ In an age of rapid economic growth and increasing material aspirations Sand's and Eliot's novels gave artisans and peasants the respect and the pride they deserved.

Sand's social thought is embedded in the development of socialism, a term she also used synonymously with communism. Her socialism is of a religious nature and went through different phases. Le meunier d'Angibault and Le péché de Monsieur Antoine, written in the 1840's, show the enthusiasm of her youth. La ville noire is marked by a profound disillusionment with the revolution of 1848. Sand always believed that socialism meant a complete change in the social and political structure of society. As she said in her preface to Le péché de Monsieur Antoine socialism could only be brought about either by a strong government or

⁷⁴Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 223.

by a profound moral and religious transformation. A revolution was not enough, socialism was an ideal, which would take centuries to attain, "réalisable que par l'initiative d'un gouvernement fort, ou par une rénovation philosophique, religieuse et chrétienne, ouvrage des siècles peut-être."⁷⁵

Sand believed that men were not ready for socialism. Socialism was based on brotherhood and love and could not be easily engendered only by political changes: "Le communisme est un contrat de fraternité idéale pour lequel nous savons bien que les hommes ne sont pas mûrs, et auquel ils ne sauraient consentir librement et sincèrement du jour au lendemain."⁷⁶ Socialism or communism then represented much more than a political doctrine. For Sand it was a way of life, almost a religion: "Le communisme est une doctrine qui n'a pas encore trouvé sa formule: par conséquent ce n'est encore ni une religion praticable ni une société possible; c'est une idée vague et incomplète."⁷⁷

As socialism evolved and became more rigorously defined into a revolutionary doctrine, Sand remained critical. In contrast to Marx, she clung to her belief

⁷⁵Le péché de Monsieur Antoine, 2 vols., (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), vol. I, p. 3

⁷⁶Souvenirs de 1848, op. cit., p. 91.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 195.

in peace and fraternity. Her socialism is above all moral and religious: "Le communisme lorsqu'il aura trouvé sa formule deviendra donc une religion."⁷⁸ Sand always refused to be identified with a political party: "Si par le communisme vous entendez telle ou telle secte, nous ne sommes point communistes, parce que nous n'appartenons à aucune secte."⁷⁹ Although she encouraged political commitment, she abhorred violence, and brutal changes. Like Eliot, she advocated slow and progressive reforms. However, socialism for her included political equality: "Le désir et la volonté que grace à tous les moyens légitimes et avoués par la conscience publiques l'inégalité revoltante de l'extrême richesse et de l'extrême pauvreté disparaisse dès aujourd'hui pour faire place à un commencement d'égalité véritable, oui nous sommes communistes."⁸⁰

Sand was opposed to revolutions and preached freedom, co-operation and fraternity: "Une direction éclairé, consciencieuse, ardente et sincère, donnée par l'état au principe protecteur de l'association, à l'examen de la forme la plus applicable, la plus étendue, la plus préservatrice de toutes les libertés

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 92.

individuelles et de tous les intérêts légitimes."⁸¹

Although she used the terms "socialism" and "communism" to describe her ideal, Sand never adopted other theories which also called themselves communist (Blanqui, Cabet, Marx.) Her socialism was not material but religious and emphasized fraternity and love: "Le peuple a compris aujourd'hui ce que c'est que le véritable communisme ... c'est l'Évangile quand au passé et au présent, c'est l'Évangile introduit dans la vie réelle sous le nom de République."⁸²

In other words, "communism", for Sand, presupposed a moral transformation of the individual and rejected materialism. It represented an ideal which had to respect the individual as much as the state. It could not be imposed from without and must always respect the wish of the majority. It was based on democracy and freedom. It was more than a form of government and must also be felt from within: "S'il est une religion, j'y adhère de toute mon âme ... mais si le communisme est une société, je m'en retire parce que je me vois aussitôt forcé d'être en guerre et en lutte incessante avec tous ceux de mes semblables qui ne reconnaissent pas l'Évangile."⁸³

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Souvenirs de 1848, op. cit., p. 90.

⁸³Ibid., p. 200.

Sand's social ideal was not an immediate and political conspiracy to seize power: "Si par communisme vous entendez une conspiration disposée à tenter un coup de main, pour s'emparer de la dictature, comme on le disait le 16 avril, nous ne sommes point communistes."⁸⁴ It advocated peaceful reforms. Revolutions were insufficient and only brought about a political change: "On ne se bat que pour faire triompher un principe immédiatement réalisable, l'institution républicaine, par exemple."⁸⁵

Eliot was more conservative than Sand. She did not directly advocate equality and she always insisted on the dangers of "vain expectations, and of thoughts that don't agree with the nature of things."⁸⁶ Unlike Sand, Eliot was not a partisan of the enfranchisement of the working classes. Felix agrees that the great problem is "how to give every man a man's share in what goes on in life,"⁸⁷ but he does not believe the working man should participate in political life. Felix is sceptical about the power of votes: "I think he expects voting to do more towards it than I do."⁸⁸

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 91.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 248.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 245.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 247.

Eliot's social ideal is above all moral. Political measures are not seen as lasting and efficient. She also believed in brotherhood and peaceful reforms. However she differs from Sand on the importance of freedom and equality. There seem to be few similarities between Eliot and socialism. Felix is not a radical in politics but in morals. Like Savonarola, he is a man guided by visions, and not only by political realities: "I am a man who am warned by visions. Those old stories of visions and dreams guiding men have their truth."⁸⁹ He is much closer to a religious prophet than to a social reformer: "I want to go to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise."⁹⁰

Eliot shared with Sand the belief that political and social reforms could only be brought about with diligence, caution and patience. Felix advocates changes but not revolution: "I don't expect them to come in a hurry, by mere inconsiderate sweeping."⁹¹ Felix Holt is not opposed to reforms: "I hope there will be great changes."⁹² But he refuses to provoke them, "to undo what has been done with great expense and labour,

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 222.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 224.

⁹¹"Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," op. cit., in Essays, p. 424.

⁹²Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 247.

to waste and to destroy."⁹³ Eliot wanted a moral transformation of society. She was opposed to the idea of mass movement because the masses are too selfish, impulsive and uneducated to bring about lasting changes. Eliot had sympathy for the people and desired a better education for them, but until this was granted she remained opposed to their political participation. She had a fear of mass uprisings. Her representations of the mob in Romola and in Felix Holt illustrate her hatred of revolutions. Uprisings are made up of "men whose mental state was a mere medley of appetites and confused impressions,"⁹⁴ and, in fact, "animated by no real political passion or fury against social distinctions."⁹⁵

Unlike Sand, Eliot separated morals from politics. Sand encouraged fighting against injustice. Eliot preached patience and tolerance: "Not all the evils of our condition are such as we can justly blame others for; and, I repeat, many of them are such as no changes of institutions can quickly remedy. To discern between the evils that energy can remove and the evils that patience must bear, makes the difference between manliness and childishness, between good sense and

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 267.

⁹⁵Ibid.

folly."⁹⁶ According to Eliot, order should be kept at all cost, reforms should be constructive and preserve culture and differences: "The endowed classes, in their inheritance from the past, hold the precious material without which no worthy, noble future can be moulded. Many of the highest uses of life are in their keeping; and if privilege has often been abused, it also has been the nurse of excellence."⁹⁷

Eliot's love of the people was sincere, but limited. She did not wish to entrust them with political power. On the contrary, Sand believed political reforms could only help develop good moral behaviour. Sand did not see political power as incompatible with moral progress. She idealized the people and saw in them the embodiment of love and purity, and tried to unite artisans, factory-workers and peasants: "Nous sommes dans le peuple, gens de deux sortes: ouvriers de la terre, ouvriers de l'industrie, gens de la ville ou de manufacture, gens de la campagne."⁹⁸ Her novels show that, in spite of their differences, factory workers and peasants belong to the same class, to one social group which shares the same

⁹⁶"Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," op. cit., in Essays, pp. 429-30.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 429.

⁹⁸"Paroles de Blaize Bonin", in Souvenirs de 1848, op. cit., p. 59.

interests and suffers similar injustices: "Vos intérêts, mes chers concitoyens de la campagne sont les mêmes que ceux de nos concitoyens des villes."⁹⁹ Sand was politically active. In her articles she strove to unite peasants and workers to the socialist cause: "Ayez donc confiance au peuple des villes ... c'est un frère qui combat pour son frère ... le peuple des villes c'est l'armée du peuple des campagnes ... sans eux vous seriez encore serfs sur une terre qui vous appartient aujourd'hui."¹⁰⁰

Eliot never went so far, but her novels were written with the intention of bringing people closer together. According to her, her goal was "the rousing of nobler emotions which make mankind desire the social right."¹⁰¹ But Eliot's "social right" was not synonymous with freedom or actual equality between social classes. Felix Holt is a respectable working-class man, but he is also conservative in politics. According to him, "there are two sorts of power. There's a power to do mischief --to undo what has been done with great expense and labour, to waste and destroy, to be cruel to the weak, to lie and quarrel, and to talk poisonous nonsense. That's the sort of power that

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰¹Letters, VII, p. 44.

ignorant numbers have. It never made a joint stool or planted a potato. Do you think it's likely to do much toward governing a great country?"¹⁰² Ultimately in the far distant future, Eliot believed that the working classes will have political power, but only when they have received sufficient education. As Felix remarks: "We or the children that come after us, will get plenty of political power some time."¹⁰³

But if Eliot and Sand disagreed on the importance of political equality, both of them were bitterly opposed to capitalist economy. Sand and Eliot were opposed to capitalism because it protected the interests of the stronger, advocate competition, and isolated individuals. They reproached capitalism for promoting egotism and greed. Sand was opposed to the absolute economic freedom. According to Sand, such freedom engendered exploitation, abuse and fraud: "Livré au laissez-faire, le commerce est une source d'abus sans nombre, de fraudes, de falsifications, de spéculations éhontées."¹⁰⁴ La ville noire also points out the other bad consequences of industrialisation, the fact that it had demographic consequences, emptied villages, over-

¹⁰²Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 247.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴"Louis Blanc au Luxembourg," La vraie république June 1st 1848, in Souvenirs de 1848, op. cit., p. 163.

populated cities, increased unemployment in the latter and labour shortage in the former: "La population est mal répartie sur le territoire, les campagnes manquent de bras, les villes en ont trop. Là est la principale cause du désordre dans la production et la consommation."¹⁰⁵ In L'Eclaireur, a journal that she founded in 1844, Sand denounced the centralisation of capital in the hands of a few Parisian industrialists.¹⁰⁶ She criticized capitalist economy for interpreting nature in a materialistic way and promoting individualism which she calls "l'erreur du siècle."¹⁰⁷

Novels such as Le péché de Monsieur Antoine and La ville noire denounce the immorality of capitalism. In the former, Sand introduces Cardonnet, a modern capitalist, whose plan to build a factory on the river disrupts the bucolic peace of a village. Cardonnet is absolutely convinced that industry will bring about happiness. He does not believe in equality but in the law of the stronger. By promising poor farmers higher wages, he lures them into becoming factory workers.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁰⁶"Les ouvriers boulangers de Paris," September 27, 1844. In Questions politiques et sociales, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1977), p. 27.

¹⁰⁷"Petition pour l'organisation du travail," La réforme, November 4th, 1848. In Questions politiques et sociales, op. cit., p. 77.

Cardonnet has no respect for nature and even contemplates changing the course of the river to suit his plans. He is a firm believer in the Industrial Revolution. His motto is: "Que l'industrie règne et triomphe."¹⁰⁸ He believes that free entreprise must rule society and advocates competition: "Que la société concoure donc, par tous les moyens, à asseoir la puissance de l'homme capable! sa capacité est un bienfait public."¹⁰⁹ Cardonnet believes that happiness consists of material possessions: "Il faut être riche pour devenir toujours plus riche."¹¹⁰ He is also the advocate of a lifestyle based on work and has nothing but contempt for poets, dreamers and other non-productive men.

Cardonnet has his enemies. First his own son Emile, who befriends Boisguibault the communist. Emile disagrees with his father's philosophy and argues that competition is immoral because it protects the strong and ignores the weak: "C'est l'injustice, c'est le droit du plus fort par l'intelligence et par la volonté, c'est l'aristocratie et le privilège sous d'autres formes."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Le péché de Monsieur Antoine, op. cit., vol. I, p. 164.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 166.

For Emile and Boisguibault, capitalism represents a primitive form of civilisation, one in which people are constantly at war with one another: "Nous vivons suivant la loi aveugle de la nature sauvage; le code de l'instinct farouche qui régit la brute est encore l'âme de notre prétendue civilisation."¹¹²

Emile argues with his father and accuses the new economic doctrines of being elitist: "Erreur et mensonge que toutes ces déclamations de l'économie politique à l'ordre du jour."¹¹³ According to him, capitalist economy is basically anti-social. First, it alienates men, separates them from their villages and transforms them into machines. Then it exploits them, giving them the bare means of subsistence which forces them to continue working. Emile accuses his father of perpetuating a very inhuman system: "Vous ne laissez pas à l'esclavage du travail le temps de respirer et de se reconnaître ... l'éducation dirigée vers le gain ne fera que des machines brutales, et non des hommes complets."¹¹⁴ Emile also argues that the capitalist's glorification of work hides another form of slavery. According to him, the conditions of factory labour are unjust: "L'amour du travail sans relâche et sans autre

¹¹²Ibid., p. 169.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 168.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 166.

compensation qu'un peu de sécurité pour la vieillesse est si contraire à la nature qu'on ne l'inspirera jamais à l'enfance."¹¹⁵

Sand denounced the economic system which encourages competition. As one keen-sighted peasant explains, the capitalist is just another lord: "Une fois que j'ai ruiné toutes les petites industries qui me faisaient concurrence, je deviens un seigneur plus puissant que ne l'étaient nos pères avant la révolution."¹¹⁶ The peasant shows that capitalism is a new form of feudalism, with its new lords dreaming of building bigger and stronger empires with no mercy for the smaller lords in their quest for supremacy: "Aucune autre fortune que la mienne ne s'élèvera, et toute petite condition sera amoindrie, parce que j'aurai tari toutes les sources d'aisance."¹¹⁷

Boisguibault proposes a system which would encourage equality through co-operation, association. According to him, the economy should reflect man's social nature. Production should be controlled, the labour force treated humanely, with respect, and encouraged to participate in the industry. In other words co-operation or association rather than

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 165.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 41.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

competition: "Associions tous nos travailleurs à tous nos bénéfices."¹¹⁸

Boisguibault and Emile are against monopoly and capital, but they do not wish to abolish private property. Sand always declared that there were two sorts of property, one individual and inalienable, and the other in common which must be restituted to the people and cannot remain in the hands of a single individual: "Il y a deux sortes de propriété: la part individuelle, qui est largement faite à quelques-uns, et qu'il faudra respecter quand même; la part commune, qui a été dérobée à tous par quelques uns et qu'il faudra restituer."¹¹⁹ She was opposed to the idea of absolute common property: "La communauté absolue ne me paraît point dans la nature véritable de l'homme."¹²⁰ According to her, equality does not imply absolute community of goods: "C'est donc chercher mal l'égalité que de la chercher dans la communauté absolue et immédiate. C'est une folie."¹²¹

La ville noire takes us a step further. There Sand examines the conditions of factory work and the effect on the lives and aspirations of the workers. The novel

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 167.

¹¹⁹Souvenirs de 1848, op. cit., p. 202.

¹²⁰Corr, VIII., p. 580.

¹²¹Ibid.

takes place in a small provincial town in the centre of France where the extraction of coal began in the middle ages. Almost twenty years have elapsed since the days of Cardonnet, and capitalism has now become a thriving force in the French economy. There are approximately six hundred factories and a total population of eight thousand workers in La ville noire.

Sand's novel describes the poor living and working conditions of the steel-workers, knife-makers, locksmiths, and gunsmiths whom Sand calls "les hommes du feu" and the paper makers, or "les hommes de l'eau." She denounces the long working hours, the dark, damp workshops, the hazardous relations between men and machines, the endless repetition of the same gestures: "Les détails de la vie manufacturière sont souvent rebutants à voir. Rien de triste comme un atelier sombre où chaque homme rivé, comme une pièce mécanique, à un instrument de fatigue fonctionne, exilé du jour et du soleil, au sein du bruit et de la fumée."¹²² The noises are deafening: "Le bruit continu des marteaux, les cris aigres des outils et le sifflement de la fournaise,"¹²³ and the small children are covered with soot and iron dust: "Tous ces enfants barbouillés de

¹²²La ville noire, op. cit., p. 129.

¹²³Ibid., p. 2.

suie et de limaille."¹²⁴ As Louis Gaucher the gunsmith remarks, not even the devil would have accepted such conditions: "Nous vivons là dans un endroit que le diable n'eût pas voulu."¹²⁵

Sand does not limit herself to the description of poor working conditions. She analyses the impact of capitalist economy on the consciousness of the workers and shows how it seeks to trap them and indoctrinate them into its ideology. Indeed, the typical worker's dream is to own his own factory and to become in turn a master. Such is the drama which takes place in Etienne Lavoute's life. Etienne is a knife-maker and gunsmith. After having worked for a while in a factory, he begins to dream of becoming rich, and to settle on top of the hill with the bourgeois: "Voilà l'ambition de l'ouvrier d'ici."¹²⁶ Sand shows how capitalism turns proud and independent artisans into money-hungry and ambitious men whose only wish in life is to become rich masters: "Devenir maître, payer et surveiller des ouvriers, tenir des écritures, faire du commerce ... acheter un terrain dans la ville haute, et faire bâtir une grande maison."¹²⁷ As Louis Gaucher says, since the worker is

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 8.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 5.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 4.

uprooted and cannot dream of going back to his village he is left with only one other solution, imitate the bourgeois: "Un peu de raison au bout de la tâche, et l'ouvrier peut devenir un gros bourgeois ... tous ces gens riches, qui de là-haut, nous regardent suer, en lisant leurs journaux ou en taillant leurs rosiers, sont, ou d'anciens camarades, ou les enfants d'anciens maîtres ouvriers."¹²⁸

Sand argues that it is not possible, as capitalists and their disciples maintain, for every worker to become successful, and illustrates her point with Etienne's story. Etienne is seduced by the idea of setting up his own business and becoming a master but he is also a good man and does not intend to exploit his workers. He buys an old factory and transforms it into a farm tool factory: "Ici je serai seul maître et seigneur chez moi! j'aurai des ouvriers que je traiterai humainement ... je serai le roi de cette solitude."¹²⁹ Tonine, the woman whom Etienne loves, does not share his dream. She also works in a factory but she has no intention of becoming a bourgeoise. She even reproaches Etienne for attempting to betray his class, an idea which is reminiscent of Felix Holt: "C'est mon idée de ne pas sortir de mon état ... je veux épouser mon pareil, et

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 5.

¹²⁹Ibid., pp. 54-55.

jamais un compagnon qui pense à la ville haute ne sera mon mari."¹³⁰

Sand believed that the worker or artisan had skills which conferred upon him a certain dignity. Tonine and Gaucher are proud workers. They love their town and its people. Tonine does not want Etienne to become a bourgeois and to exchange his skills for those of commerce. She has no sympathy for the bourgeois who make fun of them: "Les dames nous trouvent gauches et se moquent de nous."¹³¹ Tonine has no such ambition. Her intention is to stay with her friends and to live by her own skill: "Elle aimait sa ville noire, la blanche fille de l'atelier; elle y respirait à l'aise et voltigeait sur la sombre pouzzolane des ruelles et des galeries."¹³²

Etienne's experience as an industrialist and master is a failure. He soon becomes the slave of his work, worries about production, his workers, competitiveness and profit. He has very little time left to visit his friends. As Tonine remarks: "Il est mort à l'amitié ... il ne vit plus que pour l'intérêt."¹³³ Etienne's problems are serious and epitomize the tragic situation

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 41.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 41.

¹³²Ibid., p. 130.

¹³³Ibid., p. 153.

of the worker in a capitalist system. He fails because he lacks proper education and experience: "Son instruction n'était pas à la hauteur de son courage et de son intelligence."¹³⁴ And he has neither the mind, nor the heart, of an industrialist. He is too good and too honest to become a successful capitalist: "Il ne savait pas marchander avec âpreté ... il avait pitié de ses ouvriers malades ou serrés de trop près par la misère. Il faisait des avances qui ne rentraient que mal et tard, quelquefois pas du tout."¹³⁵ Finally, Etienne lacks capital and connections in the political world. Sand points out one of the paradoxes of capitalism, the fact that workers cannot really become bourgeois, that they are condemned to remain workers. Etienne was not a born businessman: "Il 's'était bien trompé le jour où il s'était cru propre au commerce."¹³⁶

Another novel with which Eliot was familiar and which contains a criticism of bourgeois economics is Le meunier d'Angibault. Bricolin represents the new race of country bourgeois: "On peut dire que l'argent passe dans leur sang, qu'il s'y attache de corps et d'âme."¹³⁷

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 150.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 85.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 145.

¹³⁷Le meunier d'Angibault, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 77.

Like most bourgeois Bricolin is an individualist. He is obsessed with money and material possessions and is blind to the need of the community as a whole: "Toute idée de dévouement à l'humanité, toute notion religieuse sont presque incompatible avec cette tranformation."¹³⁸ Sand's novel contains some of the most bitter remarks against the bourgeois's lack of ideal and sympathy: "Ils s'engraissent pour arriver à l'imbécilité ... aucune idée sociale, aucun sentiment de progrès ne les soutient, la digestion devient affaire de leur vie."¹³⁹ Bricolin's concern with economics which Sand illustrates by the picturesque but revealing expression "Au jour d'aujourd'hui," knows no limits. After repeated lies, he finally convinces Marcelle to sell her husband's estate to him. He has also stored up gold coins in a iron pot. Because Bricolin is obsessed with money, he forbids his daughter Rose to marry Grand Louis the poor miller.

Eliot's novels also contain criticisms of capitalism which recall those of Sand. Eliot denounced capitalism because it encouraged individualism, greed, and ignored compassion. The portrait she draws of "the practical man" in Felix Holt is very reminiscent of Sand's own practical men. Harold Transome, who is a

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid., pp. 77-78.

born conservative, becomes a successful merchant and banker in Greece. Harold is certainly predisposed to such a career, since his real father, the shrewd lawyer Jermyn, is "a man of business,"¹⁴⁰ and his mother has always had a desire for power. Harold is also the best representative of the spirit of the middle class: "He disliked all quarrelling as an unpleasant expenditure of energy that could have no good practical result. He was at once active and luxurious; fond of mastery ... not caring greatly to know other people's thoughts, and ready to despise them as blockheads if their thoughts differed from his."¹⁴¹

From an early age Harold has dreamed of becoming a master: "He delighted in success and predominance."¹⁴² Like Etienne, his most ardent desire is to acquire wealth and become independent: "I'll get rich somehow, and have an estate of my own, and do what I like with it."¹⁴³ Harold epitomizes the merchant spirit: "energetic will and muscle, the self-confidence, the quick perception, and the narrow imagination which make what is admiringly called the practical mind."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

Although Harold calls himself a radical, his way of thinking is that of a merchant. He uses people to achieve his own goals: "A practical man must seek a good end by the only possible means."¹⁴⁵ According to Eliot, he is "a clever, frank, good-natured egoist."¹⁴⁶ He seeks success and is "attached as a healthy, clear-sighted person, to all conventional morality."¹⁴⁷ However, Harold is determined to achieve his goal and ready to compromise. He represents the new breed of men who prefer the rich middle class and its "active industrious selfishness" to the old aristocracy and its "idle selfishness."¹⁴⁸

Like Sand, Eliot denounced the capitalist economy which promoted individualism and created the illusion that happiness consisted in independence and material possessions. According to her, capitalism is mistaken because it is basically materialistic. Materialism is criticized in The Mill on the Floss, where the Dodsons' greed reminds us of the Bricolin: "To be honest and poor was never a Dodson motto, ... rather, the family badge was to be honest and rich, and not only rich, but richer

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 158.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 156.

than was supposed."¹⁴⁹

The love of riches is also shown as evil in Silas Marner where like Bricolin, Silas hides away his gold coins and gradually worships them: "He loved them all. He spread them out in heaps and bathed his hands in them."¹⁵⁰ Silas is not a capitalist but his love of money and his arduous work isolate him from the rest of the community. Gold is an obstacle between Silas and the community of Raveloe: "His life had reduced itself to the mere functions of weaving and hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tended."¹⁵¹ It is only when the gold is finally stolen that Silas begins to communicate with the villagers.

On a larger scale, Eliot shows that the growth of a town under a capitalist economy such as Treby Magna in Felix Holt, is fragile and often illusory. The sort of change that the industrial revolution brought to Treby Magna is indeed very doubtful: "First came the canal; next, the working of the coal-mines ... and thirdly, the discovery of a saline spring, which suggested to a too constructive brain the possibility of turning Treby

¹⁴⁹The Mill on the Floss, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 274.

¹⁵⁰Silas Marner, (London: Penguin, 1925), p. 70.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 68.

Magna into a fashionable watering-place."¹⁵² Eliot shows that the end result of the efforts to turn the little market town into a rich resort was negative. Capitalists failed again because they were working for profit alone against destiny: "The handsome buildings were erected, and excellent guide-book and descriptive cards, surmounted by vignettes, were printed... But it was in vain. The Spa, for some mysterious reason, did not succeed."¹⁵³ Finally, the buildings were turned into a tape factory.

Sand and Eliot criticized the changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution, which they saw as another enslaving power for the poorer classes, and as a menace to harmonious rural life. Trains were upsetting human relations, bringing capitalist civilisation to remote places such as the villages of their childhood. Their novels contain a definite nostalgia for times before the industrial revolution and show that men were better off working in close contact and harmony with nature. Their nostalgia is not merely an artistic convention, but expresses their deep social convictions. According to them, there is something sacred about the earth, a deep and mysterious power which the rule of profit and the reign of machinery are disrupting.

¹⁵²Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁵³Ibid.

La ville noire contains a passage in which Sand describes the advantages of rural life as opposed to factory life: "Il ne faut pas quitter la terre quand on s'est marié avec elle. C'est un atelier de travail qu'on ne transporte pas et qu'il faut toujours défendre."¹⁵⁴ Sand points out that the peasant works hard, but knows he cannot master nature and therefore submits to its ways. On the contrary, in industry man competes with nature, and ultimately like Cardonnet he wants to master and submit it to his own will: "La vie de fer et de feu de l'industriel est un délire, une gageure contre le ciel; un continuel emportement contre la nature et contre soi-même."¹⁵⁵ The effect of the two sorts of labour is opposite. In industry man refuses to accept failure, whereas the peasant accepts it as part of life. His work is more austere but more dignified: "Les vaines sensibilités, les poignantes aspirations doivent s'éteindre et faire place à une espèce de fatalisme robuste."¹⁵⁶

The other disadvantage is that, unlike the peasant, the factory worker is prevented from seeing the final product of his work, he is alienated: "L'artisan n'a façonné qu'un instrument destiné à s'user et à

¹⁵⁴La ville noire, op. cit., pp. 196-97.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p.. 197-98.

disparaître, une chose très fragile qu'il ne reverra jamais, dont il ne connaîtra ni le destin ni la durée; le paysan a fécondé quelque chose d'éternel qui sommeillait, et qui recommence à vivre en sortant de ses mains."¹⁵⁷

Glorification of country life is also a characteristic of Eliot's social thought. Her criticism of capitalist economy is balanced by a description of country life as harmonious, and happy. According to her, country life is certainly not perfect, but on the whole it does not alienate the individual from the group. Compared to the progress brought about by industrial development, country life remains more humane.

In several of her novels Eliot plays on the contrast between industrial cities and rural villages. For instance, before the Industrial Revolution Treby Magna was "a typical old-market town, lying in pleasant sleepiness among green pastures, with a rush-fringed river meandering through them."¹⁵⁸ Life there was simpler and men had fewer wants and everyone seemed happy: "The great roadside inns were still brilliant with well-polished tankards, the smiling glances of pretty barmaids, and the repartees of jocose ostlers;

¹⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 198-99.

¹⁵⁸Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 39.

the mail still announced itself by the merry notes of the horn."¹⁵⁹

Neither Sand nor Eliot show that country life was easy. Both write about its hardships, and the pettiness of some villagers, but on the whole, they show that country people are happier because they have kept a sense of fellowship. Like Sand's Vallée noire, Eliot's villages are located in the heart of the country far away from industrial development. In Silas Marner the village of Raveloe is located in "the rich central plain" almost hidden from the world "nestled in a snug, well-wooded hollow"¹⁶⁰ with "orchards looking lazy with neglected plenty ... homesteads, where men supped heavily and slept in the light of the evening hearth."¹⁶¹

At times, Eliot's nostalgia seems to be greater than Sand's, perhaps a reflection of the intense development of the Industrial Revolution in England and particularly around her hometown of Nuneaton or in nearby Coventry. Sand's native Berry never became industrialized. There is a greater emphasis on the happiness of village life in Eliot's novels, as for instance in Raveloe: "Raveloe lay low among the bushy

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶⁰Silas Marner, op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁶¹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

trees and the rutted lanes, aloof from the currents of industrial energy and Puritan earnestness: the rich ate and drank freely ... and the poor thought that the rich were entirely right to lead a jolly life; besides, their feasting caused a multiplication of orts, which were the heirlooms of the poor."¹⁶² It is quite a contrast with Silas's original home in the industrial north: "What could be more unlike that Lantern Yard world than the world of Raveloe?"¹⁶³

Eliot also idealizes manual labour: "The pleasant tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil ... the basket-maker peeling his willow wands in the sunshine; the wheelwright putting the last touch to a blue cart with red wheels; here and there a cottage with bright transparent windows showing pots full of blooming balsams or geraniums."¹⁶⁴ She contrasts such a sight with the effects of recent industrialization: "The breath of the manufacturing town, which made a cloudy day and a red gloom by night on the horizon."¹⁶⁵

The picture Eliot gives of the modern Treby Magna is one of gloom and misery and reminds us of Sand's La ville noire: "Men walking queerly with knees bent

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁶⁴Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 7-8.

outward from squatting in the mine, going home to throw themselves down in their blackened flannel and sleep through the daylight, then rise and spend much of their high wages at the ale-house" and "pale eager faces of handloom-weavers, men and women, haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week's work ... Everywhere the cottages and the small children were dirty, for the languid mothers gave their strength to the loom."¹⁶⁶ Like the coachman, who at the beginning of Felix Holt complains about the change the railway brought to his profession, Eliot is distressed by industrial progress and regrets to see her dear country "strewn with shattered limbs."¹⁶⁷

Both Sand and Eliot show that the work of the country artisans is dedicated to continuing a long tradition of skill. This is an aspect which Sand insists upon in Le compagnon du tour de France, where she describes the warm atmosphere of the carpenter Pierre Huguenin's workshop: "Le bruit plaintif du rabot et l'âpre gémissement de la scie."¹⁶⁸ This is reminiscent of Eliot's carpenter Adam Bede whose workshop is also characterized by co-operation and love of work. There is no feeling of alienation there,

¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶⁸Le compagnon du tour de France, op. cit., p. 12.

neither smoke nor unhealthy working conditions. Like Pierre's, Adam Bede's workshop is pleasant. Its five men work in close cooperation, they laugh and communicate their feelings and ideas. Like Pierre, Adam loves his work and thinks nothing of working overtime to finish a piece of furniture: "I can't abide to see men throw away their tools i'that way, the minute the clock begins to strike, as if they took no pleasure i'their work."¹⁶⁹

Felix Holt also illustrates the importance of good craftsmanship. Felix refuses to continue his father's business after five years spent as apprentice to an apothecary because he knows that his father's medicine does not cure anyone. Felix becomes a watchmaker, after having decided that money was not his goal in life. With Felix, Eliot shows us her contempt for useless jobs or professions which require neither skill nor particular talent. Felix has made up his mind to stay away from such occupations: "I'll take no employment that obliges me to prop up my chin with a high cravat, and wear straps, and pass the livelong day with a set of fellows who spend their spare money on shirt-pins."¹⁷⁰ Despite the education he received Felix refuses to become part of the middle class and prefers to remain a

¹⁶⁹Adam Bede, op. cit. , p. 55.

¹⁷⁰Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 54.

working-class man doing a working-class job with all the talent and art it requires. According to him, middle-class professions are inferior to craftsmanship: "That sort of work is really lower than many handicrafts."¹⁷¹ Middlemarch's Caleb Garth also exhibits sound work ethics. Caleb is interested in "business" but remains moral: "His virtual divinities were good practical schemes, accurate work, and the faithful completion of undertakings."¹⁷² Caleb is not a capitalist, and does not understand finance. His work ethic however, is irreproachable: "He did his work well, charged very little, and often declined to charge at all."¹⁷³ As Eliot remarks, the Garths were poor but "they did not mind it."¹⁷⁴

On the whole, the major difference between Sand and Eliot's social thought lies in the importance Sand gives to political action. Eliot's thought is marked by an attitude of suspicion towards political measures. She often seems to be on the conservative side. She preferred moral solutions to strictly political measures. Although Sand's emphasis is also moral she

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷²Middlemarch, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 207.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

never separated political from moral problems. Unlike Eliot, she believed it was mistaken and naive to think that progress could be effectively achieved without political measures. According to Sand, politics and socialism went hand in hand.

It is, however, somewhat paradoxical to show, as Eliot does, that the individual is mainly the product of heredity and social milieu and to declare that changes must come from within, from the individual and not from a transformation of social and political structures. Sand took part in demonstrations, launched several newspapers, and in 1848, took a leading role in the diffusion of socialism writing articles for the Bulletin de la République. Later, she also contacted the authorities to demand the liberation of political prisoners. Social problems occupy all her thought, and it is not exaggerated to say with Pierre Vermeulen: "Tous les romans de George Sand sont des romans sociaux."¹⁷⁵ However, Sand's social position remained to the end a very personal one. She had sympathies for the Republicans but she remained an independent spirit, and always thought that love or fraternity could become effective political ideologies.

Looking back from a Marxist perspective, it is easy

¹⁷⁵Pierre Vermeulen, Les idées politiques et sociales de George Sand, (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1984), p. 240.

to link Sand and Eliot to the "Utopian" social thinkers. By their emphasis on the moral, fraternal aspect of reforms, on love as opposed to revolution, and peace as opposed to force, on community as opposed to class struggle, on future as opposed to immediate communism, and on spiritual as opposed to material socialism, they are more reminiscent of Owen, Cabet and even the Christian Socialists like Frederick Denison Maurice or John Ludlow. Like them, Sand and Eliot believed that it was still possible to unite all classes peacefully. It is interesting to remark that their novels do show, to some extent, that history is made up of social struggles, and that the individual is determined by his social and political environment, but they refused to believe in the immediacy of communism and in the necessity of universal and proletarian revolution.

There are several aspects of Sand's political thought which may have inspired Marx. One of his first works, The Poverty of Philosophy, was in fact dedicated to Sand "A madame George Sand de la part de l'auteur."¹⁷⁶ The book, written in French and published in Paris in 1847, also ends with a quotation from Sand's novel Jean Ziska, which Marx uses to reinforce his definition of political commitment and revolutionary action: "Le combat ou la mort; la lutte sanguinaire ou

¹⁷⁶Corr, VIII, p. 792. note.

le néant. C'est ainsi que la question est invinciblement posée."¹⁷⁷

Marx, who was in Paris in 1844, had written to Sand together with Arnold Ruge the director of the Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher. It is probable but not certain that they met Sand. In August 1848, Sand wrote to Marx in Germany to ask him to publish her letter denouncing as false, rumours of her political relationship with the Russian anarchist Bakunin. There is some connection between Sand and Marx but it is difficult to give more precise details. Present information seems to show that Sand was one of Marx's favourite writers.

Eliot does not mention Marx, but Marx read her novels and especially Felix Holt. In 1869, he calls Felix a "natural communist," and compares him to a neighbour friend of his, an anti-positivist fellow, Dakyns, "a sort of Felix Holt, less the affectation of that man and plus the knowledge ... He invites once a week the factory lads, treats them to beer and tobacco, and chats with them on social questions. He is a 'naturwüchsiger' communist."¹⁷⁸ Based on such a remark, we can safely infer that for Marx, Felix Holt's natural communism was still very naive and hampered by Victorian

¹⁷⁷Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 175.

¹⁷⁸Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Collected Works, (New York: International Publishers, 1988) volume 43, p. 292.

morals.

Finally, Sand and Eliot also reflect their cultures. The impact of Victorian Evangelicalism is perceptible in Eliot's preference of moral to political solutions. She preferred to restrict change to moral behaviour without desiring the political enfranchisement of the people whereas Sand not only advocated sympathy but also believed in social and political equality.

CHAPTER THREE

ART

Sand's and Eliot's conceptions of art also reflect the two major movements of their times, Romanticism and Realism. Sand owes perhaps more to the former and Eliot to the latter, although the two movements are not opposites. In many ways, Realism developed and exploited Romantic ideas. Therefore, the difference is one of degree and not of kind, which explains why both Sand's and Eliot's novels reflect Romantic as well as Realistic aspirations.

Sand grew up at the time when the Romantic movement was in the making. Her mentors were Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Madame de Staël, Byron, Scott and Goethe, and when she began writing she associated herself with the younger generation which, along with Hugo and Musset, rebelled against traditions in the arts. They demanded more freedom and turned their back on artificial conventions and the ancient classical models. They looked for inspiration in nature. Sand lived in the midst of the Romantic upheaval in music, painting, theatre and literature. Amongst her lovers were Chopin and Musset. Delacroix, Berlioz, Liszt, Flaubert, and Turgenev were her best friends. In her youth Eliot's favourite writers were Rousseau, Wordsworth and Scott. Sand's novels attracted Eliot because of their romantic concern for passion or the "vie intérieure" and also because they depicted contemporary scenes and ordinary

people anticipating thereby the Realist movement.

The novel also reflected the social ideal. Saint-Simonians insisted that art should have a social goal, namely that of instructing the lower classes, or harmonizing the different classes. Leroux was a fervent apostle of the social mission of art. In many ways, his ideas, like those of the Saint-Simonians, had an influence on the Realist movement. As early as 1831, Leroux declared that artists must fulfill a useful and social role, and encouraged them to take "la réalité contemporaine" as their subject matter: "Si au lieu de vous inspirer de votre époque, vous vous faites le représentant d'un autre âge, permettez que je range vos ouvrages avec les produits de l'époque antérieure à laquelle vous vous reportez. Ou, si oubliant que l'art c'est la vie, vous faites de l'art uniquement pour en faire, souffrez que je ne voie pas en vous le prophète, la lata que l'humanité a toujours cherché dans ses poètes."¹

Scientific discoveries also affected the novel. Gradually the sentimentalism and lyricism of Bernadin de Saint-Pierre and Chateaubriand were replaced by more objective descriptions and concern with social justice. Balzac is perhaps the first novelist to systematically

¹"Aux Artistes," Revue Encyclopédique, Nov. Dec. 1831., in Oeuvres, (Genève: Slatkine, 1978), p. 69.

bring art closer to nature, inspired by the theories of Buffon and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. In Le père Goriot (1834), dedicated to Saint-Hilaire, Balzac wrote: "Ce drame n'est ni une fiction, ni un roman. All is true, il est si véritable que chacun peut en reconnaître les éléments chez soi."² In the preface to his Comédie humaine (1842) he stated that his goal was to represent facts without changing them: "amasser tant de faits et les peindre comme ils sont."³ Later in Les Paysans (1844) Balzac declared again: "Je vais te faire rêver avec du vrai."⁴ Social theories and the sciences influenced the concept of reality in the novel. The 1840's were the time of the birth of photography or Daguerrotype which attracted Delacroix, Manet, Courbet as well as Champfleury.⁵ Claude Bernard's Introduction à la Méthode Expérimentale (1865) deeply influenced Zola. Stendhal also represented the new spirit in the novel. In Le rouge et le noir (1830) he compares the novel to a mirror whose first function is to reflect

²Le père Goriot, (Paris: Garnier, 1963), p. 7

³La comédie humaine, (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), vol. I, p. 12.

⁴Les Paysans, (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 11.

⁵In 1854 the Société française de Photographie was created and the first important exhibit of photographs took place in 1855. At the same time Courbet's paintings were rejected by the Academy. See Regards sur la Photographie en France au XIX^e siècle (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1980), p. 25., and also Linda Nochlin, Realism, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.)

life faithfully: "Un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route. Tantôt il reflète à vos yeux l'azur des cieux, tantôt la fange des borbiers de la route."⁶ Stendhal repeated the same statement in his first preface to Lucien Lewen (1836): "Un roman doit être un miroir."⁷

The word "réalisme" was newly coined to describe the growing concern of the arts and of literature with contemporary life and ordinary people. In 1826, a writer in the Mercure français wrote: "Cette doctrine littéraire qui gagne tous les jours du terrain et qui conduirait à une fidèle imitation non pas des chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art mais des originaux que nous offre la nature, pourrait fort bien s'appeler 'le réalisme': ce serait suivant quelques apparences, la littérature du XIX siècle, la littérature du vrai."⁸ In 1835 it was used to oppose Rembrandt to the classicists.⁹ Such remarks show that Romanticism included a certain realism.

In France, the term "réalisme" was popularized by

⁶Le rouge et le noir, (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 361.

⁷Lucien Leuwen, 2 vols., (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964), vol. I., p. 32.

⁸Mercure français 13, (1826), quoted by Borgerhoff, "Réalisme and Kindred Words," Proceedings of the Modern Language Association, 53, (1939), 836-43.

⁹Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p.10.

several artists who, in the early 1850's, began to use it as a battle cry for their ideal. Gustave Courbet adopted the term as a symbol of rebellion against the more conventional art of the Salons. After his paintings L'Enterrement à Ornans and L'Atelier du peintre were refused by Jury des Beaux-Arts in 1855, he opened his own exhibition entitled: "Sur le Réalisme, G. Courbet, exposition de 40 tableaux." In his catalogue (written by Champfleury) Courbet declared that "réalisme", a term imposed by unfavourable critics, was only a way to be true to life: "Faire l'art vivant, tel est mon but."¹⁰ The use of the term spread to literature and especially to the novel. The critic Fernand Desnoyers used it in L'Artiste in 1855,¹¹ and the writer Edmond Duranty created a monthly review (short-lived, from November 1856 to May 1857) called Réalisme. In 1857, his friend Champfleury¹² published the first critical analysis of the new movement called Le Réalisme.

In France, Realism became a vogue, the symbol of a movement which rallied socialists and revolutionaries to its cause. Most of those who accepted the term

¹⁰Michel Ragon, Courbet, (Paris: Vergennes, 1979), p. 8.

¹¹"Du Réalisme", L'Artiste, December 9, 1855, pp. 197-200.

¹²Champfleury, pseudonym of Jules Husson (1821-89) was, like Duranty, the author of several novels.

'realism' belonged to the political left, an important ideological difference between them and later artists such as Flaubert and the Goncourt. Its advocates were entrenched in the socialist ideal. The Romantics had become too conservative for them and their lyricism too bourgeois and individualistic. However, the first Realists believed that art must be didactic and communicate sympathy.

What is currently described, after 1857 (Madame Bovary) as "realism" belongs, in fact, to a different ideology. With Flaubert and the Goncourt there was a break between art and social duties as well as a greater concern for art for art's sake. With them, Realism was reduced to an art theory. Flaubert's well known rejection of Realism is not only the sign of a need for independence, but also betrays a radically different ideology than those of the early Realists.¹³ He even declared that he wrote Madame Bovary to annoy Champfleury.

It is also interesting to remark that the early advocates of Realism did not consider Flaubert's novel a realist work. According to Duranty, Madame Bovary was not a Realist novel because it was too impersonal, too

¹³In 1876, when Zola declared him the Father of Realism, Flaubert wrote to Sand: "J'exècre ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler le réalisme, bien qu'on m'en fasse un des pontifes." Gustave Flaubert-George Sand Correspondance, (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 521.

rigorous and lacked that which Realist literature meant for him, sentiment: "Les détails y sont comptés un à un dans ce roman avec la même valeur. Il n'y a ni émotion, ni sentiment, ni vie dans ce roman, mais une grande force d'arithméticien ... trop d'étude ne remplace pas la spontanéité qui vient du sentiment."¹⁴ Flaubert thought highly of Duranty's article,¹⁵ which shows that his art did not conform to the Realist ideal of the time. Champfleury showed more enthusiasm for Madame Bovary, but confessed that Flaubert was too crude and thought that certain details were wholly unartistic in a novel: "Trois ou quatre détails m'ont choqués, que vous feriez bien d'enlever dans une prochaine édition, je vous recommande surtout les gales de votre mendiant, et peut-être un peu trop de chirurgie dans la jambe coupée."¹⁶

Therefore, it seems that the advocates of Realism were closer to Balzac than to Flaubert, whom they found too impersonal. Shortly after Balzac's death in 1850, several re-editions of his novels appeared and he became the most widely read French novelist. The art which the

¹⁴Réalisme, 3, cited by René Dumesnil, Le Réalisme (Paris: de Gigord, 1936), p. 28.

¹⁵In 1880 he wrote to Maupassant: "Quand tu viendras à Croisset, fais-moi penser à te montrer l'article de cet excellent Duranty sur Bovary. Il faut garder ces choses-là." Cited by René Dumesnil, Le Réalisme, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁶René Dumesnil, Le Réalisme, op. cit., p. 29.

first critics and writers called "réalisme" was, at the time, close to the Romantic ideal of passion and sentiment.

In fact, Champfleury himself took Sand, and not Flaubert, as one of the best examples of Realism in art. According to him, "le réalisme" was not a school with precise aesthetic rules, but only the expression of the desire to be true and sincere: "Je ne reconnais que la sincérité dans l'art."¹⁷ However, he saw in Realism a rebellious movement which turned from literary conventions and the mythology of the classics to nature, to the lower classes, from poetry to prose. Champfleury criticized the idea that ordinary life was not a suitable subject for art: "On n'admet pas que la vie habituelle puisse fournir un drame complet,"¹⁸ and rejected the idea that art dealt with beauty. According to him, Romanticism, as represented by Chateaubriand, Hugo and Musset, was still too removed from social and political life and too absorbed in the contemplation of nature.

The Realists were mainly concerned by the social goal of art and in literature they advocated prose because it was closer to life than verse, which was not

¹⁷Champfleury, Le Réalisme, (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), p. 3

¹⁸Ibid., p. 91.

only less realistic but also too aristocratic. According to the advocates of Realism, literature must be democratic, it must represent the people: "Quelques esprits qui, fatigués des mensonges versifiés, des entêtements de la queue romantique, se retranchent dans l'étude de la nature, descendent jusqu'aux classes les plus basses, s'affranchissent du beau langage qui ne sauraient être en harmonie avec les sujets qu'ils traitent, y a-t-il là dedans les bases d'une école? je ne l'ai jamais cru."¹⁹

Champfleury insisted that Realism was not a provincial movement, limited to France, but reflected the political and social changes of Western society. It was synonymous with modernity and democracy. According to him, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Gogol, Turgenev and Sand were all Realists. Sand was a most important writer and he gave her credit not only for having greatly contributed to the development of Realism by her own novels, but also saw in her the shrewd critic who predicted the rise of Realism as a major literary movement: "Madame Sand écrivait, il y a sept ans en tête de son drame du Champy: "il y a aura une école qui ne sera ni classique ni romantique, et que nous ne verrons peut-être pas, car il faut le temps à tout; mais sans aucun doute, cette école nouvelle sortira du

¹⁹Ibid., p. 6.

romantisme.'"²⁰

The Realism of the 1840's and 1850's, was not only represented by Balzac, Duranty and Champfleury but also by several dozen more or less successful novelists.²¹ This sort of Realism was not as impersonal or scientific as it was to become with Flaubert, the Goncourt, Maupassant, or with the "naturalisme" of Zola. The ideas of sentiment and sympathy were still an integral part of its doctrine. The advocates of Realism rejected the "culte du beau" dear to Flaubert, the Goncourt and to some extent inherited by Maupassant. Duranty insisted that "réalisme" was a social movement. According to him, art must have a practical and social purpose. The Realists became the opponents of those who, like Gautier and Flaubert, were partisans of the absolute freedom of art, or the theory of art for art's sake: "Le réalisme attribue à l'artiste un but philosophique, pratique, utile, et non un but divertissant, et, par conséquent le relève. Demander à l'artiste le vrai utile, il lui demande surtout le sentiment, l'observation intelligente qui voit un enseignement, une émotion dans un spectacle de quelque sorte qu'il soit, bas ou noble ... en sachant le représenter complet et le rattacher à l'ensemble

²⁰Ibid., p. 7.

²¹See René Dumesnil, Le Réalisme, op. cit.

social."²² Defined in these terms, this Realism had little to do with the art of Flaubert or the Goncourt which aimed at impersonality, avoided being didactic and pursued the cult of form.

In the 1840's and 1850's, Realism also affected the English novel. René Wellek points out that the word "Realism" was used in 1851 in Fraser's Magazine about Balzac, and in the Westminster Review in 1853.²³ Wellek seems to be correct in emphasizing that English and French Realism did not occur at the same time: "In England there was no realist movement of that name before George Moore and George Gissing, late in the eighties."²⁴ However, Realistic works had already appeared in the beginning of the century. The vogue existed in England perhaps in a more discreet way and with less emphasis on the social and political aspects or art, but it was also a characteristic trait of the early and mid-Victorian novel.

In her Ennui or Memoirs of the Earl of Glenthorne in 1804 Maria Edgeworth wrote: "If, among those who may be tempted to peruse my history, there should be any

²²Ibid., p. 27.

²³"William Makepeace Thackeray and Arthur Pendennis, Esquires," Fraser's Magazine, 43 (January, 1851) p. 86. "Balzac and his Writings," Westminster Review, 60 (July and October 1853.) See, René Wellek, Concepts of Criticism, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 229.

²⁴René Wellek, Concepts of Criticism, op. cit., p. 229.

mere novel-readers, let me advise them to throw the book aside at the commencement of this chapter, for I have no more wonderful incidents to relate, no more charges at the muse, no more sudden turns of fortune."²⁵ In the preface to Waverley (1814) Scott declares: "I began, by degrees, to seek in histories, memoirs, voyages and travels, and the like, events nearly as wonderful as those which were the work of imagination, with the additional advantage that they were at least in great measure true."²⁶ In Shirley (1849) Charlotte Brontë declares that her novel must be read differently from usual works of fiction: "If you think from this prelude that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken ... something real, cool, and solid lies before you."²⁷

The progress towards Realistic fiction is also characteristic of Thackeray. In Vanity Fair, a novel without a hero, Thackeray declares that his book was about more real people and warns the "lofty man of genius" who "admires the great and the heroic in life

²⁵Quoted by George Levine, The Realistic Imagination, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 14.

²⁶Walter Scott, Waverley, (London: Everyman's, 1969), p. 7.

²⁷Charlotte Brontë, Shirley, (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1905), p. 1.

a serious art form and not mere entertainment. Reality was too tragic for the novelist to misrepresent it:

"What, if reality be not so, gentlemen and ladies; and if, after dancing a variety of jigs and antics, and jumping in and out of endless trap-doors and windows, through life's shifting scenes, no fairy comes down to make us comfortable at the close of the performance?"³¹

Lewes himself was one of the first critics to advocate Realism in art. Reviewing French and English novels for Fraser's in 1847 he declared: "A novel may by the dashing brilliancy of its style create a momentary sensation ... but to produce a pleasant, satisfactory, and lasting impression, it must be true to nature. It will then live. It will bear reading and re-reading."³² Lewes praised Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë for their psychological realism and their knowledge of life. Of Jane Eyre he said: "Reality, deep significant reality, is the greatest characteristic of the book."³³ We shall see that Sand was the author who most influenced Lewes's art theory.

Other examples of the progressive concern for reality can be found in Trollope, Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens

³¹Ibid., p. 306.

³²"Recent Novels: French and English," Fraser's Magazine, 36 (December 1847): 686-95, p. 687.

³³Ibid., p. 692.

and Kingsley. In England as in France, Realism in the novel between 1830 and 1860 was marked by the concern for a social and political reality. It was not primarily a concern for form, so much as a desire to represent the contemporary world in all its complexity.

Therefore, in England and in France, the novel became the literary genre par excellence. The vogue reached its peak in the last decades of the century. The yearly output in England went from a dozen in the eighteenth century,³⁴ to several hundreds in the second part of the nineteenth century. In France, the situation was similar and the output reached the same proportions. Zola compared novels to mushrooms, coming up almost over night: "Ils pullulent avec une terrifiante fécondité. Pendant l'hiver de septembre à mai, il n'y a certainement pas de jour où deux ou trois romans ne poussent comme des champignons sur le sol français."³⁵

The word "realism" can be defined in many ways but the period which concerns us (1830-1860) and which fashioned Sand's and Eliot's conception of art is

³⁴According to Ian Watt: "The annual production of fiction ... averaged only about seven between 1700 and 1740, rose to an average of about twenty in the three decades following 1740, and this output was doubled in the period from 1770 to 1800." The Rise of the Novel, op. cit., p. 290.

³⁵Les romanciers contemporains, cited by René Dumesnil, Le Réalisme, op. cit., p. 37.

characterized by its social and moral concerns. This Realism is not separate from Romanticism and has incorporated socialist ideas. The Realism of the later period, also known in France as Naturalisme, developed according to a more scientific or rigorous artistic ideology with little moral preoccupation. The first current of Realism, issued from the Revolution of 1848, was eminently religious and political. The second cut itself off from the doctrines of sentiment and sympathy. Ian Watt's remark that: "The novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it"³⁶ is not sufficient to bring out the characteristics of the novels of the first Realist phase, but better describes the novels of the second half of the century. It is also misleading to separate, as Watt does, Realism in philosophy from Realism in literature.³⁷ Such a distinction is not characteristic of the novels of the first period and prevents us from understanding the scope of the movement. However, Watt correctly observes that a characteristic of that period is that Realism was not opposed to Idealism.³⁸ As

³⁶Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, op. cit., p. 11.

³⁷"Philosophy is one thing and literature is another." The Rise of the Novel, op. cit., p. 31.

³⁸"Unfortunately much usefulness of the word was soon lost in the bitter controversies over the 'low' subjects and allegedly immoral tendencies of Flaubert and his successors. As a result, 'realism' came to be

Stendhal's and Thackeray's remarks show, the artist's reality was then a much broader concept. It turned to ordinary life, but did not limit art to that social category. It demanded the faithful representation of life.

The basic premise of Sand's aesthetics is that art must be true to nature. Her preface to Indiana (1832), written in the midst of the Romantic movement, was also one of the first examples of Realism in art. Indiana was true to life: "Un récit fort simple où l'écrivain n'a presque rien créé."³⁹ Sand declared that art must represent the facts as faithfully as possible, as a mirror or a machine: "L'écrivain n'est qu'un miroir qui les reflète, une machine qui les décalque, et qui n'a rien à se faire pardonner si ses empreintes sont exactes, si son reflet est fidèle."⁴⁰ Instead of inventing, the novelist should describe life as it presents itself to him: "Il vous raconte ce qu'il a vu."⁴¹ In Lucrezia Floriani (1847) she insists that the novel should always closely follow life: "Il va du roman

used primarily as the antonym of 'idealism'." The Rise of the Novel, op. cit., p. 10.

³⁹Indiana, (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 6.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 7.

comme de la vie."⁴² The morals of a work of art consist in its truth to life: "Le narrateur espère qu'après avoir écouté son conte jusqu'au bout, peu d'auditeurs nieront la moralité qui ressort des faits."⁴³

Sand's novels exhibit all the characteristics of the theory of Realism which, along with Balzac and Stendhal, she helped develop. Sand advocated objectivity and contemporaneity in art. Her first novels are set during the Restoration and the July Monarchy. The situations and people she described are also ordinary. Indiana, Jacques, Benedict, and André, are not exceptional characters and their stories consist of the day-to-day struggle between their existence and the world. The Realism of Sand's first novels consists of psychological analysis. She portrays her characters from within. Her female characters suffer from social injustice and the repression of their passions. Some of her male characters, such as Jacques, also live from within. His struggle is between his ideal of marriage and the marriage laws. Lélia and Horace are also psychological analysis. It is the conflict between the protagonists' ideal and the bourgeois society which solicits the interest of the reader.

⁴²Lucrezia Floriani, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 118.

⁴³Indiana, op. cit., p. 8.

Sand excelled in the description of emotions. She is lyrical like Musset and Hugo, but she also describes the emotions in their sensual aspect, a daring enterprise for a woman before Flaubert, Baudelaire, Zola and Maupassant. Sensuality is part of the attraction she exerted over her contemporaries and a quality which Eliot appreciated. However, unlike that of the later Realists, her sensuality is neither vulgar nor simply sexual.

Sand was the anatomist of passion. She believed that life offered all sorts of subjects for the artist and that his function was to observe and describe it. According to her, novelists should not have to invent far-fetched plots or concoct amusing adventures, abominable crimes or political intrigues. Closely observed, life offered a much better model for a story than the inventive capacities of the imagination: "Vraiment la vie est assez fantasque ... il y a assez de désordre, de cataclysmes, d'orages, de désastres, et d'imprévu, pour qu'il soit inutile de se torturer la cervelle à inventer des faits étranges et des caractères d'exception."⁴⁴

Sand's characters are also ordinary people. They have problems and often cannot solve them. Unlike the heroes of a more traditional sort of fiction, they are

⁴⁴Lucrezia Floriani, op. cit., p. 117.

failures. They do not successfully manage to come out of difficult situations. Their existence is a struggle in which they often fail. Sand's early novels are tragic and their tragedy is even more dramatic because it consists of problems to which every reader can relate. It is the tragedy of everyday life, not that which is caused by man's quest for the absolute, but one which consists in the absence of social equality. Her stories are concerned with the emotions of her characters at grip with the everyday world. Her female protagonists such as Indiana, Lélia, and Consuélo all want to understand, like Maggie Tulliver, the nature of this hard complex reality. The harsh reality for them is the narrow tradition which holds them prisoners. Sand's novels are also primarily about the relations between the sexes. They are critical of the conventional attitudes and offer other alternatives.

However, Sand's novels are not only the result of observation of facts. They are also the product of her own experience of life. Her stories are largely autobiographical. They reflect the failure of her marriage, her unsatisfied passions, as well as the illusions of her amorous liaisons. Her Lettres d'un voyageur are written as a confession, to express the innermost emotions and sensations. The goal which she sets herself is again realistic. Sand describes her

emotions as they develop. She wants to show the inner workings of her sensibility of the artist which, according to her, is the best way to remain close to life and to understand the nature of art.

These letters written between 1835 and 1836, reflect different states of emotion, from reverie to despair and friendship. There Sand adopts a spontaneous and digressive style which enables her to remain as close as possible to her emotions. She eliminates the narrator and lets her heart speak for itself: "S'il n'y avait pas, dans cet exercice d'écrire, un certain charme souvent douloureux, parfois enivrant, presque toujours irrésistible, qui fait qu'on oublie le témoin inconnu et qu'on s'abandonne à son sujet, je pense qu'on aurait jamais le courage d'écrire sur soi-même."⁴⁵

According to Sand, the core of art lies in the emotions. In the preface to her Lettres d'un voyageur she declares that plots and characters are invaluable only for the sentiment they represent. Her letters are an attempt to avoid the artificial part of writing, namely plots and characters, and to reveal the emotions for their own sake: "Dans un livre de la nature ce celui-ci, c'est l'émotion, c'est la rêverie, ou la tristesse, ou l'enthousiasme, ou l'inquiétude, qui

⁴⁵Lettres d'un voyageur, op. cit., p. 38.

doivent se rendre sympathiques au lecteur."⁴⁶ There emotions replace facts. Sand still compares herself to a mirror, but a mirror which is not directed to the outside world, but to the inner life: "Mon âme, j'en suis certain, a servi de miroir à la plupart de ceux qui y ont jeté les yeux."⁴⁷ Therefore, her realism is invariably linked to a certain lyricism, which she shares with other Romantics such as Hugo and Musset. According to Sand, the novelist must create his characters for the emotion he wants to communicate: "Il faut donc créer les personnages pour le sentiment qu'on veut décrire, et non le sentiment pour les personnages."⁴⁸

Eliot was soon attracted to Realistic literature. In 1839, she already showed a marked taste for the art which represented life: "It is the merit of fictions to come within the orbit of probability; if unnatural they would no longer please."⁴⁹ She admired Rubens: "I have not seen so many pictures and pictures of so high a rank ... real, breathing men and women -men and women moved by passions, not mincing and grimacing and posing in a mere apery of passion! What a grand, glowing, forceful

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁸Lucrezia Floriani, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴⁹Letters, I, p. 23.

thing life looks in his pictures."⁵⁰ Likewise, she praised the sculptor Houdon for his realistic bust of Gluck: "A striking specimen of the real in art."⁵¹ She loved the rustic paintings of Rosa Bonheur as well as those of the Dutch artists for their "rare, precious quality of truthfulness."⁵²

She admired Ruskin because he also advocated Realism in art. In her review of his Modern Painters she declares: "The doctrine that all art and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by the imagination on the mists of feeling, in the place of definite substantial reality would remould our life."⁵³ However, in a later review of his works, Eliot criticized Ruskin for limiting his art doctrine to the noble and the ideal, leaving out from the sphere of art the humble and ordinary aspects of human existence: "It has all the transcendent merits and all the defects of its predecessors; it contains an abundance of eloquent wisdom and some eloquent absurdity; it shows a profound love and admiration for the noble and the beautiful;

⁵⁰Letters, II, p. 451.

⁵¹Essays, p. 88.

⁵²Adam Bede, (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 223.

⁵³"Belles Lettres," Westminster Review, 117 (April, 1856), p. 626.

with a somewhat excessive contempt or hatred of what the writer holds to be the reverse of noble and beautiful."⁵⁴ Scott and Balzac were also among her favourite writers. She admired Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and praised Aurora Leigh, which paid a tribute to Sand, for its "genuine thought and feeling" and its simplicity: "No petty striving after special effects, no heaping up of images for their own sake."⁵⁵

As we have mentioned, Lewes himself had been the advocate of Realism in art and Sand played a great role in the development of his art theory. According to him, Sand was not only "the most remarkable woman" but also and more importantly "the most remarkable writer of the present century."⁵⁶ Lewes believed that the first quality of Sand's art was that it was based not only on a close observation but also on her rich experience of life. These two concepts became for him the basis of his doctrine of Realism: "A profound rule! a good counsel! and one we would impress on all writers, but writers of fiction especially ... it is only what you have yourself experienced, it is only what you have yourself felt or thought, that can be produced so as to

⁵⁴Westminster Review, 129 (July-October, 1856), p. 150.

⁵⁵"Belles Lettres", Westminster Review, (January, 1857): 306-326, p. 306.

⁵⁶"Continental Literati: George Sand," The Monthly Magazine, 6 (1842): 578-591, p. 578.

affect your readers."⁵⁷ According to Lewes, Sand was original because she was sincere and did not purposely imitate other writers: "Imitate the thought of others, round their periods, deliver their formulas, or flutter around their emotions, and the result will always be powerless and pointless."⁵⁸

Lewes claimed that Sand was not a Realist in the manner of Balzac, who described with a profusion of unnecessary details: "In description he is detestable; the more he labours the worse he writes; and when he attempts poetical description, he is ludicrous beyond example."⁵⁹ In contrast to Balzac, Lewes believed that Sand was succinct and managed to express the essence of her characters with only a few essential traits. Sand's art was subtle and poetic: "Instead of giving you an inventory it gives you an emotion."⁶⁰

Sand was a Realist, but her realism was poetic. It was based on emotions. Lewes refused to believe that literature was the description of society, but rather insisted, like Sand, that it was first the expression of emotions: "So far from literature being a mirror or

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 581.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 581.

⁵⁹"Balzac and George Sand", Foreign Quarterly Review, 33 (July, 1844): 265-298, p. 277.

⁶⁰Ibid. p. 279.

expression of society, it is under most aspects palpably at variance with society ... instead of regarding literature as the expression of society, we regard it as the expression of the emotions, the whims, the caprices, the enthusiasms, the fluctuating idealisms which move each epoch."⁶¹ Sand was the greatest Continental influence on Lewes's conception of literature. His conception of the relationship between literature and reality is greatly indebted to her. The reality of the artist, for Lewes as for Sand, consists in sentiment: "Literature, being essentially the expression of experience and emotions ... only that literature is effective, and to be prized accordingly, which has reality for its basis."⁶²

Eliot's conception of art as revealed in her first novels shows many similarities with that of Sand and Lewes. First, Eliot also adopted the criterion of objectivity. In her Scenes of Clerical Life she declares: "My only merit must lie in the faithfulness with which I represent to you the humble experience of an ordinary fellow-mortal."⁶³ In Adam Bede she says that her goal is to give "a faithful account of men and

⁶¹"The Lady Novelists", Westminster Review, 58 (July 1852): 129-141., p. 131.

⁶²Ibid., p. 130.

⁶³Scenes of Clerical Life, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 50.

things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind."⁶⁴ Eliot claims that the novelist must describe the world as it is: "I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath."⁶⁵ To her publisher John Blackwood, she wrote in a way which is reminiscent of Sand: "My sketches both of churchmen and dissenters ... are drawn from close observation of them in real life, and not at all from hearsay or the description of novelists."⁶⁶ To the same she also declares: "I should consider it a fault which would cause me lasting regret, if I had used reality in any other than the legitimate way common to all artists who draw their materials from their observation and experience."⁶⁷ Like Sand, Eliot does not glorify the power of the imagination. According to her, the novelist's imagination must never "represent things as they never have been and never will be."⁶⁸ Above all, the novel must be lifelike.

Eliot also believed that the goal of art was to communicate sentiment. Although literature must be

⁶⁴Adam Bede, op. cit., p. 221.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Letters, II, p. 347.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 376.

⁶⁸Adam Bede, op. cit., p. 221.

objective and represent facts, the ultimate goal of art was to cause sympathy, beliefs which are characteristic of Sand. Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and the later Realists were not concerned with sympathy, but limited themselves to objectivity. Eliot believed that art must be the expression of the emotions, and like Sand's, her realism was embedded in her religious convictions: "I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles -to win your tears for real sorrow: sorrow such as may live nextdoor to you."⁶⁹

In Eliot as in Sand, we find the belief that Realism is not an end in itself, as was the case for Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers, but a means to an end. In La mare au diable Sand argued that the goal of art was precisely to communicate sympathy: "La mission de l'art est une mission de sentiment et d'amour ... son but devrait être de faire aimer les objets de sa sollicitude."⁷⁰ Lewes agreed. In his essay "The Lady Novelists" he wrote: "All poetry, all fiction, all comedy ... are but the expression of experiences and emotions; and these expressions are the avenues through which we reach the sacred adytum of Humanity, and learn better to understand fellows and ourselves."⁷¹

⁶⁹Scenes of Clerical Life, op. cit., p. 50.

⁷⁰La mare au diable, (Paris: Bechet, 1932), p. 17.

⁷¹"The Lady Novelists," op. cit., p. 130.

Likewise, Eliot's realism is based on her belief that the ultimate goal of art is to bring people closer together: "Art is the nearest thing to life: it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."⁷² In 1859, she wrote to the Brays: "If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experience that opinions are poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures."⁷³ Eliot never departed from her original belief and in 1876 she declared again: "It is my function as an artist to act (if possible) for good on the emotions and conceptions of my fellow-men."⁷⁴

Sympathy is the ultimate goal of art. Sand's and Eliot's realism is of the religious sort. The moralizing quality of their novels is intentional. The realism to which they subscribe differs from Eric Auerbach's definition. Auerbach rejects all moralizing

⁷²Essays, p. 271.

⁷³Letters, III, p. 111.

⁷⁴Ibid., VI, p. 289.

and sentimental intentions and his analysis in Mimesis does not mention Sand or Eliot. Auerbach's definition of modern Realism (Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and the Goncourt), is in fact very reminiscent of Zola's, and overlooks the importance of the Romantic and social aspects which we referred to earlier and which were an integral part of the development of Realism. His definition is correct but too narrow,⁷⁵ and as René Wellek points out, Auerbach's prophets are not always free of didacticism.⁷⁶

The originality of Sand's and Eliot's realism lies precisely in their refusal to separate art from feeling. Impersonality or impartiality in art was a major cause of disagreement between Sand and her good friend Flaubert. Flaubert repressed his feelings, strove to hide his personal opinions and abhorred the notion of sympathy. In 1868, he wrote to Sand: "Je me borne donc à exposer les choses telles qu'elles me paraissent, à

⁷⁵Eric Auerbach defines "realism" as that which represents man "embedded in a total reality, political, social, economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving ... Stendhal is its founder." Mimesis, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.), p. 462

⁷⁶René Wellek: "I doubt whether the French realists were so completely non-didactic as Flaubert's theory claims to be, and it seems to me inadvisable to exclude such writers as George Eliot or Tolstoy, despite their didactic intention, from a concept of realism." Concepts of Criticism, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 242.

exprimer ce qui me semble vrai,"⁷⁷ with which Sand could not find fault. But Flaubert also added: "Tant pis pour les conséquences."⁷⁸ For him, art was above all a technique: "Quand sera t-on artiste, rien qu'artiste, mais bien artiste ? Où connaissez-vous une critique qui s'inquiète de l'oeuvre en soi d'une façon intense?"⁷⁹

In contrast to Sand and to Eliot, Flaubert and the Goncourt idealized form: "Bien écrire est tout."⁸⁰ Sand disagreed and criticized Flaubert's formalist attitude: "La suprême impartialité est une chose anti-humaine, et un roman doit être humain avant tout."⁸¹ For Sand as for Eliot, the novel remained essentially a means to bring people together by means of emotions. Although their realism is concerned with facts and observation, it also reflects their social and religious beliefs. They did not chose ordinary events and ordinary human beings for art's sake alone, but because they sincerely believed it was their duty as artists to bring their fellow-men closer together. With Jeanne (1840), Sand began a series of novels which represented life in her

⁷⁷Gustave Flaubert-George Sand: Correspondance, (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 190.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 215.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 527.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 519.

native Berry. She wanted the reader to feel for the humble peasants, the poor miller, the abandoned children, and the vagabonds. Her intention was to show that despite their uncouth appearance and simple manners, they were in their own way noble human beings.

Sand always reproached her contemporaries for portraying peasants as primitive and immoral or good and jovial. In Promenades autour d'un village she declares: "Si les réalistes voient parfois le paysan plus grossier qu'il ne l'est réellement, il est certain aussi que les idéalistes l'ont parfois quintessentié."⁸² She particularly criticizes the habit, common amongst realists, to portray peasants as primitive and uncouth: "Mais quelle est cette prétention de le voir sous un jour exclusif et de le définir comme un échantillon d'histoire naturelle, comme une pierre, comme un insecte?"⁸³ On the contrary, Sand portrays country people from within, showing the diversity of their character: "Le paysan offre autant de caractères variés et d'esprits divers que tout autre genre ou tribu de la race humaine."⁸⁴

Sand's rustic tales also contain picturesque

⁸²Promenades autour d'un village, (Paris: Hachette, 1981), p. 100.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

descriptions of Berry, which contrast with the atmosphere of city life of fashionable novels. It added a touch of poetry to her stories. Her intention was to be realistic about country people, and to make the reader feel sympathy for their sorrows and joys. According to her, traditional novels misrepresented and idealized country life: "Tous ces types de l'âge d'or, ces bergères, qui sont des nymphes et puis des marquises, ces bergères de l'Astrée qui ... portent de la poudre et du satin ... sont tous plus ou moins faux."⁸⁵

On the other hand, Sand believed that modern Realism was too coarse and matter of fact in its descriptions. It was often vulgar and generally failed to bring out the poetry of country life: "Le théâtre, la poésie et le roman ont quitté la houlette pour prendre le poignard, et quand ils mettent en scène la vie rustique, ils lui donnent un certain caractère de réalité qui manquait aux bergeries du temps passé. Mais la poésie n'y est guère et je m'en plains."⁸⁶

Sand thus combined realism with poetry, in such a way, as to be true to life and to move her readers. To be closer to country life Sand imitated the art of the

⁸⁵François le champi, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1976), p. 45.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 46.

folk-tale. In La mare au diable, François le champi and Les maîtres sonneurs Sand used Berrichon oral techniques and dialect. Her goal was to remain simple and to focus on the poetic aspect of their existence in order to move deeply her readers: "Le sentiment ... c'est lui qui est l'art, l'artiste ... chargé de traduire cette candeur, cette grace, ce charme de la vie primitive à ceux qui ne vivent que de la vie factice."⁸⁷ Sand believed that folk-tales had a lifelike quality which novels did not have: "Leur art est supérieur au nôtre. C'est une autre forme mais elle parle plus à son âme que toutes celles de notre civilisation. Les chansons, les récits, les contes rustiques, peignent en peu de mots ce que notre littérature ne sait qu'amplifier et déguiser."⁸⁸

Lewes admired Sand's rustic realism. He praised Le péché de Monsieur Antoine for its "fine descriptions, picturesque characters, genial feeling" as well as for the "certain freshness which belongs only to the country air."⁸⁹ He was fascinated by Sand's description of her Berry: "The affection she bears the country exercises a happy influence over her writings, and nowhere, except, perhaps, in speaking of Venice, does the witchery of her

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 39.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁹"George Sand's recent novels," Foreign Quarterly Review, 37 (April, 1846): 21-36, p. 35.

style exert a more potent spell, than in bringing before you the enchanting scenery of la vallée noire."⁹⁰ In his review of François le champi for The Athenaeum in 1848, Lewes declared that Sand had truly become "the precursor of a new era" in literature, because her novels had brought realism back to nature, and to poetry, a remark which French critics later made about Eliot.⁹¹

Lewes praised Sand's novel for successfully expressing "the simplicity and naïveté of nature."⁹² According to him, Sand was innovative: "This new novel by George Sand suggests the question 'Is modern French literature approaching a new phase?' Are the extravagances of the Sues, the Souliés, Balzacs, and Dumas's the limit beyond which nothing more hideous will be produced? Are we to close, at length, the blood-stained catalogue of Crime and be permitted once more to breathe the air of Nature?"⁹³

In Sand's rustic novels, Lewes admired "the simple language of the people", the fact that Sand remained

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

⁹¹Louis Etienne, "Le retour du réalisme à la poésie," Revue des Deux Mondes, 20 (December, 1870): 429-46.

⁹²"François le champi," The Athenaeum, May 20th, 1848.

⁹³Ibid.

distant from "the language spoken in books" and instead turned to "that spoken among peasants." He praised her talent for being "colloquial without ever ... becoming vulgar," her "simplicity without insipidity." Lewes concluded that not only had Sand succeeded in being true to nature, but he also praised her for achieved her goal in such a manner that her novel could be read by young women and by children: "These pages have a tone interpreting Nature that has an effect like that of stepping out into her sweet and quiet ways from the artificial atmosphere of a fetid civilization ... this book may be placed in the hands of a child . Mere innocence is not, however, its principal merit: it is very touching, very pretty, and very true."⁹⁴ In 1858, when Eliot was writing Adam Bede, Lewes remembered Sand's novel: "Either give us true peasants, or leave them untouched; either paint no drapery at all, or paint it with the utmost fidelity; either keep your people silent, or make them speak the idiom of their class."⁹⁵ It is not by pure coincidence that Eliot began fiction by writing rustic novels. In his article on Sand's François le champi Lewes had remarked that there was no work in English to which he could compare it: "Did we

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Westminster Review, 70 (1858), p. 493. Cited in Alice Kaminsky, "George Eliot, George Lewes, and the Novel," PMLA, (1959): 997-1013, p. 1002.

not despair of success, we would attempt a translation of some passages; but the absence of analogous literature in our own language warns us to abstain."⁹⁶ One can easily see why Eliot began to write rustic novels. Her critical articles and reviews show that in 1856 the idea of writing rustic novels was very attractive to her. Sand's François le champi like her La petite fadette added another dimension to the realist novel. They imparted an immense sympathy for the country and for its people. For the first time one felt the poetry of ordinary existence without vulgarity or immoral situations. The picturesque effect of Sand's novels was a powerful incentive for Eliot.

Like Lewes, Eliot complained about the lack of truthfulness of English art and about the absence of good rustic realism: "Where, in our picture exhibitions, shall we find a group of true peasantry? What English artist even attempts to rival in truthfulness such studies of popular life as the pictures of Teniers or the ragged boys of Murillo? Even one of the greatest painters of the pre-eminently realistic school ... placed a pair of peasants in the foreground who were not much more real than the idyllic swains and damsels of

⁹⁶ "François le champi", op. cit.

our chimney ornaments."⁹⁷ Sand's novels were undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

When Eliot began writing, Sand's rustic novels were still popular and Eliot turned to them for inspiration. With Sand's example in mind Eliot remembered her own experience of the country life, the peasants and scenery of her native Warwickshire. The characters of her first novels are mostly modelled after the people she knew. Her aunt inspired Dinah Morris and her own father lurks behind Adam Bede. But there are also undeniable echoes of Sand's characters. Adam Bede's talent and dedication to work are reminiscent of Pierre Huguenin in Le compagnon du tour de France although he is less of an artist. He is however as strong and simple as Grand Louis in Le meunier d'Angibault. Middlemarch's Mary Garth is a passionate and intelligent girl, just like Fanchon in La petite fadette, and she is as gentle and maternal as Marie in La mare au diable.

Another aspect which Eliot shares with Sand is the love of nature. Like Sand's, Eliot's early novels rely on the contrast between city and country. Unlike the major Realists, Sand and Eliot glorify country life. In Scenes of Clerical Life Eliot addresses the middle-class audience and reminds it that daily city-life is a poor

⁹⁷Westminster Review, 66 (July, 1856): 51-79, in Essays, p. 268. Eliot refers to Holman Hunt's "The Hireling Shepherd."

reflection of a truer life: "Reader! did you ever taste such a cup of tea as Miss Gibbs is at this moment handing to Mr. Pilgrim? Do you know the dulcet strength, the animating blandness of tea sufficiently blended with real farmhouse cream? No, most likely you are a miserable town-bred reader, who think of cream as a thinish white fluid ... You have only a vague idea of a milch cow as probably a white plaster animal standing in a butter man's window."⁹⁸

The difference with Sand is that Eliot does not linger on the description of the nature around Warwickshire. She is much more discreet and prefers to describe the relations between men and nature, namely the cultivation of the land or the commerce up and down the river Floss for instance. Sand loves to describe nature as a separate entity, and often portrays it as with an emphasis on its wild and and luxurious qualities. However "la dribe" in Le péché de Monsieur Antoine, is reminiscent of the river Floss. Both of them can be gentle and lend themselves to human commerce but in the end they are the only master of the country. Eliot's love for common people also played a role in her attraction to Sand's rustic novels. However, Sand does not emphasize their pitiful aspects as much as Eliot. Jeanne may be naive but she is very pure and beautiful.

⁹⁸Scenes of Clerical Life, op. cit., p. 8.

Marie is poor and plain, but also resourceful, hardworking and courageous. Grand Louis is uneducated but intelligent.

In contrast to Sand, Eliot relies on pity to communicate sympathy. Her characters are commonplace but also pitiful. Next to Grand Louis or Pierre Huguenin, Amos Barton is almost unnoticeable. His legs "are not models" and his efforts "are often blunders."⁹⁹ His wife is gentle but gullible and quite submissive. Adam Bede, Mrs. Poyser, Maggie and Dinah are as picturesque as Grand Louis, Pierre, Madeleine and François, but Sand's characters are never pitiful. They but proud and content. One feels sympathy for the tragic destiny of Indiana, Jacques, Benedict, or the solitude of Fadette and François, but no pity. What Sand wants to impart is the necessity of social and political justice. Eliot's rustic novels are more melancholy and the sentiments she tries to communicate to her readers are reminiscent of her Evangelical education. Eliot's remark about Dorothea can be applied to her own view of art: "her ideal was not to claim justice but to give tenderness."¹⁰⁰

However, Eliot believed with Sand that the task of the artist was eminently social. Sand's art theory

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰⁰Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 166.

reflected her social concern for equality and justice. According to Sand, art cannot be separated from social progress. Literature must be concerned with the social good. Sand's art theory was opposed to art for art's sake. In Les sept cordes de la lyre (1840) Alberthus declares: "Tout artiste qui ne se propose pas un but noble, un but social, manque son oeuvre."¹⁰¹ Her novels reflected her beliefs in democracy and in the people. In François le champi she wrote: "Le rêve de l'égalité jeté dans la société ne pousse t-il pas l'art à se faire brutal et fougueux, pour réveiller les instincts communs à tous les hommes de quelque rang qu'ils soient?"¹⁰²

Eliot was also prompted to literature by the desire to partake in the social good: "It is not so very serious that we should have false ideas about evanescent fashions -about manners and conversation of beaux and duchesses; but it is serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellowmen, should not be perverted and turned towards a false object instead of the true one."¹⁰³

Therefore the realism which Eliot sought to develop

¹⁰¹Les sept cordes de la lyre, (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), p. 64.

¹⁰²François le champi, op. cit., p. 45

¹⁰³Essays, p. 271.

in her rustic novels was guided by her social and religious ideal. According to Eliot, the task of the artist was to communicate sympathy, to bring people closer together. Like Sand's, Eliot's commitment to truth was not prompted by purely aesthetic desires. It is true as Damian Grant remarks that the term Realism is too "vague and elastic"¹⁰⁴ and also correct as Robbe-Grillet points out that every new progress in fiction has been made in the name of Realism: "Tous les écrivains pensent être réalistes. Aucun ne se prétend abstrait, illusionniste, chimérique, fantaisiste faussaire ... Le réalisme n'est pas une théorie, définie sans ambiguïté, qui permettrait d'opposer certains romanciers aux autres; c'est au contraire un drapeau sous lequel se rangent l'immense majorité."¹⁰⁵ However, the term as used by Sand and Eliot denotes a social conception of art.

Although her preface to Indiana established the fundamental principles of Realism, Sand always refused to be identified with the movement. First, she found the term too restrictive. She always believed that the prerogative of all art consisted precisely in being independent from schools and ready-made systems: "Nous

¹⁰⁴Damian Grant, Realism, (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 54.

¹⁰⁵Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 135.

ne sommes d'aucun pays, d'aucune coterie, d'aucune secte, d'aucune conspiration."¹⁰⁶ According to her, a great artist could not be exclusive: "Les grands esprits ne peuvent pas être exclusifs."¹⁰⁷ Then she criticized the Realists for their presumption of absolute objectivity and their lack of sympathy for the masses. According to her, reality was always partly subjective and the term "réalisme" was not adequate: "Le nom de réalisme ne convient pas, parce que l'art est une interprétation multiple, infinie. C'est l'artiste qui crée le réel en lui-même, son réel à lui, et pas celui d'un autre."¹⁰⁸ Sand's rustic novels attempted to add another dimension to realistic art, namely the ideal. They do not change in kind from her first novels, but they represent a more pleasant reality.

The limits which Eliot set to her realism are also reminiscent of Sand. Her goal was to avoid crude and vulgar details and to describe the commonplace situations and everyday people. However, her art reflects her philosophical vision. Her descriptions force the reader to see characters from different points of view. Like Sand, Eliot refused to represent

¹⁰⁶Corr, II, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷Questions d'art et de littérature, op. cit., p. 290.

¹⁰⁸Corr, XV, pp. 479-80.

intrinsically evil characters. According to her, human nature is socially determined and therefore liable to error. "Where is the blameless woman?"¹⁰⁹ she asks in Middlemarch. Eliot and Sand performed a similar selection in their reality. They stripped it from its vulgar and sordid aspects. Like Sand, Eliot did not believe that art ought to represent every aspect of life: "No one can maintain that all fact is a fit subject for art. The sphere of the artist has its limits somewhere."¹¹⁰ She also confessed that her Scenes of Clerical Life, were "softened from the fact so far as it is permitted to soften and yet to remain essentially true."¹¹¹

Sand and Eliot admired Balzac but differed from him. Sand opposed her art to that of Balzac who according to her did not see reality with the same eyes: "Depuis quand le roman est-il forcément la peinture de ce qui est, la dure et froide réalité des hommes et des choses contemporaines ? Il peut en être ainsi, je le sais, et Balzac, un maître devant le talent duquel je me suis toujours inclinée, a fait la Comédie Humaine. Mais, tout en étant lié d'amitié avec cet homme illustre, je

¹⁰⁹Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 200.

¹¹⁰Essays, p. 146.

¹¹¹Letters, II, p. 347.

voyais les choses humaines sous un autre aspect."¹¹²
Eliot equally reproached Balzac for his absence of moral limits: "Balzac, perhaps the most wonderful writer of fiction the world has ever seen, has in many of his novels overstepped this limit. He drags us by his magic force through scene after scene of unmitigated vice, till the effect of walking among this human carrion is a moral nausea."¹¹³

Sand also criticized Flaubert and Zola for similar reasons. She disliked their emphasis on the material, the grotesque, and the vulgar aspects of existence. She reproached them for not making human nature lovable. According to her, they portrayed evil and forgot to represent the good. They were not impartial but on the contrary too one-sided. She told Flaubert that Zola's Rougon was a good book but that it lacked a moral objectivity: "Un livre fort ... et digne d'être placé aux premiers rangs. Cela ne change rien à ma manière de voir que l'art doit être la recherche de la vérité, et que la vérité n'est pas la peinture du mal. Cela doit être la peinture du mal et du bien. Un peintre qui ne voit que l'un est aussi faux que celui qui ne voit que l'autre. La vie n'est pas bourrée que de monstres, la

¹¹²Le compagnon du tour de France, op. cit., preface.

¹¹³Essays, p. 146.

société n'est pas formée que de scélérats."¹¹⁴ Eliot is silent about Flaubert and Zola, but she also meant to point to the good. Speaking about the reality of Scenes of Clerical Life Eliot declares: "The real town was more vicious than Milby, the real Dempster was far more disgusting than mine, the real Janet alas! had a far sadder end than mine."¹¹⁵

Both Sand and Eliot refused to separate art from morals. Their realism has a moral nature. It seeks to establish a balance between materialism and idealism. Eliot defines her goal as follows: "My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity and sympathy."¹¹⁶ Contrary to Flaubert, Sand argued that true objectivity was to show both sides of human nature: "Je veux voir l'homme tel qu'il est. Il n'est pas bon ou mauvais, il est bon et mauvais. Mais il est quelque chose encore ... la nuance! la nuance qui est pour moi le but de l'art."¹¹⁷

What Sand objected to in the new Realist school of

¹¹⁴Gustave Flaubert-George Sand Correspondance, op. cit., p. 528.

¹¹⁵Letters, II, p. 347.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 299.

¹¹⁷Gustave Flaubert-George Sand Correspondance, op. cit., p. 511.

the 1850's and 1860's was its lack of ideals. According to her, its values were too materialistic. She was not moved by Courbet's paintings: "J'ai vu enfin des tableaux du fameux Courbet. Ce n'est ni si drôle, ni si excentrique qu'on le disait. C'est nul et c'est bête, rien de plus. Cela ne frappe personne et rentre dans l'immensité des choses qu'on ne regarde pas."¹¹⁸ Sand believed that the artist should not limit his art to description, and argued that he ought to include the ideal in the real: "Incarner un monde idéal dans un monde réel."¹¹⁹ In La mare au diable she wrote: "L'art n'est pas une recherche de la réalité positive; c'est une recherche de la vérité idéale."¹²⁰

In her Lettres d'un voyageur Sand argued that there were several levels in art. At a more elementary level art is mere form. The artist is only concerned with form, with appearance. In a more developed phase art is concerned with essences. From a mere artisan the artist becomes a poet: "Quand ce développement de la faculté de voir, de comprendre et d'admirer ne s'applique qu'aux objets extérieurs, on n'est qu'un artiste ... quand l'intelligence va au-delà du sens pittoresque, ... quand elle sonde les profondeurs du monde idéal, la réunion de

¹¹⁸Corr, XIII, pp. 152-53.

¹¹⁹Ibid., IV, p. 108.

¹²⁰La mare au diable, op. cit., p. 17.

ces deux facultés fait le poète; pour être vraiment poète, il faut donc être à la fois artiste et philosophe."¹²¹

Painting was interesting to Sand precisely because it was well adapted to describe the essential, the noble, that which constituted humanity. Painting was great art because it was synthetic and immortalized truth: "la peinture dévoile et synthétise, elle idéalise ou poétise en quelque sorte."¹²² Sand also enjoyed the Dutch school because it was successful in showing the poetry of ordinary life: "la poésie de la réalité de l'école Flamande."¹²³ However Sand's preference went to music. According to her, music was the most perfect art form, because it was the freest and went beyond the categories of real and ideal. In Les maîtres sonneurs Sand attempted to go back to the root of music by showing the development of art in her native Berry and its role in the rustic society.

There are also several levels of art in Eliot, and one can see a development from mere surface realism to more sophisticated art which embodies both the ideal and the real. As she grew older, Eliot's realism became more complex. In Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda Eliot

¹²¹Lettres d'un voyageur, op. cit., p. 251.

¹²²Oeuvres Autobiographiques, II, p. 106.

¹²³Ibid., p. 105.

widened her concept of reality. There are several allusions to the limitations of a more external realism. The novelist is no longer compared to a mirror reflecting facts but to a microscope. Eliot invites further investigation. Human nature is more complex than it seems. Reality is not appearance. No fact can be understood individually but must be represented in its relation to the whole. Only the enlarged vision is meaningful. The imagery she uses is one of webs, labyrinths, mazes. Therefore a surface realism is incomplete and cannot offer a satisfying explanation: "So much subtler is a human mind than the outside tissues which make a sort of blazonry or clock-face for it."¹²⁴ Mere description is insufficient, as is apparent in the conversation between Rosamond Vincy and Mary Garth, who remarks: "How can one describe a man? I can give you an inventory: Heavy eyebrows, dark eyes, a straight nose, thick black hair."¹²⁵

Lydgate's ideal illustrates Eliot's conception of the novel. Reality is a changing phenomenon and therefore the novelists must use more elaborate tools which reveal "subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of lens."¹²⁶ Like a scientist's, the novelist's task is

¹²⁴Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 9.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 93.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 135.

complex. Lydgate "had tossed away all cheap inventions where ignorance finds itself able and at ease: he was enamoured of that arduous invention which is the very eye of research, provisionally framing its object and correcting it to more and more exactness of relation; he wanted to pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime, that delicate poise and transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness."¹²⁷

Lewes himself never separated Realism from Idealism. With Sand he agrees that "art is a representation of reality."¹²⁸ For him as for Sand, the artist must also represent the ideal, which is only a more abstract truth: "Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism."¹²⁹ According to him, it is acceptable to choose either sort of art. Bad art was the consequence of not being lifelike in an abstract or concrete manner.

Eliot focuses on relations. What is most real for her is what is not directly perceptible, namely the minute elements which link individuals together.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Leader, August 6, 1853, p. 762.

¹²⁹Westminster Review, LXX 1858, p. 493.

Reality cannot be comprehended without a knowledge of such hidden facts. Characters can only be understood as parts of the whole milieu in which they evolve. As Dorothea Brooke remarks about the Roman frescoes: "When I begin to examine the pictures one by one, the life goes out of them."¹³⁰ Therefore the novelist must come out of the narrow limits of the art tradition which Will Ladislaw calls the "the studio point of view,"¹³¹ and expand his vision. Eliot's realism is characterized by the sense of fundamental unity of human nature. The description of human actions is a complex task. Ready-made concepts are not very helpful: "Nice distinctions are troublesome, it is much easier to say a thing is black than to discriminate the particular shade of brown, blue, or green to which it really belongs."¹³² Reality for Eliot is a web, a net-work of relations, and as Raymond Williams correctly remarks "the web, the tangle disturbs and obscures."¹³³ The task of the novelist according to Eliot, is to unravel such complexity, to show how each action is determined by another one, and how others determine one's own. The

¹³⁰Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 169.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Scenes of Clerical Life, op. cit., p. 33.

¹³³Raymond Williams, The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 88.

novelist must show the effects of one character upon another, the transformation, the adaptation, the frustrations and sacrifices which life demands: "Anyone watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another."¹³⁴

Therefore the art of Eliot in her later novels represents the development of characters through change: "A human being in this aged nation of ours is a wonderful whole, the slow creation of long interchanging influences."¹³⁵ In his Life of Goethe, a work in which he refers again to Sand's artistic conception, Lewes declares that men are "of a mingled woof, good and evil, virtue and weakness, truth and falsehood, woven inextricably together."¹³⁶ Echoes of Lewes appear in Middlemarch: "Character too is a process and an unfolding."¹³⁷ Bichat had taught Lydgate that it was impossible to understand the individual organs unless we took into consideration their relations: "Living bodies, fundamentally considered, are not associations of organs which can be understood by studying them first apart,

¹³⁴Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 78.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 335.

¹³⁶Cited by Alice Kaminsky, "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes and the Novel", Proceedings of the Modern Language Association, 1955, LXX, 997-1013, p. 1002.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 123.

and then as it were federally; but must be regarded as consisting of certain primary webs or tissues, out of which the various organs -brain, heart, lungs, and so on- are compacted."¹³⁸ Like the physiologist, the novelist must "demonstrate the more intimate relations of living structure and to help to define men's thought more accurately after the true order."¹³⁹

Characteristic of Eliot is the assumption that the most perfect art is the one which communicate the sense of wholeness, "the reaching forward of the whole consciousness towards the fullest truth."¹⁴⁰ Complexity is inherent to such wholeness. Eliot's characters evolve with "the hampering, threadlike pressure of small social conditions and their frustrating complexity."¹⁴¹ According to Eliot, great art is defined by its breadth as well as its depth. It is both analytic and synthetic. In 1868, she wrote in her notebooks: "The highest Form, then, is the highest organism, that is to say, the most varied group of relations bound together in a wholeness which again has the most varied relations with all other phenomena. It is only in this fundamental sense that the word Form can be applied to Art in

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 121.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 148.

general."¹⁴²

Sand was not particularly interested in the development of character through change. But she had experimented with milieu in her rustic novels showing the intimate relationships between men and nature. In Jeanne Sand intended to represent her character in her real original environment: "Peindre mon type dans son vrai milieu, et l'encadrer exclusivement de figures rustiques en harmonie avec la mesure, assez limitée en littérature, de ses idées et des ses sentiments."¹⁴³ In her autobiography Sand also tried to explain her own life in reference to the circumstances in which it developed, emphasizing before Balzac the influence of milieu: "Les mêmes instincts, les mêmes tendances produisent des résultats différents parce que le milieu que nous traversons n'est jamais identique au milieu traversé par ceux qui nous ont précédés."¹⁴⁴

However, Sand does not represent the complexity of life. She shows the commonness of human nature and the fundamental dependency of existences one upon the others. Except in her autobiography her novels do not attempt to represent such belief in a formal way.

¹⁴²Essays, p. 433.

¹⁴³Jeanne, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁴⁴Oeuvres Autobiographiques, op. cit., vol. I, p. 308.

Unlike Eliot's novels, Sand's do not represent the inter-relatedness of existences. She does not use several plots. However, in her autobiography Sand attempts to show the complexity of telling one's life. She uses digression and spontaneity to remain closer to life. She does not describe characters and events in a chronological way but as she remembers them, by the degree of the impression they made on her. There does not seem to be a comparable technique with Eliot, but the fundamental assumption which characterizes Sand's autobiography is that it is impossible to describe one existence without also describing that of others who helped determine it: "Toutes les existences sont solidaires les unes des autres, et tout être humain qui présenterait la sienne isolément, sans la rattacher à celle de ses semblables, n'offrirait rien de légitime à débrouiller."¹⁴⁵

Another aspect which Sand may have imparted to Eliot is the belief that literature was an intellectual enterprise. Sand did not refrain from ideas and intellectual theories: "Si je me permets de mêler quelques idées aux faits du roman, c'est qu'il m'a toujours semblé que c'était le droit du romancier et même le devoir du conteur."¹⁴⁶ She believed that a

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 307.

¹⁴⁶Corr, VII, p. 55.

novel was a combination of ideas and emotions. According to her, art must move deeply, but ultimately emotion must engender ideas. In 1847 she defined her art as follows: "Je fais des romans, c'est à dire que je cherche par les voies d'un certain art à provoquer l'émotion, à remuer, à agiter, à ébranler même ... et l'émotion porte à la réflexion, à la recherche. C'est tout ce que je voulais. Faire douter du mensonge auquel on croit."¹⁴⁷

Lewes appreciated ideas in the novel and thought that it could only help elevate it. In 1865 he wrote: "The general estimation of prose fiction as a branch of Literature has something contemptuous in it."¹⁴⁸ Lewes complained that the "vast increase of novels, mostly worthless, is a serious danger to public culture"¹⁴⁹ and remarked that "sterile abundance casts a sort of opprobrium on the art itself."¹⁵⁰ Lewes called for a more serious criticism of the novel and asked critics to consider the question: "If critics were vigilant and rigorous, they would somewhat check the presumptuous

¹⁴⁷Ibid., V, p. 827.

¹⁴⁸"Criticism in Relation to Novels", Fortnightly Review, 3, 352-61, December 15th, 1865, in Edwin Eigner & George Worth (eds), Victorian Criticism of the Novel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 182.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 183.

facility and facundia of indolent novelists, by impressing on them a sense of danger in allowing the pen to wander at random. It would warn them that rhetoric without ideas would lead them into ridicule."¹⁵¹

According to Lewes, Sand had contributed to elevate the novel by assimilating ideas to it and he presented her as a woman of great intellect: "She is not a creature of a few ideas easily exhausted, but a vast intellect continually absorbing materials from an extended experience, and a progressive philosophy, and reproducing them under the forms of Art."¹⁵² Lewes never believed that Eliot's great intellect was an obstacle to novel writing, quite the contrary, and further encouraged her to write fiction. Eliot shares with Sand the belief that fiction was a field in which intellectuals could bring their own ideas. She rejected the opinion that the novel was an inferior art form, and strove to widen its limits. She did not consider the novel as mere entertainment. "We are not ingenious puppets, sir, who live in box and look out on the world only when it is gaping for amusement"¹⁵³ Herr Klesmer the musician proudly declares.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁵²"Continental Literati: George Sand", op. cit., p. 584.

¹⁵³Daniel Deronda, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 206.

Although Sand and Eliot were first known as novelists, their interest in art lead them to experiment with other genres than the novel. During the early years of her career Sand wrote a dozen short stories. Later she also wrote children's tales, such as her Contes d'une grand-mère, Histoire de Gribouille, and wrote down the legends of her native Berry in Légendes rustiques. She also experimented with the fantastic genre in Laura.

Sand did not write poetry, but in 1850 she successfully turned to the theatre. She continued to write novels, but the stage exerted real fascination upon her, and she devoted most of her time to writing plays or adapting her best novels such as François le champi or Le marquis de Villemer for the theatre. The theatre not only gave her the opportunity to reach a larger audience, but also to be closer to life. Sand made her actors dress in their everyday clothes, speak with their native accents and some dialectal expressions. In her rustic plays, she even had live farm animals on the stage. Sand was in contact with famous actors such as Macready and Bocage. Sara Bernhardt began her career in one of Sand's plays.

Eliot wrote two short stories, and one of them, The Lifted Veil, is reminiscent of Sand. As Mathilde Blind remarked it is strikingly "curious" and has "a certain

mystical turn,"¹⁵⁴ which recalls the Lettres d'un voyageur. The protagonist Latimer is a Sandian character, romantic, overtly sensitive, and disillusioned with the world. Like the narrator in Sand's book, Latimer is a dreamer, and a traveller to such places as Venice, Geneva or Prague, all associated with Romanticism, and described in Sand's book. Both stories are also about friendship and the need for love.

It is interesting to remark that Eliot also thought of writing for the theatre, an idea certainly encouraged by the success of Sand's plays. Around 1864, at the time when Sand's theatre career was at its peak, Lewes suggested that Eliot write a play. Lewes himself was no stranger to the art of drama. Like Sand whose mother was an actress, Lewes came from a theatre family. His grandfather was an actor and he himself occasionally acted. In his younger days, Lewes had even written several plays, and adapted some plays from the French, under the pseudonym of Lawrence Slingsby.¹⁵⁵ Lewes's criticism reveals that he indeed had a thorough

¹⁵⁴Mathilde Blind, George Eliot, (London: Allen, 1883), p. 181.

¹⁵⁵Buckstone's adventure with a Polish Princess, an original farce in one act and in prose. A Cosy Couple, farce in one act. The Game of Speculation, a comedy in three acts and in prose (an adaptation of Balzac's comedy Mercadet). Give a Dog a Bad Name, a farce in one act. The Lawyers, comedy in three acts and in prose. Sunshine Through the Clouds, drama in one act (adaptation of Mme de Girardin's La joie fait peur).

knowledge of dramatic techniques. Lewes and Eliot were in Paris in 1864, and may have seen Sand's Le Marquis de Villemer, which was then playing. This might explain Lewes's sudden suggestion to Eliot, shortly after their return from Paris, that she write plays. According to him, Eliot was enthusiastic about the new project: "She rather liked the suggestion ... thought the subject a good one, one that she could work out."¹⁵⁶ Very little is known about the subject of the play or the reasons why it was never completed. For some obscure reason, the project fell through. It seems that Eliot and Helen Faucit, the actress who was to have the leading role, could not agree.

Eliot had been long acquainted with Sand's plays. When she was in Switzerland in 1850, she read Sand's play François le champi, and may even have participated in one free adaptation of it. In February 1850 she wrote to the Brays: "You know that George Sand writes for the theatre? Her François le champi, une comédie is simplicity and purity itself. The seven devils are cast out. We are going to have more acting here on Wednesday."¹⁵⁷

Since Eliot's play did not materialize, Eliot

¹⁵⁶Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 374.

¹⁵⁷Letters, I, p. 330.

turned to poetry. The Spanish Gypsy, originally written for the theatre, finally came out as a long poem in blank verse. Sand's poetic prose may have inspired Eliot, but unfortunately her bent was decidedly not poetic. Eliot wrote other poems such as Armgart and The Legend of Jubal, but as Henry James remarked she lacked "the hurrying quickness, the palpitating warmth."¹⁵⁸ Another critic correctly observed: "We are agitated, but not thrilled."¹⁵⁹

It is in their style that Sand and Eliot differ the most. Sand wrote with facility, finishing up some of her country tales in a few days. She wrote at night after having spent the day writing to her publishers, taking care of her children, or attending social gatherings with workers. She had great energy and would sometimes begin a new novel as soon as the last one was finished. She often declared that she wrote without a plan, which is only true for some of her novels. Her manuscripts show that she took great care with her style.

Sand's prose is poetic. Lyricism pervades her first novels. Simplicity and ordinary language characterize her rustic tales. She wrote in short

¹⁵⁸Gordon Haight, George Eliot: A Biography, op. cit., p. 405.

¹⁵⁹Thomas Browne, in George Eliot: Poems, (Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1887), p. 6.

sentences and with everyday words. She avoided unnecessary details and scholarly terms. It is true that the quality of her prose is not always consistent. Some of her novels, especially those rushed to the press for financial reasons, were badly written. However, others, such as Lettres d'un voyageur and La petite fadette, are perhaps the best examples of the magic of her style, and we can safely declare with Lewes: "The style of George Sand, in her earlier works, is perhaps the most beautiful ever written by a French author ... there is magic in many passages which is beyond example in the French language ... they are genuine poems ... always clear as crystal, always unaffected, always musical."¹⁶⁰

Although Eliot found in Sand a great mentor, she does not seem to have espoused her stylistic techniques. Unlike Sand, Eliot did not write with ease. Writing for her was a rather painful process. She was always self-conscious and persistently lacked confidence in her literary abilities, despite Lewes's support and encouragement. Her prose can be poetic, as for instance in her description of the picturesque scenery of Warwickshire, Mrs. Poyser's dairy, or Adam Bede's workshop. However, because of the moral and

¹⁶⁰"Balzac and George Sand," Foreign Quarterly Review 33 (July, 1844): 265-98, pp. 79-81.

philosophical nature of her novels, the frequent interruptions and addresses to the reader, and the numerous quotations and references to scholarly works, her precision of intellectual details burden her style and make certain passages tedious. It is nevertheless interesting to remark that Eliot thought of Anna Blackwell, who translated Sand's Jacques, as a reliable French translator for her own novels.¹⁶¹ She also asked François d'Albert Durade, who complained about the difficulty of translating her passages in dialect, to look for examples in Balzac and in Sand: "Would it be inadmissible to represent in French, at least in some degree, those 'intermédiaires entre le style commun et le style élégant' to which you refer? It seems to me that I have discerned such shades very strikingly rendered in Balzac, and occasionally in George Sand."¹⁶²

¹⁶¹"If Mrs. Blackwell, who, I imagine is a competent person, would like to translate the Scenes of Clerical Life, I am in no obligation to reserve them for Mr. d'Albert." Letters, III, p. 416. Eugène Bodichon had doubts about Anna Blackwell's talent as a translator, and Eliot followed his advice: "Since your account of the Algerian lady's powers is not encouraging, I think you had better simply tell her that I cannot authorize any translation on her part." Letters, IV, p. 21.

¹⁶²Letters, III, p. 374.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN

The social, political and economic changes which took place in the nineteenth century also affected the traditional definition of the nature and role of the sexes. The new middle class believed that a woman's place was in the home and that a girl's education must prepare her above all to be a wife and a mother. Economic necessities forced working-class women to work. Some worked inside their homes as seamstresses but many of them worked outside in cotton mills and mines. The condition of aristocratic women, the "lady" or the "dame", was on the whole less affected by the social and political changes. Since male aristocrats did not work, women enjoyed roughly the same privileges. Therefore it was in the middle class that women most felt the limitation of their roles. There the gap between the sexes was the widest. Capitalism encouraged male supremacy and insisted that women had to be virtuous, pure, loving and maternal. In a world in which economic and material values dominated, women came to represent man's moral conscience.

Women were also more numerous than men. According to Joan Burstyn, by 1860 in England "the excess of women over men increased by 42 percent."¹ Contingents of Englishmen had left England for the colonies.

¹Joan Burstyn, Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood, (London: Barnes & Noble, 1980), p. 35.

Therefore, demographic and economic forces drove middle-class women out of the home. Due to the shortage of men, competition for marriageable partners became severe and women had to consider living alone. As the successive reforms of political franchise continued to exclude women, the latter slowly united and began their long struggle for political power. Such circumstances forced them to examine anew the question of the nature and role of the sexes.

The French Revolution of 1789 had given women some hope of equality. Like men, French women had taken an active part in its events, sometimes acting alone, as when they forced the king back to Paris in October 1789. The Assemblée Constituante granted divorce in 1792, and several revolutionaries, including Mirabeau and Condorcet, advocated educational and political equality for women. Later, the reign of Napoléon I was rather unfavourable to women. The Civil Code (1807) refused married women civil rights, for that matter classifying them with criminals and the mentally ill, and limited their role to that of housewife and mother. Divorce was still possible but more difficult to obtain. By marriage a woman became the property of her husband, losing the few civil rights she had. She could not work without his permission, had no final say in the education of her children and no right to inherit her

husband's property. In her case adultery was a serious crime for which she could be sent to prison, whereas a husband was condemned only when adultery was committed in the home, in which case a fine was judged equitable. With the return to power of the Catholic Church during the Restoration, divorce was suppressed (1824) and was not reinstated until 1884.

In England the marriage laws also established the supremacy of the husband. However, divorce remained a possible alternative although still expensive and very difficult to obtain since it required an act of Parliament. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 abolished that arrangement, lowered the cost of divorce and accelerated its procedure. It was only in 1882 that a working wife was finally declared sole proprietor of her earnings before and after marriage.

The nineteenth century was marked by two major and opposite currents of thought concerning women. Conservatives and traditionalists in both countries maintained that the sexes were essentially different and that women were, by nature, more or less inferior to men, justifying thereby her role in society and the marriage laws. The Catholic and Anglican religions also reinforced male superiority, submitting women once more to the male authority of the priest or minister. A few Protestant sects, such as the Quakers and the

Unitarians, were more progressive and recognized equality of nature between men and women. Systems which supported capitalism, such as Positivism, reinforced the conservative positions.

Comte defended the middle-class ideology which relegated women to the home and defined them by their relationship to man. He was the disciple of a tradition, that of the reactionary Idéologues, which believed that women's inferiority was a fact of nature. Science generally reflected and confirmed the traditional conceptions about female nature. In 1843, Comte wrote to John Stuart Mill: "Dans presque toute la série animale, et surtout chez notre espèce, le sexe femelle est constitué d'une sorte d'état d'enfance radicale qui le rend essentiellement inférieur au type organique correspondant."² Female inferiority was an indisputable fact. It was a scientific truth: "Il est impossible de ne pas voir ressortir de l'ensemble des études animales la loi générale de la supériorité du sexe masculin dans toute la partie supérieure de la hiérarchie vivante."³

Again, in his Catéchisme Positiviste, Comte declares: "La supériorité masculine est incontestable en

²Lettres d'Auguste Comte à John Stuart Mill, (Paris: Leroux, 1877), p. 175.

³Ibid., p. 201.

tout ce qui concerne le caractère proprement dit, principale source du commandement."⁴ Nature did not intend women to be intelligent, and Comte argues that their emotions are the greatest obstacle to the development of their intelligence: "Leur inaptitude caractéristique à l'abstraction et à la contention, l'impossibilité presque complète d'écarter les inspirations passionnées dans les opérations rationnelles."⁵

Characteristic of this argument is the belief that woman is essentially a being in whom emotions play a considerable and determining role. For Comte, woman is "le sexe affectif." She cannot detach herself from her affections. Man, on the contrary, can separate himself from his emotions, which enables him to think abstractly. He is characterized by the intellect. He is "le sexe méditatif." Woman's role is to harmonize, man's to coordinate. The former is passive and does not require reason, the latter only is active and cannot be accomplished without the aid of reason. As Comte explains to his female protagonist in his Catéchisme Positiviste: "Votre sexe est mieux disposé à rapprocher

⁴Auguste Comte, Catéchisme Positiviste, third edition, (Paris: Lafitte, 1870), p. 288.

⁵Ibid., p. 185.

les faits et le mien à la coordonner."⁶

Comte believed that women should be excluded from political and practical life in order to remain pure and to devote themselves to their children and their husband. Their role is to educate men morally: "Le principal office des femmes consistant à former et perfectionner des hommes."⁷ Comte was willing to admit that the instruction of women must be improved and allowed them to share the same teachers as men: "Les deux sexes puisent aux mêmes sources leur initiation systématique."⁸ However, this was no progressive thought on his part but simply indicated his firm conviction in the radical difference between the sexes. The equal education for girls represented no danger, since he believed it could neither transform nor change their nature. Comte argued that equality in instruction would only confirm the differences and verify the inferiority of women: "De ce fond commun chaque praticien ou théoricien doit ensuite tirer spontanément à sa destination, sans avoir ordinairement besoin d'aucun enseignement particulier."⁹ Comte did not believe that women ought to be instructed in the

⁶Ibid., p. 235.

⁷Ibid., p. 123.

⁸Ibid., p. 265.

⁹Ibid., p. 264.

sciences. He reserved mathematics for men.

Comte's conception of marriage is almost mystical. He did not encourage sexual relationships. According to his scheme of thought, procreation ought to be reserved for a few selected couples, from whom children were to be adopted. He did not allow divorce except when one of the spouses was convicted of a serious crime. Comte was vehemently opposed to feminism and enraged to see women demanding their freedom and their right to participate in the affairs of the state. In 1843, he wrote to Mill: "Quant au progrès qui, depuis un siècle, s'opérait graduellement vers l'émancipation féminine, j'avoue que je n'y crois aucunement, ni comme fait, ni comme principe."¹⁰ According to him, feminism was only the poor offshoot of socialism and carried with it the same moral degradation: "Ce mouvement consiste surtout en un dévergondage croissant."¹¹ Comte was one of the defenders of the traditional conception of woman. He hated Sand and her friends who represented the modern woman, and he glorified the feminine virtues of seventeenth century figures, such as Madame de Lafayette or Madame de Sévigné: "La femme qui, sous un nom d'homme, s'est rendue aujourd'hui si déplorablement célèbre chez nous, me paraît, au fond, très inférieure,

¹⁰Lettres d'Auguste Comte à John Stuart Mill, op. cit., p. 203.

¹¹Ibid., p. 204.

non seulement en convenances, mais même en originalité féminine, à la plupart de ces estimables types."¹²

Along with Comte, John Ruskin also defended the middle class's conception of womanhood. On the surface, Ruskin seems to be more progressive than Comte. He avoids the argument of inferiority. In a lecture given in Manchester in 1864, Ruskin emphasized the similarity between men and women. According to him, women are not "creatures of independent kind and of irreconcilable claims."¹³ He insisted that woman was not "a shadow or attendant image of her Lord, owing him a thoughtless and servile obedience."¹⁴

However, Ruskin still argued from a male perspective. Woman is not inferior to man, but she was still made "for" man: "made to be the helpmate of man."¹⁵ According to him, woman is not inferior because she cannot be compared to man. She is not like man. Therefore the argument of inferiority does not apply: "We are foolish ... in speaking of the superiority of the one sex to the other as if they could be compared in

¹²Ibid.

¹³John Ruskin, Of Queens' Gardens, (London: Dent & Sons, 1911), p. 50.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

similar things."¹⁶ Men and women are two different natures, which were created different but also for each other, to complete each other: "Each has what the other has not: each completes the other and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give."¹⁷ In essence, according to Ruskin, men and women are imperfect alone, and marriage is the most natural way to maintain harmony and completeness. But from his analysis, it seems that man has a larger share of perfection than woman. Man is by far more able to survive since he alone is endowed with the necessary aggressive power. Men do not depend on women as much as women depend on them. Therefore, they complete each other, but the completion they bring each other is not of the same order. Man's is more vital.

Like Comte, Ruskin believed that nature endowed man with the power of action, the faculties of doing, creating and conquering. According to him, the distinctive characteristics of manhood are the predominance of the intellect and power to change his environment. Man's sphere is the external world, that of war, commerce, and creativity. On the contrary,

¹⁶Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁷Ibid.

woman's sphere is the home, "the place of shelter from all terror, doubt and division."¹⁸ There she is allowed absolute power, and can "rule." Ruskin also idealized women. Men are allowed a certain degree of immorality because of the demands of the outside world, as in the case of war or in commerce. However, woman must be a moral being at all times: "She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise -wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation."¹⁹ Deeply rooted in Ruskin's conscience, was the conviction that women must serve men. Seemingly progressive, such notions of complementarity constituted, in fact, the greatest obstacle to the effective emancipation of women and their social and political equality. In a similar way to Comte, Ruskin's conception of women is typical of the middle class's fear of the destruction of the family unit, and of its reluctance to grant women some independence and political equality.

Ruskin accepted the idea that girls' education must be improved: "You bring up your girls as if they were meant for sideboard ornaments, and then complain of their frivolity. Give them the same advantages that you give their brothers, appeal to the same grand virtues in

¹⁸Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 60.

them, teach them also that courage and truth are the pillars of their being."²⁰ However, according to Ruskin, the instruction of girls should always conform to the fundamental notion of complementarity: "All such knowledge should be given her as may enable to understand, and even to aid, the work of men."²¹ A girl should be presented the same material, but only to a lesser degree, so that she can fulfil her role of mother and wife: "A girl's education should be nearly, in its course and material of study the same as a boy's, but quite differently directed ... his command of it should be foundational and progressive, hers, general and accomplished for daily and helpful use."²²

Ruskin's argument was progressive, but still presupposed that a woman's education and instruction must first be becoming to her role. A girl must be educated but the knowledge she acquires must be practical. It must first be of some use to her role as wife and mother. In truth, it precluded women from the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and barred access to creativity. According to Ruskin, a woman's education must above all develop the qualities which are suited to her sex, namely resignation and compassion: "She is to

²⁰Ibid., p. 67.

²¹Ibid., p. 62.

²²Ibid., pp. 64-65.

be taught to extend her sympathy."²³ Only man can contemplate ideas and enjoy knowledge for its own sake: "A man ought to know any language or science he learns thoroughly, while a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends."²⁴ Like Comte, Ruskin did not believe that woman ought to take part in political affairs. Her social duties are only an extension of her home duties: "Order, comfort, loveliness."²⁵

Comte's and Ruskin's views were contested by a large undercurrent, originating with Charles Fourier, which became known as "feminism" in the latter part of the century. Fourier proclaimed absolute equality of the sexes. Contrary to Comte and Ruskin, he refused to confine women to the home. According to him, nothing in her nature indicates that women are naturally destined for home duties, a view which was then very provocative: "La majeure partie des femmes n'a ni goût, ni aptitude aux occupations du ménage."²⁶ Fourier believed that women were also born to enjoy freedom: "Dieu ne

²³Ibid., p. 63.

²⁴Ibid., p. 65.

²⁵Ibid., p. 72.

²⁶Charles Fourier, Théorie des quatre mouvements, (Paris: Anthropos, 1966), p. 123.

reconnait pour liberté que celle qui s'étend aux deux sexes et non pas à un seul."²⁷

Fourier's system was one of the first to advocate equality and freedom for both sexes, and to proclaim that women were slaves in the social order. His new conception of society promised to deliver woman from the drudgery not only of household tasks but also of maternal care. Fourier condemned the "civilized" habits of his contemporaries which compelled women to bear more children than they desired, and forced the less fortunate ones to prostitution. His writings contain a severe criticism of the male supremacy in all domains: "Une jeune fille, selon les philosophes, est une machine faite pour écumer le pot, torcher les marmots ... son penchant à jouer un grand rôle est comprimé; elle s'indigne, elle sent son avilissement."²⁸ Fourier claimed that the inferiority generally attributed to women was only the result of their status and position in society: "Un système social qui, comprimant leurs facultés dès l'enfance et pendant tout le cours de la vie, les force à recourir à la fraude pour se livrer à la nature."²⁹ He boldly declared that the nature of

²⁷Ibid., p. 90.

²⁸La fausse industrie, (Paris: Anthropos, 1967), p. 362.

²⁹Théorie des quatre mouvements, op. cit., p. 147.

women in the social order was an artificial product, the result of male dominance, and proclaimed that in his new society their true nature will be allowed to develop and flourish.

Contrary to Comte and Ruskin, Fourier not only believed women were as capable of performing all the intellectual and artistic tasks as men, but he also declared them able to surpass men: "J'ai trouvé, dans le cours de mes recherches sur le régime sociétaire, beaucoup plus de raison chez les femmes que chez les hommes; car elles m'ont plusieurs fois donné des idées neuves qui m'ont valu des solutions de problème très imprévues."³⁰ Fourier's system advocated free and equal education for the two sexes, but did not propose any set curriculum. Fourier argued that children should be free to play and to learn when they felt like it.

It is in his ideas about the relations between the sexes that Fourier was most revolutionary. He rejected marriage and advocated free love and sexual liberation. His ideas on this subject were very provocative for his time because Fourier argued for the absolute sexual liberation of women. In fact, his whole system was based on the emancipation of women: "La femme en état de liberté, surpassera l'homme dans toutes fonctions d'esprit ou de corps qui ne sont pas l'attribut de la

³⁰La fausse industrie, op. cit., p. 236.

force physique."³¹ Fourier also encouraged women to free themselves by struggling for their rights, and to commit their literature to the cause of freedom. He urged them to become "des libérateurs; des Spartacus politiques, des génies qui concertassent les moyens de tirer leur sexe d'avilissement."³²

The Saint-Simonians also rejected the traditional belief in the nature and role of women. Originally there were no women in their meetings except Bazard's wife. But slowly, perhaps under the influence of Fourier, women began to be admitted. In 1831, the "family" counted ten women among its seventy-nine members and their numbers grew larger every year. Women were attracted by the promise of equality and freedom. Like Fourier, Enfantin believed that the transformation of society could not occur without the absolute emancipation of women: "C'est par l'affranchissement complet des femmes que sera signalée l'ère Saint-Simonienne."³³ Enfantin borrowed the ideas of sexual freedom from Fourier, but remained more reserved and believed that the couple was the fundamental social unit.

³¹Ibid., p. 149.

³²Ibid.

³³Sébastien Charléty, Essai sur l'histoire du saint-simonisme, (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p. 164.

Opinions varied amongst Saint-Simonians, but they generally believed that women ought to play a political role in society. Enfantin's mysticism led his sect to look for the female Messiah: "Je vois à une régénération sociale fondée sur l'égalité de l'homme et de la femme, et j'attends la Femme qui l'opèrera."³⁴ The Saint-Simonians admired Sand and consequently asked her to become their female leader, but she politely refused.

Leroux was also favourable to women's emancipation: "Il est une moitié de l'Humanité qui a toujours partagé jusqu'ici le sort des parias, des esclaves, et des prolétaires, en ce sens qu'elle a été comme eux, dépouillée de son droit d'égalité: ce sont les femmes."³⁵ Leroux accused Christianity of having developed the idea of female inferiority: "Le christianisme n'avait pas seulement accepté le fait de l'esclavage et de l'humiliation de la femme, il l'avait dogmatisé et sanctionné."³⁶ However, Leroux also claimed that by suppressing the cult of the Virgin Mary, Protestantism made a step towards the equality of women. According to him, the two sexes were not as radically different as Comte and Ruskin believed, but instead very

³⁴Ibid., p. 260.

³⁵"Aux Philosophes," Revue Encyclopédique 1831, in Oeuvres Complètes, (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1978), p. 27.

³⁶Ibid., p. 31.

similar. In fact, Leroux believed in the theory of androgyny: "Eve pré-existait dans Adam, et il n'y a pas là de création véritable, mais seulement une séparation des deux principes de l'androgynie."³⁷ He argued that the differences between the sexual roles were the consequence of political and economic forces.

In England, Lewes and Mill were amongst those who advocated female emancipation. Lewes's ideas on the subject were more progressive than Ruskin's. Lewes did not stress the idea that woman was made for man. In his review of Charlotte Bronte's Shirley in 1850 he wrote: "We assume no general organic inferiority; we simply assert an organic difference. Women, we are entirely disposed to admit, are substantially equal in the aggregate worth of their endowments; But equality does not imply identity. They may be equal, but not exactly alike."³⁸

Lewes's argument is reminiscent of Ruskin's, especially the fact that he starts off with a clear distinction between the sexes: "Many of their endowments are specifically different. Mentally as well as bodily there seem to be organic diversities."³⁹ But more than

³⁷De l'Humanité, (Paris: Perrotin, 1845), p. 53.

³⁸"Shirley," Edinburgh Review, 91 (January, 1850): 153-73, p. 153.

³⁹Ibid.

Ruskin, Lewes tries to diminish those differences and instead of attributing them to nature he shows, like Leroux, that they are the product of external circumstances. According to him, in a state of nature men and women are very close. But the social order accentuates those differences which, in fact, only "make themselves felt whenever the two sexes come into competition."⁴⁰

According to Lewes, motherhood was the seat of the sexual difference. All other attempts to draw further differences between men and women were ultimately futile. Motherhood was woman's "distinctive characteristic" and her "high and holy office."⁴¹ Lewes attributed women's physical weakness to childbearing, which according to him, drained women's energies. Childbearing and the long and arduous education and care of children, being very demanding and exhausting tasks, often undermined women's health. Lewes argued that motherhood constituted a great obstacle for mothers who wanted to hold more responsible positions. However, he was not opposed to women playing a political role in society.

Later, at the time he met Eliot, his views became more radical. He argued that women's physical weakness

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 154.

had been exaggerated: "Too much stress has, we think, been laid on man's superiority in physical strength, as if that, in itself, were sufficient to account for the differences in intellectual power."⁴² He also pointed out the similarities between men and women, and criticized the argument according to which women were always governed by their emotions: "No such absolute distinction exists in mankind ... there is no man whose mind is shrivelled up into pure intellect; there is no woman whose intellect is completely absorbed by her emotions."⁴³ Eliot, but also Sand, certainly contributed to the radicalism of his views concerning women.

Lewes was one of the few to advocate a system of education which would develop women's intellect: "The man who would deny to woman the cultivation of her intellect, ought, for consistency, to shut her up in a harem. If he recognises in the sex any quality which transcends the qualities demanded in a plaything or a handmaid, if he recognises in her the existence of an intellectual life not essentially dissimilar to his own, he must, by the plainest logic, admit that life to express itself in all its spontaneous forms of

⁴²Ibid., p. 155.

⁴³"The Lady Novelists," Westminster Review, 58 (July, 1852): 129-41, p. 132.

activity."⁴⁴ Lewes also pointed out that a great sensitivity was not the prerogative of women, but was rather a characteristic shared by all artists and poets: "In poets, artists, and men of letters, par excellence we observe this feminine trait, that their intellect habitually moves in alliance with their emotions."⁴⁵

Mill remains the foremost defender of women's rights in the nineteenth century. His thoughts on the subject show that he was indebted to other radicals among whom we find Fourier and the Saint-Simonians. Like Fourier, Mill denounced the exploitation of women and became in the 1860's the most outspoken representative of their civil and political rights. With the Saint-Simonians, Mill believed that there could be no true social progress unless women were granted independence and political equality. In The Subjection of Women, written in 1861 but published in 1869, he advocated absolute equality of rights between all citizens, male and female: "The legal subordination of one sex to the other, is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement ... it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 132.

disability on the other."⁴⁶

Mill refused to believe that women were naturally inferior to men and argued that the sexual differences were the product of historical, political and economic forces: "Even the least contestable of the differences which now exist, are such as may very well have been produced merely by circumstances without any difference of natural capacity."⁴⁷ The Woman Question was a cause of major disagreement between Comte and Mill. Mill contested the scientific evidence which Comte used to prove the natural inferiority of women. Instead, he critically analysed the theories of scientists on the size of the brain and argued that their findings were inconclusive, the result of shallow reasoning and unfounded presuppositions. According to him, the relationships between the weight of the brain and the function of intelligence were far from being clearly understood.

Mill also remarked that femininity ought not to be confused with femaleness. He believed that femininity was a social construct, the reflection of a male dominated order: "What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing -the result of forced

⁴⁶John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women, (London: Longmans, 1869), p. 1.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 105.

repression."⁴⁸ Therefore, what was known as the nature of women was essentially artificial: "All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have -those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man."⁴⁹ Therefore, Mill declared that debates over women's nature were futile until women were truly given the means to develop and express themselves. According to him, women must be given the chance to know themselves otherwise than as daughters, mothers or wives. He advised critics to remain silent "until women have told what they have to say."⁵⁰

Mill also denounced the injustice of the marriage laws: "A wife is the actual bond servant of her husband,

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 42-46

no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called."⁵¹ He encouraged women to work, declaring that "the power of earning" was "essential to the dignity of a woman."⁵² Like Fourier, Mill also believed that women were capable of doing as well as men: "Many women ... have proved themselves capable of everything ... which is done by men, and of doing it successfully and creditably."⁵³ Mill encouraged women to unite in the struggle for their rights, but he argued that progress could only be achieved gradually, and with the participation of sympathetic men. According to him, women were not in a position to obtain satisfaction if not backed by those who had the power to intervene: "Women cannot be expected to devote themselves to the emancipation of women, until men in considerable number are prepared to join with them in the undertaking."⁵⁴

The defence of the rights of women during the nineteenth century was not only the business of a few men. Women were also very active and participated in all the movements which promised them equality and freedom. The history of feminism in the early nineteenth century often goes hand in hand with that of

⁵¹Ibid., p. 55.

⁵²Ibid., p. 89.

⁵³Ibid., p. 93.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 145.

the radical movements. From time immemorial there always were women who resisted male domination and protested to improve their condition. But during the nineteenth century these individual protests took a more political turn.

Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe argue that French feminism is the offshot of the Revolution of 1789: "Le fait nouveau de 1789 c'est bien la prise de conscience par les femmes de leur existence en tant que caste."⁵⁵ In their petitions to the king, Cahiers de Doléances and Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au Roi, women demanded a better education, qualified nurses to improve childbirth conditions and child mortality, and more work opportunities to remedy prostitution. They also asked for divorce, the reform of the marriage laws, and the right to the absolute ownership of their property. Until 1795, the freedom of the Press and speech allowed women to unite in clubs and to create journals devoted to their cause.⁵⁶ Women massively participated in the Revolution: "Habillées en hommes, elles combattent aux côtés de leur maris et de leur

⁵⁵Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français, (Paris: des femmes, 1977), p. 226.

⁵⁶"Dans ces brochures, c'est l'égalité la plus totale que revendiquent les femmes: égalité dans le domaine familial, économique, politique." Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français, op. cit., p. 224.

amants."⁵⁷ They assembled and protested to the national assembly in October 1789 against the economic difficulties. Some fought along with men in the war of 1792.

Among the most famous outspoken defenders of women's rights during the Revolutionary period were Anne Théroigne de Méricourt, who created the first woman's political club, and Olympe de Gouge whose Droit de la femme et de la citoyenne published in September 1791, remains one of the first feminist manifestoes in France. Olympe de Gouge argued that male dominance has deprived women of their natural rights. Like the authors of the Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme she insisted that women be granted the same rights as men: "La femme naît libre et demeure égale à l'homme en droits. Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune."⁵⁸ She also encouraged women to unite and to fight for their cause: "Femme réveille-toi; le tocsin de la raison se fait entendre dans tout l'univers; reconnais tes droits."⁵⁹ However, this period of feminist activity was short-lived and in 1795,

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 227.

⁵⁸Olympe de Gouges, Oeuvres, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), p. 102.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 106.

the new government soon put an end to it.⁶⁰

During the reign of Napoléon I feminism was dormant. Madame de Staël continued to show the precarious status of women. In her work De la littérature she denounced the ambiguous position of women: "Dans l'état actuel, elles ne sont, pour la plupart, ni dans l'ordre de la nature, ni dans l'ordre de la société."⁶¹ In her opinion, the condition of women was the product of an unjust social order: "Examinez l'ordre social ... et vous verrez bientôt qu'il est tout entier armé contre une femme qui veut s'élever à la hauteur de la réputation des hommes."⁶²

The Revolutions of 1830 and 1848 gave feminism new vigour. First, women turned to Owen, the Saint-Simonians and Fourier because they promised them freedom and equality. Reine Guindorf and Désirée Veret were attracted to Owen and Fourier. Eugénie Niboyet and Suzanne Voilquin were first Saint-Simonians and then

⁶⁰"Toutes les femmes se retireront jusqu'à ce qu'autrement soit ordonné, dans leurs domiciles respectifs: celles qui, une heure après l'affichage du présent décret seront trouvées dans les rues, attroupées au-dessus du nombre de cinq, seront dispersées par la force armée et successivement mises en état d'arrestation jusqu'à ce que la tranquillité publique soit rétablie dans Paris." Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français, op. cit., p. 234.

⁶¹Madame de Staël, De la littérature, 2 vols., (Genève: Droz, 1959), vol. II, p. 332.

⁶²Ibid., p. 339.

turned to Fourier. The failure of the Second Republic to grant women their demands encouraged the most zealous partisans to detach themselves from male idealism and to continue the struggle on their own. Also, the sexual liberation advocated by Fourier and *Enfantin* proved unsatisfactory. As Claire Golberg Moses remarks, women members had always constituted a more radical group in these sects: "Seemingly more conservative than *Enfantin*, the women were in fact more radical ... they placed the sexual question into the larger context of the political relationship of the sexes."⁶³

The characteristic of French feminism of that period is its working-class origin. The vast majority of the activists came from the people. Marie-Reine Guindorf and Désirée Veret who edited *La femme libre* (1832-34) were seamstresses and most of their contributors were working women. Eugénie Niboyet, Suzanne Voilquin, Isabelle Celestine and Jeanne Deroin also belonged to the people. Emancipation began among working-class women, who not only experienced male dominance at their home but at their workplace as well. In 1848 feminism took a more radical and political turn. Eugénie Niboyet created her magazine *La voix des femmes*. Jeanne Deroin began *L'opinion des femmes* and along with

⁶³Claire Golberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Albany: New York State University Press, 1984), p. 85.

Suzanne Voilquin La politique des femmes. All were committed to socialism.

Their action encouraged a more middle-class feminism with women such as Fanny Richonne, editor of Journal des femmes and Marie-Madeleine Poutret de Mauchamps, editor of La gazette des femmes. Working-class feminists differed from their middle-class counterparts in that they demanded political suffrage. However, both agreed on the need to improve education, reform the marriage laws and the right to divorce.

The Second Empire was marked by a return to the conservative and traditional conception of women, backed by the growing power of the Catholic church. After 1852, socialists and feminists alike were jailed or exiled.⁶⁴ The most popular female magazine of that period, Le conseiller des dames, represented more traditional female values. Its articles concerned the education of children, recipes and etiquette. In summary it is not so much the Revolutions themselves which seem to have fomented feminist activities but rather the failure of these revolutions to satisfy the demands of women, which slowly persuaded them that they must carry on the struggle on their own.

English feminism developed along similar patterns.

⁶⁴Jeanne Deroin went to England, Pauline Roland was sent to Algeria, Niboyet escaped to Geneva. Suzanne Voilquin went to the United States.

It was, however, largely a middle-class movement, and perhaps also more individualistic than in France. Although some women read Fourier and the Saint-Simonians, the large majority were not directly affected by their ideas. Unlike in France, feminism in England was largely, with the exception of Mill, a women's movement. Concurrently with Olympe de Gouges, Mary Wollstonecraft had written The Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) where she disproved the argument of nature, and demanded that women be granted the same knowledge as men: "Women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being."⁶⁵ The condition of women in England during the nineteenth century was similar to that of French women and differed only in that a larger proportion were middle-class.

First, the struggle was begun by a few individuals. The efforts of Caroline Norton brought the Infant's Custody Act of 1839 which gave a non-adulterous woman separated from her husband the right to keep their children under seven years of age. In 1854, another

⁶⁵Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, (New York: Source Press Book, 1971), p. 53.

woman, Barbara Bodichon, wrote a pamphlet⁶⁶ to arouse women's interest in their legal position. This became a petition signed by approximately 1500 women and was presented to Parliament in March 1856 on behalf of a Married Women's Property Bill. In 1857, the Marriage and Divorce Act made divorce less costly (usually 800 pounds) and suppressed the need for a private act of Parliament.

However, inequality before divorce remained.⁶⁷ Further progress was achieved with the Married Woman's Property Act of 1870 which declared her mistress of her earnings after marriage. It is only in 1882 that women were declared absolute owners of their own property after but also before marriage. The Act of 1873 gave women the custody of their children under sixteen. That of 1878 lowered the age to ten. Women obtained the franchise in 1918 and under the same conditions as men in 1928. French women were granted the franchise on equal terms with men in 1940.

During the second part of the nineteenth century, the new economic circumstances created problems for

⁶⁶"A Brief summary in plain language of the most important Laws relating to English Women." Westminster Review, 66 (October, 1858).

⁶⁷A woman could not obtain a divorce on the grounds of adultery unless her husband was convicted of incest, desertion of the home for more than two years, bestiality or cruelty.

middle-class women. Working-class women had at least the advantage of being wage earners, which made them more independent and able to remain unmarried if they wished to. But unmarried middle-class women had few resources. As Patricia Thomson correctly remarks, "they felt their economic disabilities more keenly than married women their legal impotence."⁶⁸ The most common positions open to women of such rank were governess or teacher. The traditional social duties of middle-class women were charitable visits to the poor and the sick. With the surplus of women in the 1860's, marriage became a less likely solution and middle-class women had to resort to work.

Barbara Bodichon, one of Eliot's best friends, took an active part in the struggle for work. She encouraged women to become professionals: "Work, not drudgery, but work, is the great beautifier. Activity of brain, heart and limb, gives health and beauty and makes women fit to be mothers of children ... women do want to work, and girls must be prepared for professions."⁶⁹ According to the 1841 census,⁷⁰ women counted for twenty-three

⁶⁸Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1817-1873, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 13.

⁶⁹Barbara Bodichon, Women and Work, (New York: Francis, 1859), pp. 21-22.

⁷⁰Duncan Crow, The Victorian Woman, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971).

percent of the working population. The percentage of working middle-class women was very small since the main jobs for women were either in the textile industry, mines, or in the agriculture and domestic services. In France in 1866, women constituted approximately twenty-five percent of the working population.⁷¹

In response to the demands of women their education was given some attention. In France in 1836 an effort was made to create elementary schools for girls, but schooling was not mandatory. In 1850, the Loi Falloux encouraged villages of at least 800 people to open a school for girls provided funds were available. The Secondary Examination or Baccalauréat was still reserved for boys, although a few women began to take it in the late 1860's. Lycées for girls only opened in 1880. In 1881 reforms made elementary education for both sexes free and in 1882 it was declared mandatory and secular.

In spite of the progress made in female education, the content of instruction was still very much feminine. During the Second Empire, the education of middle-class girls was mainly in the hands of nuns. Girls were taught the rudiments of arithmetic and some English or Italian. Science, philosophy and the classical languages remained the prerogative of boys until World

⁷¹Henri Sée, Histoire économique de la France, 2 vols., (Paris: Armand Colin, 1942), According to Sée there were 400,000 female workers out of 2 million.

War I. During most of the nineteenth century, the instruction for women did not develop their intellect. It was still believed that knowledge was unbecoming for a woman. Many held the belief of Joseph De Maistre: "La science est une chose très dangereuse pour les femmes."⁷² Professional instruction advanced slowly. Eliza Lemonnier opened a school for adults in 1862. Along with drawing and needlework she also taught women accounting. Illiteracy decreased in general but women were still more illiterate than men.⁷³

In England, reforms progressed more rapidly. In 1848, Queens College for Women was created, followed by Bedford College in 1849. In 1850, Miss Buss founded the North London Collegiate School, and in 1854 Miss Beale opened her Cheltenham Ladies' College. Emily Davies, who devoted her life to improve female education was convinced that there was "a deep and broad basis of likeness"⁷⁴ between men and women. Like in France, English women wanted to be educated in the classics and in the sciences. In 1865 the University of Cambridge

⁷²Cited by Benoîte Groult, Ainsi soit-elle, (Paris: Grasset, 1975), p. 47.

⁷³Antoine Léon believes that women were three times as likely to be illiterate as men. See Histoire de l'enseignement en France, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967.)

⁷⁴Quoted by Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine, op. cit., p. 58.

allowed women to take their examinations under the same conditions as men, Oxford in 1870 and London in 1878. Between 1876 and 1880 primary education for girls was also improved and made compulsory. It became free in 1891. Towards the end of the century, women with higher education began to enter the traditional male professions. In 1868, England had sixty female physicians,⁷⁵ but their working conditions were not yet equal to those of male counterparts. In France, during the Second Empire female physicians were only allowed to practice in the colonies.

Sand's and Eliot's positions on the question of women reflect the ambiguity of the position of women in their times. On the whole, Sand was more outspoken in both her life and her novels, and she unequivocally expressed her resentment and anger at the social order. In this sense, when compared to those of Eliot, Sand's first novels make strong feminist demands. Eliot's position towards women is more difficult to define. She is more hesitant to conclude and her analysis shows an acute sense of the complexity of the problem. Above all she is determined to remain impartial, to examine both sides of the question. But the nature and condition of women were topics of vivid interest to her. Before she turned to novels, she wrote articles and reviews which

⁷⁵Duncan Crow, The Victorian Woman, op. cit.

dealt with women. She wrote on French women, Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft,⁷⁶ and even contemplated writing a comprehensive article on German women: "Not only the modern German woman ... but the woman as she presents herself to us in all the phases of development through which the German race has run from the earliest historic twilight when it was blended with the Scandinavian race, and its women were prophetesses, through the periods of the Volks Wanderung and the Romantic bürgerlich life of the Middle Ages up to our own day."⁷⁷

As these remarks show, Eliot was interested in showing the evolution of women, their development in history, and demonstrating the influence of social circumstances. In her younger days, before she became known as a famous female author and before her scandalous liaison with Lewes was revealed to the public, Eliot was more outspoken in her opinions on women. Later, she became more reluctant to openly express her thoughts on the question of women's emancipation. Her liaison with Lewes certainly constituted a serious obstacle to her making feminist

⁷⁶"Woman in France: Madame de Sablé", Westminster Review, 62 (October, 1854): 448-73. "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft", Leader, 6 (October, 1855): 988-89.

⁷⁷Letters, VIII, pp. 133-34. Eliot's article has not been found and it is probable she never wrote it.

statements and as Gillian Beer suggests: "Her irregular life might jeopardise more than it gained for the movement if she were an open and active supporter."⁷⁸ But her ideas on the question also reflect her moral nature and the depth of her vision. She wanted her novels to produce an aesthetic and moral effect, and would have been disappointed to see her novels used only as feminist propaganda.

Eliot's ideas on the nature and role of the sexes underwent several influences, among which her religious education and Lewes played a great role. However, the importance of Sand should not be overlooked and may even have influenced, to some extent, Eliot's decision to live with him. The courage she showed by agreeing to live with Lewes, whose married life was far from spotless, shows that, like Sand, she had chosen the way of love and was ready to live for her ideal.

Although Sand and Eliot seem to agree on certain fundamental notions concerning the nature of women, their novels present the problem from a slightly different angle. One of the first common principles that Eliot shares with Sand, and one on which the latter exerted a profound influence, is that femininity is a social construct which has been imposed on women from

⁷⁸Gillian Beer, George Eliot, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), p. 183.

without. Sand's life was an open struggle against the conventions of the times. Her manly manners and habits such as her occasional male attire and cigars, as well as her fight to obtain legal separation from her husband, were provocative at a time when the sexes were supposed to be far apart and women thought to be docile and feminine.

Because of the success of her novels and her immense talent, Sand was treated on the same level as male writers. She was described as having male qualities which consequently challenged the traditional conception of the sexes. Elizabeth Barrett Browning referred to her as a "large-brained woman and large-hearted man."⁷⁹ Sand won the respect and the admiration of the most famous intellectuals of her time. It is Sand whom Balzac had in mind when he declared: "le génie n'a pas de sexe." Flaubert always called her "maître."

Sand's heroines are not feminine. They often dress up as men. Fanchon wears male attire and Consuelo infuriates the priests with her male disguise. The change of clothes is symbolical of the artificiality of women's status. When Consuelo, in an attempt to escape from her followers, puts on her young friend Haydn's clothes, she immediately feels more secure and stronger:

⁷⁹Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "A Desire", The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, (Edinburgh: Nimmo, Hay & Mitchell, 1899), p. 435.

"Elle se trouva si bien déguisée que le courage et la sécurité lui vinrent en un instant."⁸⁰ Like clothes, femininity is something which can be discarded. The so-called male attributes come along with male clothes, and with them the freedom women need. Male clothes fit Consuélo. She enjoys the freedom of movement they give her: "Sa taille fine et souple comme un jonc jouait dans une large ceinture de laine rouge; et sa jambe ... sortait modestement un peu au-dessus de la cheville des larges plis du pantalon."⁸¹ Sand concludes that the change of clothes is almost a change of sex: "Le changement de costume, si bien réussi ... semblait être un véritable changement de sexe."⁸²

Her remarks about clothes are symbolic of the importance of culture in the sexual difference. Female clothes greatly contribute to the image of women as feminine, delicate and mysterious beings. According to her, clothes constrain women and exert a powerful fascination in men. In Consuélo Sand declares: "Le vêtement qui en fait, même aux yeux du moins chaste, un être si voilé et si mystérieux, est pour

⁸⁰Consuélo, 3 vols., (Meylan: Editions de l'Aurore, 1983), vol. II, p. 28.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

beaucoup dans cette impression de trouble et d'angoisse."⁸³

Sand criticized coquetry. According to her, the coquette is a woman who has accepted her feminine role. In Valentine she declares: "C'est un triste spectacle que celui de ces femmes flétries qui cachent leurs rides sous des fleurs et couronnent leurs fronts hâves de diamants et de plumes. Chez elles, tout est faux: la taille, le teint, les cheveux, le sourire; tout est triste: la parure, le fard, la gaieté."⁸⁴ Sand's heroines are ordinary looking. Fanchon and Consuélo are in fact rather plain. Fanchon's nose is too small and her mouth too large. Consuélo is not attractive either: "Sa taille était svelte .. mais sans forme, sans rondeur, sans aucune séduction ... Son visage tout rond, blême, insignifiant, n'eût frappé personne."⁸⁵ Miss Vallier in Monsieur Sylvestre also shares the same plainness: "Elle n'est pas jolie comme type. Elle a le nez rond, sans distinction, la bouche grande avec des lèvres trop retroussées. Elle a aussi le menton trop court et les pommettes trop saillantes. A tout prendre

⁸³Ibid., p. 28.

⁸⁴Valentine, (Paris: Lévy, 1869), pp. 102-3.

⁸⁵Consuélo, op. cit., vol. I, p. 46.

elle est peut-être même laide."⁸⁶ Another example is Marcelle in Le meunier d'Angibault: "Ses traits n'étaient pas d'une grande perfection."⁸⁷

The turn to ordinary people and features was naturally part of the Realist credo. Sand wanted to be true to nature. Occasionally, Sand's heroines are beautiful. But when they are, it is without vanity and there is something manly in their beauty. Indiana is always simply dressed: "La simplicité de sa mise eût suffi pour la détacher en relief au milieu des diamants, des plumes et des fleurs qui paraient les autres femmes."⁸⁸ Lélia's beauty is characterized by a certain virile aspect: "Vous étiez belle, Lélia! mais belle autrement que moi ... votre respiration soulevait votre poitrine avec une régularité qui semblait annoncer le calme et la force; et dans tous vos traits, dans votre attitude, dans vos formes plus arrêtées que les miennes, dans la teinte plus sombre de votre peau, surtout 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 de vous reconnaître."⁸⁹

⁸⁶Monsieur Sylvestre, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 101.

⁸⁷Le meunier d'Angibault, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 189.

⁸⁸Indiana, (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 58.

⁸⁹Lélia, (Genève: Editions de Crémille, 1970), p. 140.

Indiana, Lélia, Consuelo, Edmée and Fanchon are dark-haired and have a dark complexion, which for Sand denotes force and virility. In Horace, Sand reproached novelists for portraying women either as weak or as melancholy beings. She refers to the "sombres et délirantes figures de femmes"⁹⁰ of the literature she calls Romantic. According to her, its female characters were too enticing and too beautiful: "beautés plus piquantes et plus dangereuses."⁹¹ Such literature was not true to nature: "Quoique se fussent des types charmants dans les poèmes et dans les romans, ce n'étaient point des types vrais et vivants dans la réalité présente. C'étaient des fantômes du passé, riants ou terribles."⁹² The same reproach is made in Monsieur Sylvestre: "La littérature romantique nous a gâté les femmes."⁹³

According to Sand, the business of literature is to portray women as they truly are and as they could be if they were allowed the full expression of their nature. The representation of women in her novels is therefore realistic but also idealized. The idealization is

⁹⁰Horace, (Paris: Club du Livre, 1969), p. 159.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., p. 260.

⁹³Monsieur Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 90.

accomplished by emphasizing the characteristics Sand believes specific to women, namely love, compassion and moral earnestness. She is reluctant to call her female protagonists "heroines" since the term evokes femininity: "Quand nous disons 'héroïne' c'est pour rester classique."⁹⁴ Throughout her career, Sand criticized novelists for not representing strong women: "Les romanciers ... ne mettent pas volontiers en scène les femmes vraiment fortes."⁹⁵

Eliot was perhaps less interested in showing the essential attributes of female nature than in showing the influence of social factors on the development of women's character. Unlike Sand, she insisted on the evolutionary aspect of sexual differences. According to her, the sexual differences were not absolute. On the contrary, they reflected social and political changes. However, like Sand, Eliot believed that women were not given the opportunity to develop all of their capacities, and in her novels she argued that femininity was not to be confused with femaleness.

Amongst the myriads of female characters present in Eliot's works, it is possible to observe a tendency to criticize feminine women. Hetty Sorel, Rosamond Vincy and Celia Brooke are all shown as uninteresting and of

⁹⁴Adriani, (Paris: Editions France Empire, 1980), p. 121.

⁹⁵Tamaris, (Paris: Lévy, 1890), p. 206.

limited intelligence. In contrast to them, Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke and Mary Garth are much more reminiscent of Sand's heroines. Like them, they are not truly beautiful, but nevertheless charming. Maggie is not as pretty as her cousin Lucy whom she pushes in the mud. She looks like a gypsy, and hates having fashionable curls. Like Maggie's, Mary Garth's hair is "dark ... rough and stubborn."⁹⁶ In The Spanish Gypsy Fedalma's hair is characterized by "a glossy blackness."⁹⁷

Eliot's heroine is generally not beautiful. She is not a coquette. Mary Garth is ordinary looking: "Her plainness ... was of a good human sort, such as the mothers of our race have very commonly worn in all latitudes under a more or less becoming headgear."⁹⁸ In contrast to her sister Celia, Dorothea also refuses to wear jewels and her hair is "flatly braided and coiled behind so as to expose the outline of her head in a daring manner at a time when public feeling required the meagreness of nature to be dissimulated by tall barricades of frizzed curls and bows."⁹⁹

⁹⁶Middlemarch, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 92.

⁹⁷The Spanish Gypsy, in Poems of George Eliot, vol. I, (Boston: Dana Estes, 1910), p. 55.

⁹⁸Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 92.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 23.

Both Sand and Eliot also argued that contrary to common belief, women are endowed with intelligence. They did not believe that intelligence was the prerogative of the male sex. According to them, women's intelligence is not inferior to nor different from that of men. Sand's novels show that women are deprived of instruction but not of intelligence. Her heroines are not well educated but they are intelligent and capable of abstract thought and logical reasoning. In her autobiography she describes the story of her own education, and remarks that her preceptor at home did not give her as thorough a training in Latin and mathematics as her stepbrother. She also explains that she was deprived of her favourite subject, botany, because it required a basic explanation of sexuality, which was unsuitable for girls. Finally she summarizes the education she received at home and at the Couvent des Dames Anglaises in a few words: "Il fallait de la grâce avant tout."¹⁰⁰

Sand wanted women to receive a better and equal instruction and naturally created heroines with all the essential aptitudes for education. Sand always stressed the gap between the education of men and women as the source of major problems: "un homme ordinaire en sait

¹⁰⁰Oeuvres Autobiographiques, 2 vols., (Paris: Gallimard, 1970-72), vol. I, p. 723.

presque toujours plus long que la femme la mieux instruite."¹⁰¹ In Valentine she denounced the pitiful state of the instruction of girls: "L'éducation que nous recevons est misérable; On nous donne les éléments de tout, et l'on ne nous permet de rien approfondir ... on veut que nous soyons instruites; mais du jour où nous deviendrons savantes, nous serions ridicules."¹⁰² In her Lettres à Marcie she declared such prejudices unfounded and accused men of maintaining women in a state of exploitation: "Les femmes reçoivent une déplorable éducation, et c'est là le grand crime des hommes envers elles."¹⁰³ Vallier in Monsieur Sylvestre is the epitome of such a state of things. He refuses to educate his daughter because he thinks women are not capable of intelligence.

Sand also denounced the educational system (Loi Falloux) which favoured religious and expensive private schools to the detriment of public schools for the less fortunate women, who represented the great majority. Although she shows promising talent, Caroline in Le Marquis de Villemer is not allowed to continue her schooling because her father does not have sufficient

¹⁰¹Mademoiselle la Quintinie, (Genève: Slatkine, 1979), p. 29.

¹⁰²Valentine, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁰³Lettres à Marcie, in Oeuvres Complètes, (Paris: Perrotin, 1843), vol. XV, p. 215.

funds. When educated, Sand's heroines are always educated in a feminine way, for instance Lucie in Mademoiselle la Quintinie is "aussi instruite qu'une femme peut l'être."¹⁰⁴ Only Love Butler in Jean de la Roche has a proper training in the classics. Sand shows that her knowledge of Greek is not unbecoming and does not inflate her vanity. Love Butler is still humble and dutiful: "La science n'avait rien desséché dans son âme ouverte à toute beauté, rien appauvri dans son oeil d'artiste."¹⁰⁵

In her rustic novels, Sand showed the difficulties which country women faced and the obstacle they had to overcome to be able to have a basic education. Brulette in Les maîtres sonneurs learns how to read from a maid who had worked for an aristocratic family. Fanchon, Marie and Jeanne exhibit all the qualities and could have become as learned as men if they had been given a comparable education. Sand criticized the prevalent prejudice about the inferiority of female intelligence and argued that the intellect was not affected by the sexual difference: "J'admets physiologiquement que le caractère a un sexe comme le corps, mais non point l'intelligence."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴Mademoiselle la Quintinie, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁰⁵Jean de la Roche, (Paris: Lévy, 1887), p. 256.

¹⁰⁶Souvenirs et idées, (Paris: Lévy, 1920), p. 20.

Education and knowledge play a central role in Eliot's conception of the sexual difference. It is the determining factor, the one which prepares men and women for culture and makes possible the full development of their nature. Eliot herself was one of the most learned women of her time. She not only knew French, Italian and German, but also taught herself the classics and the rudiments of Hebrew. She was more learned than Sand and enjoyed participation in the culture of her time as editor of the Westminster Review or in conversations with other intellectuals, abroad and at her London home.

Eliot did not believe that the female intellect was of an inferior nature and, like Sand, she refused to accept that intelligence was affected by sexual difference. In her essay "Woman in France: Madame de Sablé" she declares in a way which is reminiscent of Sand: "Science has no sex: the mere knowing and reasoning faculties, if they act correctly, must go through the same process and arrive at the same result."¹⁰⁷ Her novels show that contrary to common belief, women all have the capacity for knowledge. The Mill on The Floss begins with the problem of education. Mr. Tulliver is concerned with Tom's future and wants to send him to school to learn mathematics and Latin in the hope that it will help him choose a suitable career.

¹⁰⁷Essays, p. 53.

Tom does not believe Maggie should learn mathematics and Latin: "Girls never learn such things. They're too silly."¹⁰⁸ His teacher Mr. Stelling also believes in woman's natural lack of intelligence: "They can pick up a little of everything, I dare say ... they've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow."¹⁰⁹ The passage is very reminiscent of Sand's description of her own education. Bartle Massey (another teacher) in Adam Bede also uses strong arguments against female intelligence. According to him: "A woman'll make your porridge every day for twenty years, and never think of measuring the proportion between the meal and the milk."¹¹⁰ Middlemarch's males do not have high opinions of female intellectual capacity either. Mr. Brooke is proud to say to Mrs Cadwallader: "Your sex are not thinkers."¹¹¹

Eliot's novels are always critical of the kind of instruction that women received in her day. For instance, she makes fun of Rosamond Vincy's stay at the famous Mrs Lemon's school, "the chief school in the

¹⁰⁸The Mill on the Floss, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 145.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 150.

¹¹⁰Adam Bede, (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 286.

¹¹¹Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 44.

county, where teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female -even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage."¹¹² Rosamond, who came out of her school, "sweet to look at as a half-opened bush rose, and adorned with the accomplishments for the refined amusement of men,"¹¹³ is definitely not Eliot's ideal of womanhood. Rosamond is the epitome of middle-class feminine perfection which had always stifled woman's true nature: "Rosamond never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date."¹¹⁴

Dorothea had an education "comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse."¹¹⁵ The instruction she received was feminine and very superficial. Dorothea's initiation to culture corresponded to "a toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies."¹¹⁶ Even Gwendolen Harleth, who went to school in the 1850's, a time of progress in the

¹¹²Ibid., p. 78.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 221.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 24.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 70.

education of girls, still suffered from superficial instruction: "In the schoolroom her quick mind had taken readily that strong starch of unexplained rules and disconnected facts which saves ignorance from any painful sense of limpness."¹¹⁷

But Sand and Eliot did not limit themselves to criticizing the shallowness of female education. They also argued that the need to know is inherent to women and that culture is essential to her well being and consequently also beneficial to society as a whole. Sand's heroines are intelligent and show that they can learn as well as men. For instance, Lélia is characterized by an ardent desire to accomplish something other than feminine expectations: "Elle est tourmentée d'un insatiable désir d'être quelque chose."¹¹⁸ Yseult in Le Compagnon du Tour de France is interested in scholarly works: "Elle était adonnée à la lecture, à la rédaction analytique d'ouvrages assez sérieux pour son sexe et pour son âge."¹¹⁹ Edmée in Mauprat is not only endowed with the faculty of intelligence, but is also capable of logic and common sense, qualities which were mostly attributed to men:

¹¹⁷Daniel Deronda, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 31.

¹¹⁸Lélia, op. cit., p. 147.

¹¹⁹Le compagnon du tour de France, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1977), p. 225.

"Un bon sens au-dessus de son age et peut-être même de son sexe."¹²⁰ Caroline in Le Marquis de Villemer also excels in perspicacity and logic: "Elle avait une remarquable netteté de jugement, jointe à une faculté rare chez les femmes, l'ordre dans l'enchaînement des idées."¹²¹ Fanchon in La petite fadette is obviously too poor to go to school, but she is equally endowed with such qualities which her prolonged contact with nature helps to develop. Like Jeanne, she receives a good knowledge of medicinal plants from her mother. Her intellect functions in a scientific manner: "Elle avait l'esprit qui observe, qui fait des comparaisons, des remarques, des essais."¹²²

Desire for knowledge and culture is a characteristic of Eliot's heroines. Dorothea shares Lélia's ideal. She wishes to accomplish something substantial in the world. She soon realises that without the classics no access to culture is possible and is therefore determined to do her best to acquire them. Her quest is her first attempt to extract herself from "the shallows of ladies' school literature."¹²³

¹²⁰Mauprat, (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), p. 155.

¹²¹Le Marquis de Villemer, (Paris: Lévy, 1887), p. 202.

¹²²La petite fadette, (Paris: Levy, 1885), p. 137.

¹²³Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 21.

Casaubon seems the right man, "one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance."¹²⁴ His vast erudition seems to her like a temple, and Greek and Latin seemed to her part of the ritual of the neophyte: "Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her as a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly."¹²⁵ Dorothea's demand for knowledge is not futile, but corresponds to a profound need of her nature. "Her mind was theoretic,"¹²⁶ Eliot remarks. She likes to draw plans, and believes herself a good architect.

Maggie's nature is also characterized by similar intellectual needs: "A creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge."¹²⁷ Her father knows she is more intelligent than his son, which naturally worries him. Maggie is also confident of herself. She knows that she can learn geometry and Latin faster than Tom. She is so curious and eager that for lack of better books she reads the dictionary. Knowledge, and particularly Latin, fascinates her: "The mysterious sentences, snatched from an unknown context ... gave

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 24.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 52.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 8.

¹²⁷The Mill on the Floss, op. cit., p. 235.

boundless scope to her imagination, and were all the more fascinating because they were in a peculiar tongue of their own, which she could learn to interpret. It was really interesting -the Latin Grammar that Tom said no girls could learn: and she was proud because she found it interesting."¹²⁸ Eliot certainly remembered Sand's account of her intellectual eagerness. Romola is the only one of Eliot's heroines to receive an equal education but she lived during the Florentine Renaissance and the circumstances of her education were exceptional, even for the times.

But if instruction is capital for women, it is still not sufficient. Both Sand and Eliot want women to be able to work and to participate fully in culture. Sand's Jacques is an attack on the social structures which allow men to look for a position but impose the convent and marriage on women: "Un homme est obligé de se faire un état ou de se chercher une position sociale au sortir du collège; une jeune personne, au sortir du couvent, trouve sa position toute faite, soit qu'on la marie, soit que ses parents la tiennent pour quelques années encore auprès d'eux."¹²⁹

Jacques's sister Clemence argues that sewing and household duties fail to stimulate women's intelligence

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 147.

¹²⁹Jacques, (Paris: Lévy, 1869), p. 17.

and turn women bitter and dissatisfied: "Travailler à l'aiguille, s'occuper des petits soins de l'intérieur, cultiver la superficie de quelques talents, devenir épouse et mère, s'habituer à allaiter et à laver des enfants, voilà ce qu'on appelle être femme faite."¹³⁰ She demands the same freedom for women that men enjoy, namely to fashion their own life, to have a large share of experience: "Je pense qu'en dépit de tout cela une femme de vingt-cinq ans, si elle n'a pas vu le monde depuis son mariage, est encore une enfant. Je pense que le monde qu'elle a vu étant demoiselle, dansant au bal sous l'oeil de ses parents, ne lui a rien appris du tout, si ce n'est la manière de s'habiller, de marcher, de s'asseoir, et de faire la révérence. Il y a autre chose à apprendre dans la vie, et les femmes l'apprennent tard et à leurs dépens."¹³¹

Eliot's novels also illustrate this point. If her heroines, as it is often remarked, are failures, it is not because of something intrinsic to their nature, but rather because society offers them very few opportunities. As Eliot remarks about Dorothea: "Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid.

wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done."¹³²

Instruction is the first step, and like Sand, Eliot demands for women "that thorough education ... which will make them rational beings in the highest sense of the word."¹³³ Eliot believed that men and women should be given equal education: "The lives of men and women ought to be passed together under the hallowing influence of a common faith as to their duty and its basis. And this unity in their faith can only be produced by their having each the same store of fundamental knowledge."¹³⁴

Eliot also argued that a certain amount of independence was necessary for women to develop their nature. According to her, women ought also to be able to experience life, such as Ladislav does for instance, vagabonding in Europe in search of his vocation. Also, women ought to enjoy knowledge for its own sake, which will develop their intellect separately from their affections: "We women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections .. we ought also to have our share of the more independent life -some joy in

¹³²Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 680.

¹³³Essays, p. 203.

¹³⁴Letters, V, p. 58.

things for their own sake."¹³⁵

Like Sand, who disliked female meetings and clubs, Eliot did not advocate the sort of education which would further separate men from women: "We have no faith in feminine conversazioni, where ladies are eloquent on Apollo and Mars ... weaving fabrics out of cobwebs."¹³⁶ She wanted men and women to share the same teachers. Eliot admired French society because she thought it did not exclude women from culture. She argued that French salons "were réunions of both sexes,"¹³⁷ where conversation bore upon serious and contemporary subjects: "Theology, of course, was a chief topic; but physics and metaphysics had their turn, and still more frequently morals, taken in their widest sense."¹³⁸ Eliot believed that French women not only had the advantage of a better climate which has a positive effect on their character, but she also claimed that they were superior to English women because they had access to culture: "Women become superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men; and this must ever be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 107.

¹³⁶Essays, p. 80.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 57.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 73.

true social well-being."¹³⁹

To illustrate her point, Eliot takes for example seventeenth-century women such as Madame de Sablé and Madame de Sévigné, and more modern women such as George Sand: "The vivid interest in affairs which was thus excited in woman, must obviously have tended to quicken her intellect, and give it a practical application; and the very sorrows -the heart-pangs and regrets which are inseparable from a life of passion -deepened her nature by the questioning of self and destiny which they occasioned, and by the energy demanded to surmount them and live on."¹⁴⁰

Eliot claimed that instead of being contrary to women's nature, culture stimulated it and allowed it to develop and blossom. Once again she took the French women as models when she argued that participation in the affairs of the state did not create an obstacle to their more feminine qualities: "Madame de Sablé was not the less graceful, delicate, and feminine, because she could follow a train of reasoning, or interest herself in a question of science."¹⁴¹ Therefore Eliot was a staunch advocate of equal access to education and culture, and believed with Mill that the problem of the

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 80.

nature of the sexes will be solved when women are given the means to develop theirs: "Let the whole field of reality be laid open to woman as well as to man, and then that which is peculiar in her mental modification, instead of being, as it is now, a source of discord and repulsion between the sexes, will be found to be a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life."¹⁴²

Both Sand and Eliot believed that men and women complemented each other. But unlike for Ruskin, complementary for them implied a similarity of nature and an equality of rights and functions. Eliot's ideal woman is more intellectual than Ruskin and Comte would have allowed. However unlike Sand, Eliot believed that women ought to keep some of their more traditional virtues: "Was not the woman, who could unite the ease and grace ... with an intellect that men thought worth consulting in matters of reasoning and philosophy, with warm affections, untiring activity for others, no ambition as an authoress, and an insight into confitures and ragoûts, a rare combination?"¹⁴³

Another aspect on which Sand insisted was that women are moral. According to her, women are by nature moral beings and their reputations for hypocrisy and vanity is the result of their being oppressed. Consuélo

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 73.

is "sage, rangée, laborieuse, douce, fidèle, fort sensible, patiente."¹⁴⁴ In her autobiography, Sand explained that she resented being supposed to be shallow, deceitful, talkative, vain and lazy: "A toute heure j'interrogeais mon âme avec une naïve curiosité pour savoir si elle avait la puissance de son aspiration, et si la droiture, le désintéressement, la discrétion, la persévérance dans le travail, toutes les forces enfin que l'homme s'attribue exclusivement, étaient interdites en pratique à un coeur qui en acceptait ardemment et passionément le précepte ... je ne me sentais ni perfide, ni vaine, ni bavarde, ni paresseuse."¹⁴⁵

Eliot insists rather on the difficulty which women have of fulfilling their ambitions and expressing their true nature. They are closer to Sand's early heroines and like them, are often unable to achieve their ideal. There is a definite instinct to rebel in Eliot's heroines which recalls Sand. Maggie is impulsive. She throws fits of anger and inserts pins in her doll. Dorothea, Eliot tells us, enjoys riding, and underneath her religious appearance we sense a sensual nature: "There was nothing of an ascetic's expression in her

¹⁴⁴Consuelo, op. cit., vol. I, p. 137.

¹⁴⁵Oeuvres Autobiographiques, op. cit., vol. II, p. 127.

bright full eyes."¹⁴⁶ Her religious education did not obliterate her powerful instincts: "She loved the fresh air and the various aspects of the country, and when her eyes and cheeks glowed with mingled pleasures, she looked little like a devotee."¹⁴⁷ Dorothea is characterized by a "love of extremes"¹⁴⁸ and a "rhapsodic mood."¹⁴⁹

Gwendolen complains about the lack of opportunities for women: "This is a dreadful neighbourhood. There is nothing to be done in it."¹⁵⁰ Unlike Dorothea, she is not religious, but she is still ambitious and finds herself limited by "the narrow theatre which life offers to a girl of twenty."¹⁵¹ Gwendolen is angry at the social order: "We women can't go in search of adventures -to find out the North-West passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored, and that

¹⁴⁶Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵⁰Daniel Deronda, op. cit., p. 93.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 51.

is the reason why some of them have got poisonous."¹⁵²

Gwendolen does not help her drowning husband and poor Casaubon's marriage to Dorothea seems to have fatally undermined his health. Deronda's mother also expresses the same sort of resentment: "You are not a woman. You may try -but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out ... 'this is what you must be; this is what you are wanted for'."¹⁵³

The rebellious streak is the major characteristic of Sand's heroines. They are not always successful in their rebellion, but they nevertheless express a determination not to be abused. Their anger is directed against male dominance in general, which shows that for Sand, women constituted an exploited class. Indiana, for instance, is angry at her father as well as her husband. She is determined to resist the oppression of men: "Sa résignation, c'était la dignité d'un roi qui accepte des fers et un cachot, plutôt que d'abdiquer sa couronne et de se dépouiller d'un vain titre."¹⁵⁴ Her resistance is not a whim but the sign of a deeper instinct for survival: "une volonté de fer, et une force

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 541.

¹⁵⁴Indiana, op. cit., p. 199.

de résistance incalculable contre tout ce qui tendait à l'opprimer."¹⁵⁵ She loves horseback riding for the sensation of mastery it confers and also because it is the only activity which can absorb her excess energy: "Alors elle semblait se réveiller d'une léthargie et dépenser en un jour toute l'énergie inutile qu'elle avait ... laisser fermenter dans son sang."¹⁵⁶ Indiana accuses man's culture of exploiting women. She tells Raymon her lover: "Le vôtre, c'est le dieu des hommes, c'est le roi, le fondateur et l'appui de votre race; le mien, c'est le Dieu de l'univers, le créateur, le soutien et l'espoir de toutes les créatures. Le vôtre a tout fait pour vous seuls; le mien a fait toutes les espèces les unes pour les autres. Vous vous croyez les maîtres du monde; je crois que vous n'en êtes que les tyrans."¹⁵⁷ Her flight to the island of Mauritius symbolizes the need to escape male civilisation and to return to mother nature.

Anger is also characteristic of Brulette: "Ce que je souffre au dedans de moi de colère rentrée, je ne peux pas vous le dire, vous ne comprendriez jamais."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 150-51.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁵⁸Les maîtres sonneurs, (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), p. 203.

Like Indiana she prefers death rather than submission to man: "Il valait mieux être morte plutôt qu'insultée."¹⁵⁹ Likewise Edmée refuses to be defined from a male perspective. She wants to be understood for herself and not by constant reference to a preconceived notion of what she ought to be: "Les hommes s'imaginent que la femme n'a point d'existence par elle-même."¹⁶⁰ She will love Bernard in return only when he is able to understand her point of view: "Je ne souffrirai jamais la tyrannie de l'homme, pas plus que la violence d'un amant que le soufflet d'un mari."¹⁶¹ Bernard's conversation with Edmée finally convinces him of the soundness of her argument: "Ma conversation avec Edmée m'avait jeté dans un monde nouveau."¹⁶²

In La petite fadette Marie is called upon to help cure Sylvinet. Her diagnosis and prescription are also symbolic of the necessity for men to be cured of their diseased minds: "Son corps n'est pas bien malade, c'est à mon esprit d'y faire rentrer le mien."¹⁶³ Lélia is also one of the most independent spirits. She hates tyranny in general and male supremacy in particular:

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁶⁰Mauprat, op. cit., p. 251.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁶³La petite fadette, op. cit., p. 266.

"L'homme est brutal et ne sait pas où commence le dévouement de la femme ni où il finit."¹⁶⁴ According to her, women have always been under the hegemony of men. The fact is so universal that it has been interpreted as an act of nature: "O misère et asservissement de la femme! vous êtes tellement dans la nature que la société aurait dû s'efforcer au moins de vous adoucir!"¹⁶⁵

Most of the anger against male dominance is directed towards marriage. Indeed, marriage constituted then the most repressive state for women. An unmarried woman had few options but at least she enjoyed the advantage of not being legally and materially dependent on her husband. Marriage was unfortunately the only alternative for women. Their whole education only prepared them to be wives and mothers. Sand's unfortunate experience with marriage explains her virulent attacks on the marriage laws. In her early novels she seems to condemn the lifelong union of men and women, hinting, like Fourier, that it was not natural and arguing for the freedom to change partners. In *Lélia* she declares: "L'union de l'homme et de la femme devait être passagère dans les desseins de la Providence; tout s'oppose à leur association et le

¹⁶⁴*Lélia*, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

changement est une nécessité de leur nature."¹⁶⁶

However, Sand did not pursue such a train of thought, and mainly under the influence of Leroux she returned to a more conservative belief in the couple. Then she focused on the injustice of the marriage laws, and maintained her position until her very last novel La tour de Percemont (1875). First, Sand criticized the mariage de convenance, by which innocent young girls were married to rich older men. Indiana, Fernande, Valentine are all married off in this way. Indiana is nineteen years of age and goes with no transition period from her paternal authority to that of her husband: "Elle ne fit que changer de maître ... changer de prison et de solitude." She is told that to love her husband is her duty: "Elle m'aima pas son mari pour la simple raison qu'on lui faisait un devoir de l'aimer."¹⁶⁷ Valentine's fate is similar: married to old and rich Comte de Lanzac she falls in love with Benedict, a young peasant.

In Jacques, a novel which particularly deals with the question of marriage, Sand put her criticism in the words of a man, Jacques, whose marriage to young and innocent Fernande is a profound disillusion. Jacques considers the question of marriage from the point of

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Indiana, op. cit., p. 38.

view of a man whose life with an uneducated and inexperienced wife leaves him unsatisfied: "Le mariage est toujours selon moi, une des plus barbares institutions ... les hommes sont trop grossiers et les femmes trop lâches pour demander une loi plus noble que la loi de fer qui les régit."¹⁶⁸ In Jean de la Roche, written at time of the return to power of the Catholic Church, Sand made her criticism even more virulent: "Cette loi bestiale, imaginée par l'humanité primitive et sauvage, qui ordonne à la femme de servir et d'adorer son maître, quelque ingrat qu'il puisse être."¹⁶⁹

Sand demanded a reform of the marriage laws. She wanted wives to have not only the same rights as their husbands, but also respect and love: "Je voulais faire du mariage une obligation réciproque et sacrée."¹⁷⁰ The sacredness of marriage rests on such reciprocity. In her article "A propos de la femme dans la société politique," written in 1849, Sand asked the Assembly and all women, whether married or unmarried, to give the question of marriage priority in their demands: "Le pacte du mariage ... brise absolument les droits de propriété de tout un sexe."¹⁷¹ She focused on the legal

¹⁶⁸Jacques, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁶⁹Jean de la Roche, op. cit., p. 312.

¹⁷⁰Valentine, op. cit., p. 326.

¹⁷¹Souvenirs et idées, op. cit., p. 25.

status of a married woman and exposed the flagrant injustice which kept an eighty-year-old wife in the position of a minor: "Il est certain aussi que la mère de famille, mineure à quatre-vingts ans, est dans une situation ridicule et humiliante."¹⁷² Sand refused to accept the authority of the husband as a fact of nature and denounced the double moral standard on which it rested: "Son droit d'adultère hors du domicile conjugal, son droit de meurtre sur la femme adultère, son droit de diriger à l'exclusion de sa femme l'éducation des enfants ... droits sauvages, atroces, antihumains."¹⁷³

Eliot also drew a severe criticism of marriage. Not having herself undergone the injustice of such laws (at least until a later age, since she married John Walter Cross in 1880) her criticism is not as bitter as Sand's. In any case, Sand's early novels and particularly the tragic married situation between Fernande and Jacques deeply moved her. Eliot's conception of marriage also rests on the equal status between wife and husband. She does not suggest that men and women ought to adopt free love as Sand does sometimes in her early novels, but she does insist on the notion of reciprocity. For instance, with a touch of irony she remarks in Middlemarch: "Society never made

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 28.

the preposterous demand that a man should think as much about his own qualifications for making a charming girl happy as he thinks of hers for making himself happy."¹⁷⁴

Eliot does not forget to mention that for most men, a woman was above all a future wife. Mr. Chichely, Middlemarch's coroner, defines woman from such a perspective: "I like a woman who lays herself out a little more to please us. There should be a little filigree in a woman, something of the coquette."¹⁷⁵ Casaubon marries Dorothea because he is looking for a companion for his old age. He is just another representative of the spirit of the age. He prefers young wives precisely because they are more docile and obedient, "the younger the better, because more educable and submissive."¹⁷⁶ In a way which is reminiscent of Ruskin, Casaubon believes that "the characteristic excellences of womanhood" are what he calls the "capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own."¹⁷⁷

Lydgate's conception is similar. For him, as for Ruskin, woman was a "queen" to be classified with

¹⁷⁴Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 229.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 41.

"flowers and music ... moulded only for pure and delicate joys."¹⁷⁸ Therefore, her education ought to prepare her to be "polished, refined, docile."¹⁷⁹ According to him, woman belongs in the home where she "would create order ... keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment."¹⁸⁰ Obviously Casaubon's and Lydgate's marriages are failures. Although both Dorothea and Rosamond have been educated to become wives, their ambition in life, intellectual or material, goes beyond Casaubon's and Lydgate's expectations. Even for men, marriage is a risky enterprise. Harold Transome, one of Eliot's most chauvinistic males, likes submissive and docile women: "I hate English wives; they want to give their opinion about everything."¹⁸¹ He married a former Greek slave who corresponded to his ideal.

Eliot also argued that the conditions of marriage were against reason and experience: "The fact is unalterable that a fellow-mortal with whose nature you are acquainted solely through the brief entrances and exits of a few imaginative weeks called courtship, may,

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 289.

¹⁸¹Felix Holt, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 19.

when seen in the continuity of married companionship, be disclosed as something better or worse than what you have preconceived, but will certainly not appear altogether the same."¹⁸² Marriages occur rather rapidly in Eliot's novels which partly explains their failures. Romola's marriage to Tito is perhaps the most tragic of all and is a good example of the risks a woman takes in accepting a man she hardly knows.

The marriages which take place between people who know each other, such as that of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy or Esther Lyons and Felix Holt, are durable. Mary and Esther take the time to observe their suitors before they agree to marry. Eliot's position on the marriage laws was very similar to Sand's. Gwendolen Harleth's hatred of marriage is based on the injustice of its laws: "Her thoughts never dwelt on marriage as the fulfilment of her ambition."¹⁸³ Marriage for her is synonymous with slavery and it is natural that she refuses "to become a wife and wear all the domestic fetters of that condition."¹⁸⁴ Gwendolen is determined to refuse marriage as the only alternative for a woman of her class. However, Eliot shows that she cannot do anything else because her education has not prepared her

¹⁸²Middlemarch. op. cit., p. 160.

¹⁸³Daniel Deronda, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

for a career. Gwendolen is also very naive about life in general and about marriage in particular. Like most of Eliot's heroines, she is a child and is unaware of the kind of sacrifice marriage demands.

Love is another subject which occupies an important place in Sand's and Eliot's novels. Sand's heroines show an instinctive gift for love but they are also characterized by a strong demand to be loved in return. Sand wanted to show men that love is not only a woman's role. She argued that love is a spiritual act which must not be confused with the more material pleasure of the senses. "L'amour n'est pas un art d'agrément,"¹⁸⁵ Rose declares in Le meunier d'Angibault. Indiana is characterized by the need to be loved. Her husband does not love her. Raymon is only interested in her sexually. Lélia faces the same dilemma. Her sexual experience leaves her dissatisfied: "J'avais près de lui une sorte d'avidité étrange et délirante qui ... ne pouvait être assouvie par aucune étreinte charnelle ... je fuyais cette couche voluptueuse et misérable, ce sanctuaire de l'amour."¹⁸⁶

Sand denounced the tradition which repressed women's sexuality. In Lélia she shows that sexual fulfilment is also important for women. Pulchérie tells

¹⁸⁵Le meunier d'Angibault, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁸⁶Lélia, op. cit., p. 151.

Lélia that it is wrong to ignore sexual pleasure:

"Croyez-vous que le coeur reste étranger aux aspirations des sens?"¹⁸⁷ Pulchérie believes that sexual pleasure is an integral part of love, and that Lélia's mistake is to have separated spiritual from bodily pleasures: "Ne rougis pas de demander à la matière les joies que t'a refusées l'intelligence ... tu sais d'où vient ton mal: c'est d'avoir voulu séparer deux puissances que Dieu avait étroitement liées."¹⁸⁸

However, Sand condemned sexual pleasure without love and the tradition which considered women chiefly as objects of pleasure: "Mais quoi, le rôle de la femme se borne t-il aux emportements de l'amour?"¹⁸⁹ In Jeanne, La mare au diable, Mauprat, and Consuelo Sand denounced the sexual abuse of women. In all these stories, the heroine miraculously escapes being raped. Sand insists that sexual pleasure cannot be an end. In itself it is a delusion: "Je regarde comme un péché mortel non seulement le mensonge de sens dans l'amour, mais encore l'illusion que les sens chercheraient à se faire dans les amours incomplets."¹⁹⁰ In this respect, Sand was

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁹⁰Oeuvres Autobiographiques, op. cit., vol. I, p. 297.

more conservative than Fourier and Saint-Simon. The idea of a sexual revolution was still too materialistic for her, and the success of Fourier's theories infuriated her: "Cette doctrine immonde, cette doctrine ésotérique de la promiscuité."¹⁹¹

However, Sand also criticized the mystic and contemplative conception of love: "L'amour n'est pas une infirmité, l'amère ou la pâle contemplation de l'impuissance intellectuelle, de l'inaptitude à la vie collective ou sociale."¹⁹² According to her, love is the synthesis between material and spiritual elements, the result of experience: "C'est bien plutôt une maturité jeune, mais solide de l'esprit et du coeur, une force éprouvée, une plage où les flots montent avec énergie mais qu'ils n'entraînent pas dans les abîmes."¹⁹³ Love is rather the reunion of the body and the heart, the combination of reason and of the emotions: "Je dis qu'il faut aimer de tout son être ... nous sommes corps et esprit tout ensemble. Là où un de ces aspects de la vie ne participe pas, il n'y a pas d'amour vrai ... le véritable amour c'est quand le coeur, l'esprit et le

¹⁹¹Souvenirs et idées, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁹²Adriani, (Paris: Editions France Empire, 1980), p. 209.

¹⁹³Ibid.

corps se comprennent et s'embrassent."¹⁹⁴ Defined in these terms, love becomes the most important social act. It is not a duty for it is not imposed from without but supercedes and conditions all duties: "L'amour est la plus religieuse des manifestations de notre vie morale, le plus important de nos actes individuels par rapport à la société."¹⁹⁵

According to Sand, love is revolutionary and egalitarian. It does not admit social barriers and can only develop between equal individuals: "A celui qui est pénétré de la sainteté des engagements réciproques, de l'égalité de sexes devant Dieu, des injustices de l'ordre social et de l'oppression du vulgaire à cet égard, l'amour peut se révéler dans toute sa grandeur et dans toute sa beauté."¹⁹⁶ Sand believed that love was impossible if men did not accept women as equals and until they understood their nature: "Pour aimer il faut commencer par comprendre ce que c'est qu'un femme, quelle protection on lui doit ... à celui qui est imbu des erreurs communes de l'infériorité de la femme, de la différence de ses devoirs avec les nôtres en fait de fidélité; à celui qui ne cherche que des émotions et non un idéal, l'amour ne se révélera pas. Et à cause de

¹⁹⁴Oeuvres Autobiographiques, op. cit., p. 295-7.

¹⁹⁵Horace, op. cit., p. 93.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 92.

cela, l'amour, un sentiment que Dieu a fait pour tous, n'est connu que d'un bien petit nombre."¹⁹⁷

Sand also argued that love consists of a large part of sacrifice, but she refused to confuse love with abnegation as Comte did: "Le dévouement tue l'amour."¹⁹⁸ According to her, abnegation is a total sacrifice and rests on the devotion of one individual for another, which Sand refused to accept. However, love requires a certain amount of sacrifice and endurance, which differentiates it from friendship: "La vie de tous les jours, cette chose, si odieuse et si pesante dans la solitude, cette succession continuelle de petites douleurs fastidieuses que l'amour seul peut changer en plaisir, l'amitié dédaigne s'en occuper."¹⁹⁹

Love also plays an important role in Eliot's novels. Eliot is not as effusive and lyrical as Sand. Her analysis is not as open and provocative as Sand's, and she remains silent on the question of sexuality. As Frederick Meyers remarks: "With all her profound knowledge of the heart, there is always a certain austerity and reserve, a subordination of amatory to ethical situations; there is no débordement, no cris d'amour et d'angoisse; nay the only love letter which we

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁹⁸Jacques, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., p. 61.

can recall in her works was written by Mr. Casaubon."²⁰⁰

On the whole, Meyers's impression is correct, but there are certain scenes in The Mill on the Floss such as those between Philip and Maggie and Maggie and Stephen, or in Romola between Tito and Tessa which recall Sand. The sensuality is very diffuse but it is nevertheless present: "Who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm? -the unspeakable suggestions of tenderness that lie in the dimpled elbow, and all the varied gently-lessening curves down to the delicate wrist, with its tiniest, almost imperceptible nicks in the firm softness ... A mad impulse seized on Stephen; he darted towards the arm, and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist."²⁰¹ Eliot's love scenes are much shorter than Sand's. There is almost no courtship between Casaubon and Dorothea or between Romola and Tito. There is a certain reluctance to describe love in its details, and except in The Mill on the Floss, Eliot does not linger on the sensual aspect of love. She rather shows the influence of external circumstances on the love situation. She focuses on the manner in which love is subject to the outside forces, how it changes, matures, or dies.

²⁰⁰"George Sand," The Nineteenth Century, (April, 1877): 221-48, p. 228.

²⁰¹The Mill on the Floss, op. cit., pp. 441-42.

Love is not at the root of the existence of all Eliot's heroines. It is however characteristic of Maggie: "And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie?"²⁰² Like Indiana, Maggie wants to be loved: "She had always longed to be loved."²⁰³ In Maggie, Eliot describes young enthusiastic love, one which Sand describes in La petite fadette or in François le champi. It is passionate but dutiful. With Dorothea, Esther and Mary Garth, Eliot shows the slow development of love from a childish conception to a more adult state. Dorothea's search for knowledge is just a necessary step in her development. The final destiny of her nature is love: "No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion."²⁰⁴

There are differences between Sand's and Eliot's representation of love. In Sand's novels love constitutes the most important part of the plot. In Eliot, it is always connected to its moral consequences. Motherhood plays an important role in Eliot's novels. "The mother's love is at first an absorbing delight, blunting all other sensibilities; it is an expansion of the animal existence; it enlarges the imagined range for self to move in; but in after years it can only continue

²⁰²Ibid., p. 235.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 382.

²⁰⁴Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 680.

to be joy on the same terms as other long-lived love - that is, by much suppression of self, and power of living in the experience of another,"²⁰⁵ she writes in Felix Holt. Her heroines are maternal and when they love, it is in a maternal way. Maggie loves her brother in a maternal way. Dorothea's behaviour towards Casaubon is also maternal. In contrast, except in François le champi, motherhood is a subject on which Sand does not insist in her novels. Her biographers usually describe her as a very maternal person. She had a son and a daughter and raised them herself. Several of her lovers were younger than she was and it is possible, as critics often do, to interpret this as a consequence of a great dose of maternal instinct. But Sand chose to represent strong women rather than motherly ones.

However, in her essays Sand clearly states that motherhood is the essential characteristic of femaleness. According to her, it is impossible to dissociate women from motherhood. Motherhood for her is not limited to childbearing, and implies nursing, raising and caring for children, activities which, as Elisabeth Badinter has shown,²⁰⁶ were left to nurses and

²⁰⁵Felix Holt, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁰⁶Elisabeth Badinter, L'amour en plus: histoire de l'amour maternel, (Paris: Flammarion, 1980).

governesses until the mid-nineteenth century. Sand wants to expand the role of motherhood beyond the limits of maternity. For instance, in François le champi she shows that the relationship between mother and son can be the source of great happiness. Therefore, when Sand declares that motherhood is a powerful instinct she means for all women to become closer to their children: "Si je n'avais pas cet instinct là je ne serais pas une femme."²⁰⁷ Sand believes that all women should nurse and raise their own children. Motherhood confers upon women a greater sense of responsibility and develops their strength. Thérènce in Les maîtres sonneurs declares in a way which is reminiscent of Maggie Tulliver's nature: "Si j'avais des enfants je les défendrais comme une louve et les couverais comme une poule."²⁰⁸

Orphans are also present in Sand's novels, which was a way of attracting the attention of her contemporaries to the serious problems of abandoned children. Madeleine adopts François, Brulette adopts Charlot and raises him herself. Both of them find happiness in their children. Madeleine even marries François. The experience of motherhood, the pains and joys of raising a child help Brulette become a better

²⁰⁷Monsieur Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 227.

²⁰⁸Les maîtres sonneurs, op. cit., p. 299.

woman: "Elle en avait changé qu'en mieux ... plus douce en son parler, plus sensée et plus intéressante en sa conduite."²⁰⁹

But if motherhood brings fulfilment, women must also have a certain control over the matter. Sand believed that women often bore too many children. Brulette loves children but refuses to lay them like eggs: "Je n'ai jamais fait semblant d'avoir l'instinct d'une bonne poule couveuse."²¹⁰ Sand struggled to change the custom which separated upper and middle-class families from their children, relinquishing their education to the convent for the girls or the boarding school for boys. She believed that the duties of a mother should encompass the education of her children over which at the time she had no say. She also demanded better control of illegitimate children, paternity suits, the creation of orphanages and finally, she contributed herself to the development of children's literature.

Eliot did not experience biological motherhood. Lewes's rather complex family situation prevented her from having any children of her own. Along with his own children, Lewes had also recognized those fathered by his friend Thornton Hunt. After Lewes separated from

²⁰⁹Ibid., p. 323.

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 331.

his wife, she continued her relationship with Hunt and bore him more children. As David Williams remarks, Lewes and Eliot "had agreed between them that a child would have added immeasurably to their unavoidable difficulties, and for this reason the utmost precautions had been taken."²¹¹ The situation was certainly a painful one for Eliot. Her novels as well as her letters show that she was very maternal. In a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe she declares: "You have had longer experience than I as a writer, and fuller experience as a woman, since you have borne children and known the mother's history from the beginning."²¹² However, Eliot took care of Lewes's sons Charles and Thornton as best she could and after some time considered herself a real mother. In 1861, she wrote to Mrs Taylor: "We have a great boy of eighteen at home who calls me 'mother' ... you will understand that the point is not one of mere egoism or personal dignity, when I request that any one who has a regard for me will cease to speak of me by my maiden name."²¹³

Eliot believed that motherhood was woman's God-given attribute, one of which she should be proud.

²¹¹David Williams, Mr. George Eliot: A Biography of George Henry Lewes, (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1983), p. 202.

²¹²Letters, V, p. 31.

²¹³Ibid., III, p. 396.

According to her, motherhood provides women with a biological substratum which fashions her sensibility in a specific way: "Under every imaginable social condition, she will necessarily have a class of sensations and emotions -the maternal ones- which must remain unknown to man."²¹⁴ Eliot argued that the fact women are by nature destined to be mothers is a great advantage, and one which should bring women closer together. Motherhood "introduces a distinctively feminine condition into the wondrous chemistry of the affections and sentiments, which inevitably gives rise to distinctive forms and combinations."²¹⁵

Eliot enjoyed representing children in her novels, either in the background as when she describes the Vincys in Middlemarch, the Meyricks in Daniel Deronda, Tessa in Romola, or in the foreground as in The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner. "My love of the childhood scenes made me linger over them,"²¹⁶ she wrote to François d'Albert-Durade in 1861. Mrs. Bede, Mrs. Tulliver, Mrs. Poyser, Mrs. Vincy, and Mrs. Garth are all happy mothers. Her heroines are also fond of children. Although Dorothea certainly does not act like one who would gladly become a mother, Eliot remarks that

²¹⁴Essays, p. 53.

²¹⁵Ibid.

²¹⁶Letters, III, p. 374.

she has "powerful, feminine, maternal hands."²¹⁷ Mary Garth likes children, enjoys reading them stories, and children like her. After her marriage she has six children, four boys and two girls.

Eppie's story, in Silas Marner, bears a curious resemblance to that of Sand's François le Champi. François and Eppie are both waifs who, once adopted by lonely Madeleine and Silas respectively, bring them joy and happiness. Like Sand, Eliot shows that raising and caring for a child brings fulfilment: "By seeking what was needful for Eppie, by sharing the effect that everything produced on her, he had himself come to appropriate the forms of custom and belief which were the mould of Raveloe life."²¹⁸ Like Sand, Eliot also believed that motherhood should not be limited to child-bearing but should also lead to a deeper relation between mother and children. By the same token Silas's story shows that children can also bring happiness to fathers.

Like Sand in Indiana, Eliot's novels also describe the tragic consequences of sexual relationships outside of marriage. Indiana's maid Noun commits suicide because she is pregnant by her mistress's lover. Hetty Sorel's story is reminiscent of Noun's tragic

²¹⁷Middlemarch, op. cit., p 32.

²¹⁸Silas Marner, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 201.

experience. Eliot goes back to the problem with Eppie's mother and Mrs. Glasher in Daniel Deronda. One also is moved by the great number of children of Amos Barton's wife, which ultimately takes her to the grave. In Scenes of Clerical Life, Caterina Sarti's death in childbirth reminds us of the risks of motherhood at the time. Eliot also describes other problems which beset the lives of women, such as Nancy Lammeter's infertility in Silas Marner, a condition which seriously undermines her marriage, and Rosamond Vincy's miscarriage. Rosamond is, however, one of the least maternal of Eliot's heroines.

Eliot's attitude towards motherhood is very close to that of Sand. They both believed that motherhood is natural and occupies an important place in woman's nature. Both criticized the traditional view which limited women to that function. According to them, motherhood must be a choice. Gwendolen Harleth remarks that in marriage, a woman "had more children than were desirable."²¹⁹ Motherhood is also a central theme in Daniel Deronda. It is Daniel's meetings with his own mother which reveal his true cultural identity.

Sand and Eliot came to similar conclusions concerning the nature of the sexes. Contrary to most of their contemporaries, they believed that the sexes were

²¹⁹Daniel Deronda, op. cit., p. 30.

not very far apart. According to them, men and women differ by their bodily organisation, but this is not seen as a "difference", a term which was often held against women to justify their social inequality. Both Sand and Eliot agree that to some extent biology is destiny: "La nature ne s'est pas servi du même moule."²²⁰ Nature's influence is inescapable: "Je crois que leur caractère qui tient à leur organisation donnera toujours en elles un certain aspect particulier à leur manifestations dans la science, dans l'art, et dans la fonction."²²¹

However, neither Sand nor Eliot precisely explain the characteristics of femaleness. According to them, femaleness consists in a greater sensibility. Sand declares: "Quelque soit l'homme, la femme est toujours un être plus délicat, plus exquis dans la sensibilité, plus sérieusement attentif dans les choses du coeur."²²² Likewise, Eliot believed that "a certain amount of psychological difference between man and woman necessarily arises out of the difference of sex."²²³ According to her, women are also characterized by a greater sensitivity: "Take the mode in which some

²²⁰Corr, I, p. 104.

²²¹Souvenirs et idées, op. cit., p. 20.

²²²Corr, VIII, p. 81.

²²³Essays, p. 53.

comparatively external physical characteristics such as quality of skin, or relative muscular power among boys, will enter into the determination of the ultimate nature, the proportion of feeling and all mental action, in the given individual."²²⁴ Eliot also believed that circumstances play a determining role in sexual difference. She likes to point out that the physical superiority of males "may have been exaggerated by a vicious civilization."²²⁵ Both Sand and Eliot believed that women and men are equally complete. They argued against the idea of a natural inferiority. However, they also pointed out that men and women are not identical. Sand declares: "Il y a diversité d'organisation et non difference. il y a donc égalité et non point similitude."²²⁶ This was their basis for demanding better social conditions. Sand was convinced that men and women had more in common than it was supposed: "Il ne m'a jamais semblé que l'homme et la femme fussent deux êtres absolument distincts."²²⁷ In a letter to Flaubert she declared in 1867: "Il n'y a qu'un sexe. Un homme et une femme, c'est si bien la même chose

²²⁴Letters, IV, p. 468.

²²⁵Essays, p. 53.

²²⁶Souvenirs et idées, op. cit., p. 20.

²²⁷Ibid.

que l'on ne comprend guère les tas de discussions et de raisonnements subtils dont se sont nourries les sociétés sur ce chapitre-là."²²³ Eliot did not go as far as Sand, but she remained convinced that men and women shared the same intellectual capacities.

Sand also makes an interesting remark concerning the importance of heredity and early behaviour, and declares that her own son rather than her daughter had inherited her sensitivity: "J'ai observé l'enfance et le développement de mon fils et de ma fille. Mon fils était moi, par conséquent femme bien plus que ma fille, qui était un homme pas réussi."²²⁵ In her novels, Sand presents very sensitive male poets whose nature is very close to that of women.

Eliot seems to have agreed with Sand but only to a certain extent. Like her, she believes women are intellectually equal to men, but she also seems to hold on to more feminine qualities which she refers to as: "that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing woman's being with affectionateness."²²⁶ Her ideal woman has the same intellect as man but has kept her more feminine

²²³Gustave Flaubert-George Sand Correspondance, (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 121.

²²⁵Ibid.

²²⁶Letters, IV, p. 468.

qualities. The difference with Sand is not one of kind but of degree.

Were Sand and Eliot feminists? The answer depends on how we define feminism. Feminists of the 1960's and 1970's were often radical in politics and did not include them in their ranks. Simone de Beauvoir criticized Sand for refusing to go beyond her personal lot: "Elle réclame le droit à l'amour libre ... mais elle refuse de collaborer à la Voix des femmes ... ses revendications sont surtout sentimentales."²²⁷ Albistur and Armogathe give her some credit but categorize her feminism as "individuel sentimental et romantique."²²⁸ Neither Ellen Moers²²⁹ nor Elaine Showalter²³⁰ considers Eliot a feminist. According to Moers: "Feminism is one thing, and literary feminism, or what I propose to call heroinism, is another."²³¹ Eliot's heroines were also criticized for being failures, as Zelda Austen points out: "Critics are angry with George Eliot because she did not permit Dorothea Brooke ... to do what George

²²⁷Simone de Beauvoir, Le deuxième sexe, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), vol. I, p. 140.

²²⁸Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français, (Paris: des femmes, 1977), p. 269.

²²⁹Ellen Moers, Literary Women, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

²³⁰Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

²³¹Ellen Moers, Literary Women, op. cit., p. 122.

Eliot did in real life, translate, publish articles, edit a periodical, refuse to marry until she was middle-aged, live an independent existence as a spinster and finally live openly with a man she could not marry."²³² Historians of feminism rarely refer to literature and generally leave Sand and Eliot out.²³³

Recent criticism has made an effort to correct these views, and has contributed to clarifying Sand's and Eliot's contribution to feminism. For instance, Sand's foremost scholar Georges Lubin recalls the importance of feminist arguments in Sand's novels and insists that critics need to undertake a more thorough reading of her works: "When one reads writers today proclaiming that George Sand did nothing for women's rights, you have to recognize that the authors of such counter-truths did not read her works."²³⁴ Francine Mallet examined Sand's relationship with feminists of

²³²Zelda Austen, "Why Feminist Critics Are Angry With George Eliot," College English, 37 (1976): 549-58, p. 549.

²³³Léon Abensour, Histoire générale du Féminisme (Paris: Plon, 1921). Jean Rabaut, Histoire des féminismes français, (Paris: Stock, 1978). Claire Goldberg Moses, French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984). Only Miriam Schneir includes a passage from Sand's Lettres à Marcie in her book Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings, (New York: Random House, 1972).

²³⁴Georges Lubin, "George Sand and Women's Rights," trans. Janis Glasgow, George Sand Newsletter 2, vol. III, (Fall, 1980): 43-51, p. 44.

her times, and argues that Sand was not anti-feminist but only more cautious: "Son féminisme est réfléchi. Elle ne met pas la charrue avant les boeufs."²³⁵ She also points out that Sand's feminism is grounded in experience and that her accomplishments are the very proof that a woman could be a mother and a lover, as well as a writer: "La force de la position de George Sand résulte de ce qu'elle a prêché d'exemple et souffert des maux qu'elle combat. Elle a démontré qu'une femme pouvait à la fois être amante et mère, jouer un rôle social, gagner sa vie et créer."²³⁶

In the same manner, Gillian Beer has re-examined the question of Eliot's feminism and points out the close relationship which existed between her and the other female activists such as Barbara Bodichon, Bessie Parkes, Emily Davies: "Almost every one of the women with whom George Eliot was intimate from the mid-1850's was actively involved in the women's movement."²³⁷ Beer refutes the notion that Eliot was uninterested in the movement and shows that, on the contrary, in her books as well as in her life she was very concerned by it: "George Eliot, then, did engage with issues vital in the

²³⁵Francine Mallet, George Sand, (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p. 188.

²³⁶Ibid.

²³⁷Gillian Beer, George Eliot, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), p. 181.

life of the women's movement."²³⁸ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also suggest that Eliot's works have been misinterpreted, and they see the link with other female writings in The Lifted Veil: "Although until quite recently she has been viewed almost exclusively in terms of male literary history, Eliot shows in The Lifted Veil that she is part of a strong female tradition."²³⁹

Lubin, Mallet, Beer, Gilbert and Gubar are correct in so far as they show that it is wrong to leave Sand and Eliot outside of the women's movement, and that, contrary to what earlier feminists believed, Sand and Eliot did not disregard the Woman Question. However, what remains to be shown are the characteristics of Sand's and Eliot's approach, their similarities and differences. It is therefore essential to avoid projecting contemporary definitions of feminism and to first look at the social and political contexts in which Sand's and Eliot's ideas developed.

We have seen what Sand and Eliot thought of the sexual difference and that they demanded a reform of the marriage laws as well as more freedom and education for women. Resistance to male oppression is embodied and illustrated by their very lives. They were not only

²³⁸Ibid., p. 180.

²³⁹Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic, (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 476.

women of ideas, but they had the courage to actually live them out. The relative freedom they enjoyed, as well as the success they reached as writers certainly gave courage to women to follow in their foot-steps. Realism was also their way to raise the consciousness of women and it achieved its goals by depicting their pitiful and unjust conditions. Their novels exposed what Eliot calls "an imperfect social state."²⁴⁰ If Eliot's women are failures it is because of society and not because there is something endemic to all women.

Their writings also bear the mark of their dedication to obtaining equality for women. Anger at the unjust conditions of women is an important stimulus which led Sand to literature. In fact, she took up the pen to liberate women from the slavery of their condition. In a letter written at the onset of her career, which incidentally shows the influence of Fourier, Sand declares that she is determined to write and fight for the cause of women: "Les femmes ne comptent ni dans l'ordre social ni dans l'ordre moral. Oh! j'en fait le serment ... je relèverai la femme de son abjection et dans ma personne et dans mes écrits ... Que l'esclavage féminin ait son Spartacus. Je le serai ou je mourrai à la peine."²⁴¹ Such a declaration, one

²⁴⁰Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 682.

²⁴¹Corr, IV, pp. 18-19.

of many which have been ignored by former critics, shows that contrary to common opinion, she was not only concerned with her own problems but had decided to fight for all women independently of class and marital status. Sand's novels cannot be separated from the cause of women. Bringing out the social injustice as well as women's needs, her keen analysis showed that women of all classes formed the oppressed sex, and she incited them to rebellion.

Sand's novels did not simply coincide with the rebirth of the women's movement in 1832 but greatly contributed to it. Her novels encouraged other women to join in her struggle. Therefore, it is wrong to believe that Sand was not concerned by women's problems. She was not only in the midst of the struggle for women but at its very origin. As her correspondence shows, her relationships with other feminists were on the whole very good. Besides some differences of education and class, she was always well respected and entertained good relationships with Marie D'Agoult, Flora Tristan, Pauline Roland, Hortense Allart. She also acted as a great catalyst between women, urging them to abandon the vague utopias of Fourier and Saint-Simon for the more reasonable solutions proposed by socialists.

Sand pointed out the dangers of such sects which, in truth, were fundamentally anti-democratic. In 1848,

a time when the woman question gained a new vigour, Sand insisted that women finally separate themselves from Fourier and Enfantin and define the objectives of their struggle in a more democratic and realistic way:

"Comment ces dames entendent-elles l'affranchissement de la femme? Est-ce comme Saint-Simon, Enfantin ou Fourier? Prétendent-elles détruire le mariage et proclamer la promiscuité? S'il en est ainsi ... je déclare que je me sépare personnellement de leur cause."²⁴²

In spite of Sand's disagreement with the Saint-Simonians, they repeatedly tried to persuade her to rally to their cause. In 1836 they sent her presents and distributed two hundred copies of her portrait (a lithograph) to their disciples. Later they asked her to become the female leader of their movement,²⁴³ an offer which she politely refused. Sand not only differed with them in ideology but was convinced that their doctrine of the rehabilitation of the flesh was not the correct way to emancipate women.

However, if Sand encouraged women to emancipate themselves from the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists, she did not want them to struggle entirely on their own. Like Mill, she believed that women's liberation could only take place through an alliance with dedicated men

²⁴²Souvenirs et idées, op. cit., p. 23.

²⁴³Corr, VII, pp. 256-57.

in a mass movement. According to her, the emancipation of women required a radical transformation of society. Working-class males and peasants suffered the same political injustices as women. Socialism promised absolute equality and represented for Sand the only democratic solution for women. It is true that Sand disapproved of women's clubs and meetings, but this should not be interpreted as a rejection of political commitment. It is rather her way of urging women to adhere to socialism and to unite with the partisans of true equality. According to her, a separate female movement was impractical and furthermore, given the circumstances, doomed to failure.

Hence, in a way socialism encompasses feminism. Sand was opposed to any action which would further increase the difference between men and women. She believed that there was a large majority of men who were willing to give women equality in marriage. Sand's goal was to obtain social and political equality for all. She criticized unjust "systems" more than "men". She was often afraid of being misunderstood and when English feminist and translator of her novels Eliza Ashurst paid her a visit, Sand remarked that in contrast to Ashurst, her own ideal could not be reduced to a question of sexual difference: "L'homme et la femme sont tout pour elle, et la question de sexe ... efface chez elle la

notion d'être humain, qui est toujours le même et qui ne devrait se perfectionner ni comme homme, ni comme femme, mais comme âme et comme enfant de Dieu."²⁴⁴ Sand's position on women must be understood in the context of her religious and social ideal. She believed in love and sought to unite rather than antagonize the sexes.

It is interesting to notice that Eliot's position is quite similar. However, Eliot was less eager to see women participate in political life. As for Sand, the distinctive mark of Eliot's thought vis à vis women is altogether critical and supportive. Eliot did not encourage female clubs and meetings. She wanted women to participate in the same meetings and conversations as men. Her main objective was also to reduce the gap between the sexes. She was for the improvement of women's lot, but also for the improvement of men's condition. Like Sand, she refused to be categorical about the question of sexual difference and always pointed out "the folly of absolute definitions of woman's nature and absolute demarcation of woman's mission."²⁴⁵

Eliot's novels are concerned not only with women, but more particularly with men and women, with the relation between environment, heredity and the sexes.

²⁴⁴Corr, VIII, p. 640.

²⁴⁵Essays, p. 203.

She shows the importance of the environment in the development of sexual roles. Eliot does not define woman but shows the factors which contribute to the shaping of her nature. "As if a woman were a mere coloured superficies!"²⁴⁶ Will Ladislav replies to Naumann's idealistic representations. Eliot criticizes the essentialist conception of women. She insists on the variety between women, and thereby denounces the stereotype. As Will tells Naumann: "You must wait for movement and tone. There is a difference in their very breathing; they change from moment to moment."²⁴⁷ Her prelude to Middlemarch leaves no doubt as to her intentions: "The limits of variation are really much wider than anyone would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse."²⁴⁸ Her heroines are all different because their immediate circumstances shapes their lives differently. The originality of Eliot's stories is to show the complex interplay between sex and milieu. Therefore, she argues that it is futile to define women in an absolute way: "If there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with

²⁴⁶Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 157.

²⁴⁷Ibid.

²⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 3-4.

scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains."²⁴⁹

It is not reluctance to participate in the women's movement as much as a desire to remain independent and to refuse to be incorporated into a narrower vision than her own which characterizes Eliot. Several allusions in her correspondence show that she did not want to be part of a feminist propaganda, which she feared might jeopardize social progress. Eliot did not want to become the representative of a female movement. When several of her more active friends begged her to join in with their efforts she hesitated. The demands of her friends to participate and to speak in public annoyed Eliot and she often answered that she did not consider herself a specialist on the women's question. In a way which is reminiscent of Sand she declared in 1869: "I know very little about what is specially good for women -only a few things that I feel sure are good for human nature generally, and about such as these last alone, can I ever hope to write or say anything worth saying."²⁵⁰

Eliot was also aware that her "immoral" liaison with Lewes might jeopardize the credibility of her action for women. Other activists like Bessie Parkes

²⁴⁹Ibid., p. 3.

²⁵⁰Letters, V, p. 58.

and Barbara Bodichon had more respectable lives. They were married. Bodichon's father and Emily Davies's brother-in-law were members of Parliament. And after 1865 they had the support of Mill. Eliot preferred to remain silent on certain questions concerning the methods of liberation. In 1878, she wrote to Mrs Taylor: "My function is that of the aesthetic, not the doctrinal teacher -the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge... it is one thing to feel keenly for one's fellow-beings; another to say 'This step and this step alone, will be the best to take for the removal of particular calamities.'"²⁵¹

Her liaison with Lewes had indeed ostracized her for a few years, as is shown by a letter written in 1854 by George Combe to Charles Bray: "An educated woman, who in the face of the world, volunteers to live as a wife, with a man who already has a living wife and children, appears to pursue a course and to set an example calculated only to degrade herself and her sex, if she be sane ... If you receive her in your family circle ... pray consider whether you will do justice to your own female domestic circle and how other ladies may feel

²⁵¹Ibid., VII, p. 44.

about going into a circle which makes no distinction between those who act thus, and those who preserve their honour unspotted."²⁵² According to Ann Fremantle, Eliot's reputation as an immoral woman lasted well into the 1930's.²⁵³

Despite her discretion and her refusal to commit herself to a more active and more public struggle, Eliot nevertheless contributed to and encouraged the struggle for equality by advising and giving financial support. Education and marriage were aspects of the struggle about which she was neither timid nor hesitant. In 1867 she wrote to Barbara Bodichon: "The better Education of Women is one of the objects about which I have no doubt, and I shall rejoice if this idea of a college can be carried out."²⁵⁴ She encouraged the work of Emily Davies and helped her with the curriculum of Girton College. She shared her enthusiasm with Sara Hennel: "There is a scheme on foot for a women's college, or rather university, to be built between London and Cambridge, and to be in connection with the Cambridge University, sharing its professors, examinations and

²⁵²Ibid., pp. 129-30.

²⁵³Ann Fremantle, George Eliot: A Biography, (London: Duckworth, 1933).

²⁵⁴Letters, IV, p. 399.

degree! Si muove."²⁵⁵

In 1869, when Girton College opened, she "bestirred herself to ask others to subscribe."²⁵⁶ She contributed fifty pounds and continued to encourage women to work towards the improvement of female education: "It is not likely that any perfect plan for educating women can soon be found, for we are very far from having found a perfect plan for educating men. But it will not do to wait for perfection."²⁵⁷

The reform of the marriage laws was also a subject on which Eliot agreed with feminists. In 1856, Eliot signed Bodichon's petition for the reform of the marriage laws, and asked Sara to join her. She thought the petition was "well and soberly drawn up"²⁵⁸ and told Sara that if it passed it "would help to raise the position and character of women."²⁵⁹ She also supported the creation of The Englishwoman's Journal: "It must be doing good substantially -stimulating woman to useful work, and rousing people generally to some consideration of women's needs."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵Ibid., p. 401.

²⁵⁶Ibid., V, p. 58, note 5.

²⁵⁷Ibid., IV, p. 425.

²⁵⁸Ibid., II, p. 225

²⁵⁹Ibid., p. 227.

²⁶⁰Ibid., III, p. 225.

Eliot also encouraged work for single women. In 1861 she congratulated Mrs Taylor for her dedication: "I am so glad to know ... that you are interesting yourself, with Madame Belloc, in the poor workhouse girls."²⁶¹ A few months later she praised her again: "Hardly anything is more wanted, I imagine, than homes for girls in various employments -or rather for unmarried women of all ages."²⁶² Eliot even supported the union of bookbinding women,²⁶³ and in 1869, she told Oscar Browning, who had just returned from Russia, that she was glad to know that "in those ultra-civilized regions," women were "in good practice as lawyers."²⁶⁴

The question of the vote was also important to feminism, although not the most important one since as we have seen, most of the male population did not enjoy such a privilege until 1848 in France, and 1884 in England. The fact that women had no part in political affairs was not then felt as an injustice particularly directed towards women. Sand never denied that women ought to play a political role. After all, she argued, Queens had ruled England and in the France of the Ancien Régime aristocratic women enjoyed some political

²⁶¹Ibid., VI, p. 65.

²⁶²Ibid., p. 119.

²⁶³Ibid.

²⁶⁴Ibid., V, p. 59.

privileges. Therefore Sand believed that, in due time, women must take part in political affairs of the state. In 1848, she declares: "Les femmes doivent-elles participer un jour à la vie politique? Oui, un jour, je le crois avec vous."²⁶⁵

However, it seems that the political role Sand wanted for women was that of elector. She wanted women to be able vote, but did not wish, in her days, to see women become deputies and play a more responsible role. According to her, women were still too ill-prepared for political life. Their lack of experience and their education were then largely inadequate to turn them into political leaders. The most urgent reforms concerned marriage and education, and the struggle to obtain them was a political one: laws had to be changed, status to be redefined, rights to be re-examined. The two reforms had to be fought together. Without a professional education, marriage remained the only alternative for women. It was difficult for unmarried women to live alone unless they were independently wealthy. Marriage more than the vote deprived women of their rights. It was marriage which was a debasing condition for women and Sand was correct to insist that feminist demands should be directed against it: "La femme étant sous la tutelle et dans la dépendance de l'homme par le mariage,

²⁶⁵Souvenirs et idées, op. cit., p. 21.

il est absolument impossible qu'elle présente des garanties d'indépendance politique ... il me paraît donc insensé, j'en demande pardon aux personnes de mon sexe qui ont cru devoir procéder ainsi, de commencer par où l'on doit finir, pour finir apparemment par où l'on eût dû commencer."²⁶⁶

Therefore, Sand did not encourage women to seek the vote until they had obtained a reform of marriage. The vote would have only benefitted a small portion of unmarried women. Married women, the vast majority, could not vote since by legal definition they had no rights. As Sand remarked, before she could have power in society, a woman should have power in her own family: "Quel bizarre caprice vous pousse aux luttes parlementaires, vous qui ne pouvez pas seulement y apporter l'exercice de votre indépendance personnelle?"²⁶⁷

An unfortunate incident also caused Sand to be more cautious about her declarations concerning the political role of women. In 1848, the Club des Jacobins proposed her candidature to the National Assembly, without previously consulting her, which infuriated her. On the whole, the feminist press respected Sand and often published excerpts of her writings. La gazette des

²⁶⁶Ibid., p. 22.

²⁶⁷Ibid., p. 35.

femmes published fragments of her Lettres à Marcie.²⁶⁸ The Journal des femmes quoted passages of the first edition of Lélia.²⁶⁹ In 1848, Eugénie Niboyet's La voix des femmes confirmed the importance of Sand's role in French literature, "les lettres s'honorent de la célébrité de George Sand,"²⁷⁰ and in the women's movement: "La parole de George Sand est pour nous religieuse et sainte, parce qu'elle est à tous."²⁷¹

However, Niboyet's journal was also responsible for spreading the false rumour of Sand's candidature: "La femme marche encore sans force dans sa liberté, Sand est puissante et n'effraie personne, c'est elle qu'il faut appeler par les vœux de toutes au vote de tous. Nous en avons la conviction, du jour où nos intérêts seront en ses mains, elle vivra en nous et comme nous! ... En appelant Sand à l'assemblée nationale, les hommes croiront faire une exception, ... toutes les femmes vous aideront à la nommer."²⁷² A year later, in 1849, her candidature as well as that of Jeanne Deroin, editor of L'opinion des femmes, was again proposed to the

²⁶⁸"La soeur cadette," La gazette des femmes, (Journal poétique et littéraire, 1841-47), 6 November, 1841.

²⁶⁹"Le cri d'une âme souffrante à Dieu," Journal des femmes, 1 October, 1835.

²⁷⁰La voix des femmes, 20 March, 1848.

²⁷¹Ibid., 24 March, 1848.

²⁷²Ibid., 6 April, 1848.

assembly. Sand may have been flattered but her replies which were published in several newspapers were rather critical of Niboyet's declaration. The general comments Sand makes concerning Niboyet and other female activists must be analysed in the context of this incident. Sand declared that she had no acquaintance with such women and expressed her disagreement with them: "Je ne vois point que dans l'état actuel des choses, les femmes doivent être si pressées de prendre une part directe à la vie politique. Il n'est point prouvé qu'elles y apportent un élément de haute sagesse et de dignité bien entendue, car si une grande partie des hommes est inexpérimentée encore dans l'exercice de cette vie nouvelle où nous entrons, une plus grande partie des femmes est exposée à cette inexpérience, et l'essai compliquerait d'une manière fâcheuse les embarras de la situation."²⁷³

Furthermore, Sand argued that equality did not mean identity, that equal right to work and equal capacity for work should not force men and women to occupy the same functions: "L'homme et la femme peuvent remplir des fonctions différentes sans que la femme soit tenue, pour cela, dans un état d'infériorité."²⁷⁴ Sand also accused the more political radicals of actually obstructing the

²⁷³La vraie république, 7 May, 1848.

²⁷⁴Ibid.

progress of the movement: "Vous êtes donc coupables d'avoir retardé, depuis vingt ans que vous prêchez sans discernement, sans goût et sans lumière l'affranchissement de la femme, d'avoir éloigné et ajourné indéfiniment l'examen de la question."²⁷⁵

These are arguments with which Eliot agreed. In 1853 she wrote to Mrs. Taylor: "'Enfranchisement of women only makes creeping progress; and that is best, for woman does not yet deserve a much better lot than man gives her."²⁷⁶ In 1867 at the time when Eliot's friends Bodichon and Davies were occupied with the question of the vote and associated themselves with Mill, Eliot still remained pessimistic about the good of such demands. She reproached Sara Hennel for interesting herself in that question: "I proceed to scold you a little for undertaking to canvass on the Women's Suffrage question. Why should you burthen yourself in that way, for an extremely doubtful good?"²⁷⁷

For Eliot, as for Sand, the questions of marriage and education were more important. Eliot believed that education would show if women were made for political life and therefore thought it preposterous to actually

²⁷⁵Souvenirs et idées, op. cit., p. 37.

²⁷⁶Letters, II, p. 86.

²⁷⁷Ibid., IV, p. 390.

demand political power. More than Sand however, she seems to have had a profound dislike of politics. Briberies, compromises and the dishonesty of politicians abound in Romola, Middlemarch and Felix Holt. In this respect she is closer to Comte and Ruskin and believed that woman's role in society ought to continue, at least for the time being, to be limited to morals rather than to politics.

Criticism of methods, differences of opinion, as well as hesitancy and some pessimism, especially on Eliot's part are not arguments against a feminist position. Also, and in spite of Moers's argument, the differences between literary feminism and feminism seem to be of degree and not of kind. Feminism is certainly political but the problems it deals with and the questions it raises go far beyond the sphere of practical solutions. Sand broke barriers and conventions. She was audacious and brave and fought social injustice and sexual discrimination up to her death. Her attacks were so virulent that they fomented several generations of feminist activity. Eliot contributed to feminism by putting the problem of women in context. She dealt with the sexual difference in a philosophical way, examining its development, trying to sort out reasonable from unreasonable claims. She was very suspicious of shortsighted solutions. According to

her, the emancipation of women was "a long ladder stretching far beyond our lives."²⁷⁸

Eliot's novels show the narrowness which confines women on all points of view, intellectually and also sentimentally. In Middlemarch she speaks of "the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world, where everything was done for her and none asked for her aid."²⁷⁹ Her heroines are all pitiful. Maggie, Dorothea, Romola and Gwendolen suffer from the narrow limits of their world. Rosamond Vincy seems happy but Eliot mentions that she had been "brought up in such thoughtlessness."²⁸⁰ The force of Eliot's novels is that they do not deal with the problem of women in a superficial way. They show direct relationships between the character of women and their milieu, which on the whole stifles it. Men's supremacy is questioned and their conception of female nature contested. Casaubon marries Dorothea because he thought she represented "a personification of that shallow world which surrounds the ill-appreciated or desponding author."²⁸¹ Tom Tulliver believes that shoe-wiping is "an indignity to

²⁷⁸Ibid., II, p. 227.

²⁷⁹Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 225.

²⁸⁰Ibid., p. 242.

²⁸¹Ibid., p. 165.

his sex."²⁸² Eliot also shows that the condition of women depends on their acquisition of power. As Maggie declares to Tom: "you are a man ... and have power, and can do something in the world."²⁸³ But few of her heroines acquire it.

In their own way both Sand and Eliot contributed to feminism. Their activities and support were conditioned by their respective culture and the social and marital position they occupied. Within this historical context it would be wrong to accuse them of being little concerned with women's emancipation. However, it would be far-fetched and misleading to compare them to modern feminists and especially to those who such as Mary Daly²⁸⁴ seek to glorify women and to develop their difference. A certain amount of pride concerning the "specific" female qualities is present in Sand as well as in Eliot, but the direction of their feminism is different. What Sand and Eliot wanted above all was to fill in the gap between the sexes. They refused to further antagonize them.

The importance of their contribution was a well-

²⁸²The Mill on the Floss, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁸³Ibid., p. 347.

²⁸⁴"Radical feminism is not reconciliation with the father. Rather, it is affirming our original birth, our original source, movement, surge of living."
Gyn/Ecology: The Meta-ethics of Radical Feminism, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 39.

established fact. As we have seen, even the most radical feminists held Sand in high esteem. Likewise with Eliot. In 1866, critic Henry Lancaster called Eliot "the champion of woman against the selfishness and oppression of men."²⁸⁵ Towards the end of her life Eliot exerted a powerful fascination on young female radicals.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵Henry Lancaster, "The Novels of George Eliot," North British Review, 45 (September, 1866): 197-228, p. 222.

²⁸⁶See K. A. McKenzie, Edith Simcox and George Eliot, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

CHAPTER FIVE

ELIOT, SAND AND RECENT FEMINIST CRITICISM

The recent development of feminist criticism has given special attention to the question of the relationship between women and the arts. The great majority of critics believe that women have always approached literature in a specific way, an argument which is relevant to a study of Sand and Eliot. Therefore after a brief summary of the recent debate over female aesthetics we will show Sand's and Eliot's positions on the subject.

Recent research on sexual differences seems to fall into three categories. One which argues against biological determinism in favour of the importance of social factors,¹ another which maintains the importance

¹According to Ira Reiss, "Sexual customs are established by the group ... biological similarities cannot account for the vast differences in sexual lifestyles." Journey into Sexuality, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1986), p. 26. John Nicholson believes that the common assumptions of difference between men and women are not significant when studied experimentally. He argues that their physiologies are more similar than it is assumed, shows the existence of male cycles, and rejects the existence of a maternal instinct: "All we can say with confidence is that there are at least two respects in which males and females are clearly different when they start out. Their genital tracts are constructed quite differently, and only one sex has the potential to give birth. But even this statement has to be qualified." Men and Women: How different are they?, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 1. In her book Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, (London: Tavistock, 1986), Janet Sayers also argues against biological determinism.

of the body,² and a last one, which is synthetic and argues that both physiology and social environment play a role.³ The debate is far from being over and new discoveries in the sciences constantly change the traditional understanding of both male and female physiology.

Literary feminists also approach the relationship between women and the arts from different viewpoints. Some, such as Viviane Forrester, prefer not to speak of a female aesthetic and argue, on the contrary, that art is a domain in which sexual differences disappear: "S'il peut y avoir écriture au féminin, produite par du féminin, il n'y a pas de texte féminin ni masculin."⁴ In contrast, Ellen Moers believes that sexual differences are relevant in the arts. What Moers sees

²Hélène Cixous, argues that a great part of the difference between men and women lies in the body. According to her, the female body is the seat of precious differences which have been repressed. Therefore women must learn to discover them: "Chaque texte un autre corps." La venue à l'écriture, (Paris: 10/18, 1977), p. 58.

³Lynda Birke, declares: "I cannot accept that adult biological processes have no impact upon our perception of ourselves as women or men." Women, Feminism and Biology, (New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 104. Birke stresses the importance of the body: "Women do have something in common biologically", Ibid., p. 105. But she also argues that "a woman's biology, and her experience of it, do not exist in a social and political vacuum." Ibid., p. 105.

⁴Viviane Forrester, "Féminin Pluriel," Tel Quel, 74 (1977): 68-77, p. 77.

in the production of literature by women is a significant phenomenon: "It is the only intellectual field to which, for hundreds of years, women have made an indispensable contribution."⁵ Moers assumes that both their physiology and their social position contributed to similarity in their literary creations: "Being women, women writers have women's bodies, which affect their senses and their imagery. They are raised as girls, and thus have a special perception of the cultural imprinting of childhood. They are assigned roles in the family and in courtship, they are given or denied access to education and employment, they are regulated by laws of property and political representation which, absolutely in the past, partially today, differentiate men from women."⁶ According to Patricia Meyer Spacks, the similarities between female writers are more the result of their bodily organisation than of social and political circumstances: "Changing social conditions increase or diminish the opportunities for women's action and expression, but a special female self-awareness emerges through literature in every period."⁷

Likewise, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar declare

⁵Ellen Moers, Literary Women, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), preface, ix.

⁶Ibid., xi.

⁷Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination, (New York: Discus Book, 1976), p. 1.

that they have been "surprised by the coherence of theme and imagery ... in the works of writers who were often geographically, historically and psychologically distant from each other."⁸ According to them, the female trait has roots which go beyond the cultural and social differences: "In radically different genres we found what began to seem as a distinctively female literary tradition."⁹ Béatrice Didier declares that her long acquaintance with women writers lead her to believe that the profound affinities between them are neither purely coincidental nor simply the product of social factors: "Ce qui frappe ... c'est un certain accent, la marque d'une différence qui rend habituellement reconnaissable un texte écrit par une femme."¹⁰ In his analysis of female novelists, Michel Mercier also finds that similarities are by far more significant than differences: "Mes lectures m'ont confirmé dans ces différences."¹¹

Some argue that the differences are not absolute. Meyer Spacks, Didier and Kristeva believe that no matter

⁸Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), preface, p. xi.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Béatrice Didier, L'écriture-femme (Paris: des femmes, 1981), p. 17.

¹¹Michel Mercier, Le roman féminin, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), p. 7

how different men and women are, their writings are never poles apart. Hélène Cixous and Irma Garcia believe that the characteristics of female writing, its style, is that it is always closer to sensations: "La vie se fait à partir de mon corps."¹² According to Cixous, motherhood is also a fundamental force: "Il y a de la mère en toute femme."¹³ She compares writing to nursing: "L'écriture aussi c'est du lait. Je nourris."¹⁴ According to Garcia, femaleness is present in the arts, but it cannot be made very explicit. Female artists have also undergone male repression and therefore their attempts at being truly authentic about themselves were not always possible, which explains why one cannot define female literature: "L'écriture des femmes n'est ni reconnaissable, ni repérable, elle ne se donne jamais à voir ... le texte dégage du féminin, mais ne peut se définir comme tel."¹⁵ According to such an interpretation, it seems that one can only intuit femaleness, rather than understand it in a rational way.

Other critics have also criticized the maleness of language. According to them, order and syntax is the

¹²Hélène Cixous, La venue à l'écriture, (Paris: 10/18, 1977), p. 57.

¹³Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁵Irma Garcia, Promenade femmilière, 2 vols. (Paris: des femmes, 1981), vol. I, pp. 12-14.

product of male dominance. Woman, they argue is a non-syntactic being: "L'homme est profondément syntaxique. Il n'agit qu'en fonction de sa position spatiale, temporelle, sociale et économique. Si un mot le gêne, il le remplace aussitôt par un synonyme. Un mot ne compte pas."¹⁶ Virginia Woolf also believed that language was not made for women: "The very form of the sentence does not fit her."¹⁷

The problem of female literature is one of identity and authenticity. Feminists want a truly authentic female literature, one which would not reflect male dominance and which would confer a certain amount of identity. The first point which must be made is the relevance of Sand and Eliot to the question. However, in their day the question of the relationship between sex and literature could not be approached as eloquently as today. The sexual roles were further apart and it was much more difficult for women to be authentic about themselves. Female writers had first to break away from a stereotype which confined them. Mary Ellmann's remark that: "Books by women are treated as though they

¹⁶Claudine Herrmann, Les voleuses de langues, (Paris: des femmes, 1976), p. 73.

¹⁷Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979), p. 48.

themselves were women,"¹⁸ is hopefully no longer true today, but it is still significant for the nineteenth century.

In spite of the great number of their male admirers, Sand and Eliot themselves did not escape a certain amount of sexist criticism at the turn of the century. For instance Emile Faguet, a liberal and a sympathizer with feminism, thought that Sand's shallowness was characteristic of her sex: "Elle est amoureuse des idées, sans être capable de bien les entendre ... elle a les instincts d'un penseur sans en avoir la puissance."¹⁹ Likewise, Henry James liked to point out that they were unmistakably feminine. In a characteristic manner, he remarks that Sand had only the appearance of an intellectual: "She lived from day to day, from hand to mouth (intellectually as it were) and had no general plan of life and culture."²⁰ James even suggests that Eliot's intellect lacked "a certain masculine comprehensiveness."²¹ According to him, Eliot is successful when she remains feminine, when she

¹⁸Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), p. 29.

¹⁹Emile Faguet, Dix-Neuvième Siècle: Etudes Littéraires, (Paris: Lecène, 1892), p. 388.

²⁰Henry James, Atlantic Monthly, May 1885, in David Carroll (ed), George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 492.

²¹Ibid., p. 277.

exhibits that which he calls "the exquisite taste on a small scale." However, she fails when she attempts to go beyond these limits, in which case her art discloses "the absence of taste on a large scale."²² Another criticism addressed to Sand and Eliot concerned their inability to portray virile men. Leslie Stephen calls Daniel Deronda "a school girl's hero"²³ and remarks that in general her male characters are "female in disguise."²⁴

Specificity is a subject which Sand or Eliot tried to raise. Both of them demanded more authenticity and genuineness in female literature. First, they argued against the rigid divisions between female and male creativity. Sand's novels are an effort towards sincerity and genuineness. Eliot encouraged women to follow Sand's example. Her articles on the relationship of women to literature not only pay a great homage to Sand but are one of the first critical studies of female writings written by a woman.

Sand and Eliot were familiar with female writers. Sand had read Madame Riccoboni,²⁵ the memoirs of Madame

²²Ibid.

²³William Baker, Critics on George Eliot, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 50.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Corr, I, p. 202.

Roland,²⁶ and Mrs Radcliffe, but they did not seem to have moved her in any special way. Even her reading of Madame de Staël does not seem to have been as fruitful for her as that of Plato or Leibniz. In her Lettres d'un voyageur, she finds Staël too conservative, too 18th century. She calls her "homme-femme," and "la raisonneuse, la logique, l'utile."²⁷

Eliot's preference in female fiction went to those who were true to their sex. Eliot used Sand's example to encourage women to write in a more authentic manner. According to her, Sand gave modern literature the female viewpoint. Her works were of comparable quality with those of the best male novelists and also brought something specific. Sand was true to nature. Eliot declared that Sand wrote sincerely and authentically without imitating male writers or other female writers. Hence she was a genuine artist and genuinely female.

The fact that both Sand and Eliot wrote under a male pseudonym was in itself significant, since the pseudonym was the best way to avoid the stereotype of female literature. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was customary to think that literature was the business of men. Stendhal argued that women should

²⁶Ibid., II, p. 861.

²⁷Lettres d'un voyageur, (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), pp. 137, 142.

turn to literature only in case of financial necessity and provided their names were concealed or their works published posthumously.²⁸ Robert Southey in his response to Charlotte Brontë remarked: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, it ought not to be."²⁹ It was therefore logical that women should use a male pseudonym. In her autobiography, Sand remarks that her grandmother was opposed to having her name in print and also recalls that she had been advised to raise children and not to write novels.

Eliot had more luck and benefitted from the encouragement, advice and support of Lewes. But she still felt that she needed a male pseudonym. In 1859, Eliot wrote to Bodichon: "It is quite clear that people would have sniffled at it, if they had known the writer to be a woman."³⁰ In another letter to Charles Bray she said that she did not sign her article on Mr. Cummings for the same reasons: "The article appears to have produced a strong impression and that impression would

²⁸"Je dirai qu'une femme ne doit jamais écrire que ...des oeuvres posthumes ... une femme doit imprimer comme le baron d'Holbach ou madame de la Fayette; leur meilleurs amis l'ignoraient ... je ne vois qu'une exception, c'est une femme qui fait des livres pour nourrir ou élever sa famille." De l'Amour, 2 vols., (Genève: Edito-service S.A., 1965), vol. II, p. 91.

²⁹Muriel Spark (ed.), The Brontë Letters, (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 65.

³⁰Letters, III, p. 106.

be a little counter-acted if the author were known to be a woman."³¹ Lewes himself was well aware of the existence of a double standard in literature: "When Jane Eyre was finally known to be a woman's book the tone noticeably changed."³² Later to Barbara Bodichon, he explained: "Anonymity was to get the book published on its own merits, and not prejudged as the work of a woman, or a particular woman."³³ Eliot's particular situation with Lewes may have also contributed to her use of the pseudonym.

Both Sand and Eliot became attached to their pseudonym. It was neither the name of their father nor that of a husband, and it conferred upon them a certain identity. Sand declares: "A présent j'y tiens beaucoup à ce nom ... je l'ai fait moi-même et moi seule, après coup, par mon labeur, je n'ai jamais exploité le travail d'un autre, je n'ai jamais pris, ni acheté, ni emprunté une page, une ligne à qui que ce soit."³⁴ In Daniel Deronda Herr Klesmer makes a remark which echoes Eliot's pride: "My rank as an artist is of my own winning, and I

³¹Ibid., II, p. 218.

³²Ibid., p. 506.

³³Ibid., III, p. 106.

³⁴Oeuvres Autobiographiques, 2 vols., (Paris: Gallimard, 1970-72), vol. II, p. 140.

would not exchange it for any other."³⁵

Sand and Eliot did not wish to be known as female authors, which for them was synonymous with secondary literature. Sand hated to be called a "femme auteur" and spoke of herself in the masculine form as a "romancier" or "un conteur." In her correspondence she declares: "Ne m'appellez pas femme-auteur, ou je vous fais avaler mes cinq volumes ... ne m'affublez pas d'un ridicule que je fais."³⁶ A woman-author undoubtedly evoked feeble literature: "L'animal le moins intéressant et le plus mal peigné du monde."³⁷

Both Sand and Eliot believed that art was mainly a matter of sensitivity and thought that women ought to give expression to their emotions. Romanticism and Realism are therefore largely responsible for the emergence of a more genuine female literary production. The body played an essential role in art. Sand's novels considerably changed the conception of female literature. The realism of passion opened new horizons for women. Eliot took Sand's realism and the genuineness of her experience as the principle of the modern novel and urged women to be true to their sex.

³⁵Daniel Deronda, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 212.

³⁶Corr, I, p. 16.

³⁷Ibid., II, p. 292.

In 1854, Eliot declared: "We think it an immense mistake to maintain that there is no sex in literature ... in art and literature, which imply the action of the entire being, in which every fibre of the nature is engaged, in which every peculiar modification of the individual makes itself felt, woman has something specific to contribute."³⁸

Lewes himself had already given special attention to the problem in an article entitled "The Lady Novelists." Lewes had remarked that female literature in general was not very original because it seemed to be an imitation of male novels, and citing Sand, but also Austen as examples, he argued that women had to become more authentic in their writing: "We are in need of genuine female experience. The prejudices, notions, passions, and conventionalisms of men are amply illustrated; let us have the same fulness with respect to women."³⁹ Therefore, Lewes urged women to write more sincerely, and to give their own personal impressions of life: "To write as women is the real office they have to perform."⁴⁰

³⁸"Woman in France: Madame de Sablé", Westminster Review, 62 (October, 1854): 448-73, in Essays, op. cit., p. 53.

³⁹"The Lady Novelists," Westminster Review, 58 (July, 1852): 129-41, p. 132.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Eliot preferred French female novelists because she thought they were more authentic: "With a few remarkable exceptions, our own feminine literature is made up of books which could have been better written by men ... when not a feeble imitation, they are usually an absurd exaggeration of the masculine style."⁴¹ In her article "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,"⁴² Eliot divides English literary women into three categories. Those of the "the mind-and-millinery species" or the upper middle-class who "write in elegant boudoirs, with violet-coloured ink and a ruby pen ... their intellect seems to have the peculiar impartiality of reproducing both what they have seen and heard, and what they have not seen and heard, with equal unfaithfulness."⁴³ Another category which distinguishes itself by its lack of intellectual depth is the "oracular species": "Take a woman's head, stuff it with a smattering of philosophy and literature chopped small, and with false notions of society baked hard, let it hang over a desk a few hours every day, and serve up hot in feeble English, when not required."⁴⁴ Worse is the Evangelical novelist or

⁴¹"Woman in France: Madame de Sablé", Westminster Review, op. cit., in Essays, p. 53.

⁴²"Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," Westminster Review, 66 (October, 1856): 442-61.

⁴³Ibid., in Essays, p. 304.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 310.

"white neck-cloth species" who writes "a kind of genteel tract on a large scale, intended as a sort of medicinal sweetmeat for Low Church young ladies."⁴⁵

Eliot accuses such women of giving female literature a bad name. Her artistic criticism also has political implications. She says she would be willing to excuse poor literature if it was written out of financial necessity. But she refuses to excuse poor literature when it is written out of pure vanity, "the foolish vanity of wishing to appear in print,"⁴⁶ which is encouraged by the compliments of compassionate and friendly critics. These women do not respect the "sacredness of the writer's art" and write under "the extremely false impression that to write at all is a proof of superiority in a woman."⁴⁷ Eliot's article urged women to consider art as a difficult task, one for which they had to labour and study. Herr Klesmer's remarks to Gwendolen illustrate Eliot's point: "I was speaking of what you would have to go through if you aimed at becoming a real artist -if you took music and the drama as a higher vocation in which you would strive after excellence ... You would find -after your education at doing things slackly for one-and-twenty

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 317.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 323.

⁴⁷Ibid.

years- great difficulties in study: you would find mortifications in the treatment you would get when you presented yourself on the footing of skill. You would be subjected to tests; people would no longer feign not to see your blunders. You would at first only be accepted on trial."⁴⁸

Eliot believed that French women were better artists first because they had a physiological advantage over English women. According to Eliot, "the small brain and vivacious temperament" which she thought was characteristic of Frenchwomen enabled "the fragile system of woman to sustain the superlative activity requisite for intellectual creativeness."⁴⁹ On the contrary, in Northern countries: "The larger brain and slower temperament of the English and Germans are, in the womanly organization, generally dreamy and passive ... the physique of a woman may suffice as the substratum for a superior Gallic mind, but is too thin a soil for a superior Teutonic one. Our theory is borne out by the fact, that among our own countrywomen, those who distinguish themselves by literary production, more frequently approach the Gallic than the Teutonic type; they are intense and rapid rather than comprehensive."⁵⁰

⁴⁸Daniel Deronda, op. cit., p. 220.

⁴⁹Essays, p. 55.

⁵⁰Ibid.

According to Eliot, there is a direct relationship between female physiology and art: "The woman of large capacity can seldom rise beyond the absorption of ideas; her physical conditions refuse to support the energy required for spontaneous activity; the voltaic pile is not strong enough to produce crystalizations; phantasms of great ideas float through her mind, but she has not the spell which will arrest them, and give them fixity. This, more than unfavourable external circumstances, is, we think, the reason why woman has not yet contributed any new form to art, any discovery in science, any deep-searching inquiry in philosophy. The necessary physiological conditions are not present in her."⁵¹

Sand is rather silent on the characteristics of female literature. However, her novels often point to the limits of language, which she attributed to male dominance. For instance, in Monsieur Sylvestre she remarks that language was too poor to express female feelings: "La langue des hommes est faible pour exprimer tous les degrés de tendresse du coeur humain."⁵² Her frustrations with language are also apparent in her autobiography, where she expressed her difficulty of finding the proper word for her emotions: "Je ne savais

⁵¹Ibid., p. 56.

⁵²Monsieur Sylvestre, (Plan de la Tour: Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 133.

pas de nom pour ce que je sentais."⁵³ Garcia interprets Sand's digressions as a sign of her desire to estrange herself from male language. Didier suggests that Sand's use of dialect was also a way to escape male language. Both remarks contain some truth, because Sand wanted to retrieve a former and less sophisticated language. She found more spontaneity and simplicity in dialect and purposely avoided the rules of the all-male Académie. It is possible that ideally the use of dialect symbolizes the need to escape the maleness of language, but it is difficult to ascertain. What is true is that dialects represented a way out of absolute categorizations. They were richer and more subtle: "Une langue supérieure pour rendre tout un ordre d'émotions, de sentiments et de pensées."⁵⁴

What characterizes Sand's and Eliot's contributions to female literature is a great concern for authenticity and quality. Both Sand and Eliot understood the link between art and freedom but also between art and education. In the preface to a collection of her short stories, Sand argues that one of the advantages that male novelists have over female novelists is their better education: "Par son éducation

⁵³Oeuvres Autobiographiques, op. cit., vol. II, p. 107.

⁵⁴François le champi, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1976), p. 44.

plus complète et son raisonnement plus exercé, l'homme peut plus aisément peindre la femme, que la femme ne peut peindre l'homme."⁵⁵ Eliot also saw education as the key to a better female literature. As Will Ladislav remarks: "There is a great deal in the feeling for art which must be acquired."⁵⁶ Celia plays the piano a little, "a small kind of tinkling which symbolized the aesthetic part of the young ladies' education."⁵⁷ Rosamond plays well, but without creativity. Her talent consists in reproducing music "with the precision of an echo."⁵⁸ Herr Klesmer tells Gwendolen that before she thinks of becoming an artist, "technicalities have in any case to be mastered."⁵⁹

However, neither Sand nor Eliot encouraged women to write for women only. They asked women to write with the courage of their sex, emphasized the importance of education for the arts, but never believed that women should write for women alone, nor that they should limit their writing to the female body. Authenticity for them meant the freedom for women to write from their own view

⁵⁵Nouvelles, (Paris: des femmes, 1986), p. 31.

⁵⁶Middlemarch, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 169.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁹Daniel Deronda, op. cit., p. 221.

points, without adopting male standards. Each in her own way enriched female literature and elevated it to a level of quality rarely achieved before. Their originality is to have encouraged sincerity, humility, and dedication to art, without confining women to a rigid model. They also avoided being too categorical about male literature and thought that, although physiology was an important factor, it never constituted an absolute barrier. They would have agreed with Stendhal's remark: "Il y a peut-être autant de façons de sentir parmi les hommes que de façons de voir."⁶⁰

⁶⁰Stendhal, De l'amour, 2 vols., (Genève: Edito-Service S.A., 1965), vol. I, p. 16.

CONCLUSION

The role of Sand in Eliot's intellectual and artistic development had been hitherto overlooked. As we have seen in the introduction, the relationship between Sand and Eliot aroused the interest of literary critics, but on the whole their remarks never went beyond the usual clichés. There are several reasons to account for this. The first is historical and cultural. At the end of the century, comparative criticism was still greatly impeded by national prejudices. The instinctive tendency was to oppose Eliot to Sand or at least to point out the differences. The majority of the English critics emphasized Sand's romanticism and her poetic style but rarely paid attention to her ideas. As Matthew Arnold remarked in 1876: "The English public conceives of her as a novel-writer who wrote stories more or less interesting ... but Sand is something more than a maker of charming stories ... we do not know her unless we feel the spirit which goes through her work as a whole."¹

By the time critics on the other side of the channel discovered Eliot, Sand's days were past. She was not forgotten but the ideal she stood for was considered old-fashioned. Eliot came at a time when Zola and Maupassant were the authors in vogue, and her

¹Matthew Arnold, Essays Religious and Mixed, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 219.

rustic novels represented for the French critics a more moral sort of realism. In France, Eliot remained the author of an intellectual elite. She never became a popular novelist and her fame was not comparable to that of Sand in Victorian England. A phase of conservatism, which can be seen in Jules Lemaître's virulent reactionary article against the taste for foreign literature, marked the turn of the century. Sand was then shown as a precursor of Eliot. French critics concentrated on Eliot's religious and moral development and overlooked her romantic and social aspirations.

On the whole, literary criticism reflected the difficult political relationship between France and England. Unfortunately, as those relationships improved after the first World War, the vogue of Sand and Eliot had passed and a parallel between the two authors was less likely to be made. Eliot was still read, but Sand, with the exception of a few rustic tales, had fallen into oblivion and only a vague image of that "strange, wild, wonderful woman,"² subsisted.

The second factor which obscured the link between Sand and Eliot is that Sand's ideas were often misinterpreted. Sand was too narrowly categorized as a romantic and an idealist, which prevented critics from

²Percy Lubbock (ed.), Elizabeth Barrett Browning in her Letters, (London: Smith and Elder, 1906), p. 286.

seeing her role in the development of Realism. Sand's Lettres d'un voyageur, but also her prefaces to Indiana, La mare au diable, and François le champi, contained her artistic credo. There she explained her belief that the artist must be true to nature and that his mission was to communicate sympathy, an ideal which Eliot adopted.

Finally Lewes's role and his acquaintance with Sand had not been suspected. Thomson is here a pioneer, since she is the first to have remarked Lewes's interest in Sand, but more evidence has been found since her work. The work of Georges Lubin on Sand's correspondence has been illuminating and revealed Lewes's admiration of Sand. Their friendship may have only lasted for a few years, but Sand's comments show it was nonetheless true and sincere.

As we have shown, Sand exerted a profound influence on Eliot, but Eliot did not imitate her in a superficial and amateurish way. Both writers achieved originality and their novels also reflect personal and cultural differences. Certainly "Eliot was no Sand,"³ as Jerome Thale likes to remark, but one must be conscious of the presence of Sand in Eliot. The sentiment of injustice, the need to be loved, the poetry of country life, the necessity to live according to a moral ideal and to sympathize with humanity are aspects which

³Jerome Thale, The Novels of George Eliot, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p.3.

were fully developed by Sand.

Like Sand's description of herself in her autobiography, like Marie and Fadette, Eliot's heroines exhibit the same combination of an ardent compassionate nature which borders on mysticism, with a keen desire for justice. Maggie Tulliver loves and wants to be loved. Dorothea Brooke's story is that of "a mind struggling towards an ideal life."⁴ Her love for Will is mixed with the sentiment that Casaubon and his family have been unjust to him. Eliot is also indebted to Sand for her conception of Realism, the poetry of rustic life to be found in Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede. Also the keen analysis of childhood that one finds in The Mill on the Floss is reminiscent of François le champi and of La petite fadette. The power of passion, the description of existence in terms of conflict, "the various entanglements, weights, blows, clashings, motions, by which things severally go on,"⁵ recall Indiana and Jacques.

However, Eliot's artistic ambition grew wider and her task as a novelist became more complex. Unlike Sand, she had a keen interest in the natural sciences and adapted some of their principles to the novel. Her later novels do not evoke the poetry of country life, but rather show the relationships between characters and milieu. The idea that the novelist

⁴Middlemarch, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 37.

⁵Ibid., p. 241.

must represent the complexity of human life, put forward in Sand's Histoire de ma vie, became Eliot's goal, and for her the most perfect art form became the one which expressed the most intricate relations. It is also interesting to notice that at the time when Sand's theatre career was at its peak, Lewes encouraged Eliot to write a play.

Sand and Eliot differ in their styles. Sand is more spontaneous, often poetic and always simple. Eliot's pen diligently follows her intellect. It is often cramped by scholarship and moralizing intentions. However, in certain passages in which she describes nature and in The Lifted Veil Eliot shows that she too can be poetic and spontaneous.

Finally, the Woman Question interested both Sand and Eliot. Sand was more outspoken than Eliot. She argued above all against the marriage laws. Eliot insisted on education and opportunities for women. They both attempted to disprove the argument of nature which declared that the sexes were far apart, and women inferior in intellect. They showed the influence of milieu on sexual differences, and argued for more union of the sexes in all aspects of life.

Also, they encouraged women to be more expressive in their art. On this point Eliot was more outspoken than Sand, urging women not to imitate male styles, and to be sincere and more true to themselves. They both believed that there was a direct relationship between femaleness and literature, but never maintained that it was radical. In their own way,

they contributed to widening and enriching the female novel, by a keen psychological analysis, a provocative sensuality and depth of intellect. As Walt Whitman remarked: "Both women were formidable: they had, each one had, their own perfections: I am not inclined to decide between them: I consider them essentially akin in their exceptional eminent exalted genius."⁶ Whitman also correctly believed Sand and Eliot had proved that women were as talented as men in the arts: "Can women create, as man creates, in the arts? rank with the master craftsmen? ... It has been a historic question. Well, George Eliot, George Sand, have answered it: have contradicted the denial with a supreme affirmation."⁷

⁶Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, 3 vols., (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1914-53), vol. III, p. 35.

⁷Ibid.

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