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## The Novel Map

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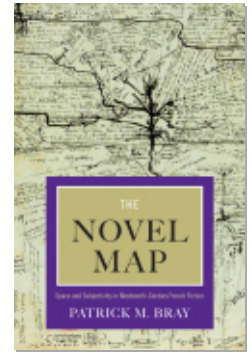
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# PART III

## Sand's Utopian Subjects

Homme, mon ami, tu plaisantes volontiers les oeuvres, fatalement autobiographiques, de la femme. Sur qui comptais-tu donc pour te la peindre, te rebattre d'elle les oreilles, la desservir auprès de toi, te lasser d'elle à la fin? Sur toi-même?\*

—Colette, *La Naissance du jour*, 81–82

Of all the writers I study in this book, George Sand was the most successful, not only in terms of earning a living from her pen, but especially in her international celebrity during her lifetime. As Naomi Schor in *George Sand and Idealism* and others have shown, Sand's innumerable novels and plays awarded her what seemed like an unquestionable place in the French literary canon in the nineteenth century. The most famous woman writer of her time, Sand could not escape a visibility brought on by her exceptionality as artist and woman. This double exceptionality meant that she was already inscribed in a public discourse, caught in the impossible position between authorial subject and the inferior status of feminine subject accorded to her by law and social convention. Unlike Stendhal or Nerval, who wrote unpublished texts meant to explore the limits of their own subjectivities, Sand avoided a candid, personal examination of her own life. Her apparently exhaustive multivolume memoir *Histoire de ma vie*, for all its inclusion of minute detail, leaves out the most well-known episodes of her infamous love affairs. Sand's fictional texts, instead, propose new models of subjectivity that refuse simple rep-

\*Man, my friend, you willingly make fun of women's inevitably autobiographical works. On whom did you count on then to paint them until you were sick of hearing about it, to turn you against her, to make you tired of her in the end? On yourself?

representations of gendered subjects and create new spaces where women and men interact with each other and in society. In the next two chapters, I examine Sand's first signed novel, *Indiana*, and one of her last novels, *Nanon*, each of which use textual space to reinvent social ties and to rectify historical injustice.<sup>1</sup>

George Sand's unique place in history might seem to suggest that her works are not representative of a woman's subject position, that she somehow freed herself from the constraints placed on other women of her time. Many of her male contemporaries, such as Balzac, certainly felt that she was different, masculine, or more like themselves (Naginski, *George Sand: Writing for Her Life*, 1). Yet her texts work through and reconfigure women's subjectivity, independently of her own extraordinary life. Reading Sand's texts biographically, an approach which often yields insights about the emergence of her ideas, nevertheless obscures the richness of Sand's thinking about subjectivity.

Contemporary feminist scholarship confirms what Sand's writing teaches us: the stakes of writing the subject are fundamentally different for women. As Margaret Cohen and others have argued, the choice of literary genre in the first half of the nineteenth century and beyond was largely gender-determined. The hybrid texts of Stendhal, Nerval, Proust, and others combined the genres of realist novel and autobiography. Cohen claims that the dominant literary genres chosen by women were sentimental or idealist novels and that realism was later constructed as a genre on the basis of realist texts written by male authors.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars claim that men more easily overcame the taboo against the exhibitionism inherent to autobiography since Rousseau.<sup>3</sup>

Women's writing was therefore caught, until very recently, in a critical double bind, where women's fiction was read as autobiographical, and any truth in women's autobiography was considered compromised because of the gender of the author.<sup>4</sup> Women writers were seen as women first and writers second, a critical perspective that casts the inevitable glare of autobiography onto the most fictive of their productions. As Domna Stanton remarks, "[autobiography] had been used . . . to affirm that women could not transcend, but only record, the concerns of the private self; thus it had effectively served to devalue their writing" (4).

While the female author's novel was read as autobiography (and her autobiography read as novel), the discourse of autobiography itself reproduced the notion of a universal, and implicitly male, subject.<sup>5</sup> The suspension of the distinction between autobiography and fiction within a single text, as practiced by Stendhal, Nerval, and others, did not provide

a satisfactory option for women writers since the very denial of their authorial position relied on a supposed blurring of autobiography and fiction. Instead of unraveling the authorial subject, which constitutes a positive goal for the male writers I study in this book, in women's writing the affirmation of separate genres, the inscription of a female subjectivity through an autobiographical signature (an "autogynograph"), and an assertion of the right to create truly fictive novels proves to be, ultimately, more liberating.<sup>6</sup> In my readings of Sand's works, I make an effort to avoid interpreting her novels as veiled autobiographies, preferring rather to analyze how her texts invent new subjects.

Just as the nineteenth-century literary field attempted to marginalize women's writings, and thereby determined their textual strategies, women did not enjoy the same freedom of movement, the same ability to explore physical space, as their male counterparts. Political oppression goes hand in hand with restrictions on travel. Gérard de Nerval's wanderings across Europe showed not only his personal conflation of psychological and physical space, but they also revealed the resistance of the bourgeois order to the perceived dangers of vagrancy, all the more exaggerated in the case of women. The sexist ideal of women's domesticity in the nineteenth century was rendered concrete in their exclusion from the political sphere and objectification by the male gaze in public spaces. The *flâneur* as a dispassionate, objective observer of city streets served to solidify the neutral, male, subject position, and his very powers of observation rendered it impossible for the *flâneuse* to walk the streets unnoticed. As Catherine Nesci shows in her book *Le flâneur et les flâneuses*, women writers such as George Sand, Delphine de Girardin, and Flora Tristan employed inventive means of taking back the streets, ranging from cross-dressing to assuming masculine pseudonyms. Their texts, she argues, deployed "counter-myths" of the modern city, constituting urban utopias where women and men could interact as equals (41–42).

Sand's novels, I argue, figure the double bind of women's textual subjectivity—the impossibility of writing either pure fiction or pure autobiography—as a function of textual space. The utopias of Sand's literary imagination are ideological structures that use space to redefine language and society. In *Indiana*, texts and urban spaces are represented as dangers to the heroine's body and sanity. The symbolically rich natural utopia of the Île Bourbon (today the French overseas department La Réunion in the Indian Ocean) renews identity and language for both Indiana and Ralph. *Nanon*, by contrast, portrays a female narrator whose mastery of writing proceeds in tandem with her mastery of maps, and who eventually builds

her own agrarian utopia. These two novels which bookend Sand's long literary career from the aftermath of July 1830 to the tragedy of 1871 suggest that fictional women subjects for Sand overcome the limits imposed on women by their specific historical situations and propose transcendent forms of subjectivity in imaginary spaces of their own creation.