The influence of peasant life in the works of George Sand

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THE INFLUENCE OF PEASANT LIFE IN THE WORKS OF GEORGE SAND

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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George Sand enhanced nineteenth century French Literature with a variety of themes and types of literary compositions. This paper treats her profound ability to depict the peasant in the environment of his rustic conditions, his manners and his activities of daily life. It signifies the "simplicity of maturity" as a specific period in George Sand's career as a writer. It further implies the idea that the word "peasant" is not treated simply as an economical status but as a symbol of life which is closest to nature in its purest form.

The study is limited to the four novels by George Sand which are considered, "Les chefs-d'oeuvre du genre idyllique en France." They are *La Mare au Diable*, *La petite Fadette*, *François le Champi* and *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*. These works enable one to conclude that peasant life had a definite influence in the writings of George Sand and that her ability to depict peasant life features the best expression of her talent.

It is hoped that this study will be beneficial to students of French literature, and that it will motivate them to read the rustic novels discussed in it.

It is with esteem that the writer of this paper acknowledges the advice and assistance of Dr. Benjamin F. Hudson whose helpful guidance has been invaluable. The writer is also indebted to Stetson University Library and Trevor Arnett Library for the loan of books used in this study.
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CHAPTER I

GEORGE SAND - HER LIFE AND INSPIRATIONS

The first fifty years of the life of George Sand are emphasized in this chapter. It was during this time, 1804-1845, that she was inspired to write the works with which this study is concerned. The period is important because it embraces the childhood which led to the development of an extremely vivid imagination, the beauties of nature, and a personal respect for communion with God. She experienced an unsuccessful marriage which led, paradoxically, to a profound respect for love. During these years her experiences contributed greatly to her prominence in French literature. Her career as a writer was an undeniable success.

The year of her birth, 1804, is of historical significance because it marked the beginning of the first Empire under Napoleon Bonaparte. He crowned himself Emperor of France at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. 1 On July 5, of the same year and in the same city, Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin was born. 2 Her importance in nineteenth century French literature is comparable to Napoleon's greatness in French history. Her ancestry provided an introduction to a varied and stimulating life. Aurore descended from the king of Poland, Auguste II and Aurore Koenigsmarck. Maurice de Saxe, her grandfather, was a field marshal and one of the greatest military men of his century. 3

In 1778, Mme Dupin de Francueil

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2 Bertha Thomas, George Sand (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), p. 4.
gave birth to Maurice Dupin, Aurore's father.¹ Her mother, Sophie Victoire, was the daughter of a master bird seller. She had the uncomfortable youth of a poor girl in troubled times. In 1800, in Milan, Maurice Dupin found her in his general's chamber. A relationship grew and resulted in marriage one month before the birth of Aurore Dupin who later became known as George Sand.² Paternally, therefore, she was an aristocrat and maternally she belonged to the people.

During her early childhood, her father, who was away in Madrid, saw very little of his daughter. Sophie Victoire gave in to the loneliness of being away from her husband and carried Aurore with her to visit him. Maurice carried them both to Nohant to live with his mother. As he was leaving La Châtre to return to his post, he was accidentally killed.³

Nohant was the setting of Aurore's major childhood experiences. It is located about three miles from the little town of La Châtre, in the department of Indre, part of the old province of Berry. The manor is a plain grey house with steep mansard roofs, of the time of Louis XVI. It is surrounded by court yards, a large flower garden and woods.⁴

Her grandfather had been a disciple of Rousseau, and his principles of natural education had so far survived him that Aurore was allowed to mix with the peasants and to grow up a complete tomboy until she reached the age of fourteen. During this period, she was entrusted to the care of Deschartres who tutored her. He made no differences between boys and girls. He was of the opinion that both should be

²Ibid., p. 27.
³Ibid., p. 34.
⁴Thomas, op. cit., p. 8.
given the same instruction and education. Aurore even dressed in boy's attire.¹

Sometimes Aurore spent entire days in the garden and in the fields with Ursule, her little peasant friend who lived at Nohant, and Hippolyte, her half-brother.² They roamed the countryside of Berry. Aurore picked strawberries, found bird's eggs, watched the cattle as they grazed in the prairie and mixed well with the little villagers. She not only watched them grow up but she matured along with them. If a storm came up while they were out in the open, they would take refuge in an old shed or a delapidated barn. Then, their greatest pleasure was to tell horrible and mysterious tales, the same type as those told by the little camarades from Biegne Loug by Turgenev. Aurore listened with the same pleasure as her friends to stories which had been told by the old chanvreur (the peasant charged with burning the hemp for all the village). While doing his work in a shed or a deserted house, this chanvreur, Etienne Depardieu, told the rustic legends of Berry. This is the naive and illiterate Berry of yesteryears, nourished by its traditional, religious and superstitious beliefs, which impressed itself on the mind and imagination of George Sand. She spoke the language and lived according to local customs and habits. She had an intimate knowledge of the laborious peasant life and knew by name all the families of Nohant, their needs, their desires, their interests and even their way of thinking.³ Aurore's childhood at Nohant provided some of the experiences which were rekindled in her pastoral novels.

³Karenine, op. cit., p. 136.
In spite of her ideas of libre-penseuse, in 1817, the grandmother judged it necessary for Aurore to make her first communion. The child then spent two years in a Parisian convent, le couvent des Dames Augustines anglaises. She adjusted well to convent life and developed a profound respect for God and the Catholic Religion. After having left the convent and much later in her life, liberal ideas prompted her to turn to deism.¹

Aurore Dupin became Mme Dudevant on September 10, 1822, nine months after the death of her grandmother.² Her husband, Casimir Dudevant, was the natural son and adopted heir of a Gascon Baron of the Empire. Casimir was a country squire with the country squire's taste.³ Hunting was his favorite sport. For nine years, 1822 - 1831, the future George Sand played the role of wife and housekeeper. Most of this time was spent at Nohant; Casimir became the manager of Nohant. Two children were born, Maurice in 1823 and Solange in 1828. The marriage ended in divorce.⁴ Her inspirations and experiences during this time influenced, for the most part, periods of her writing career, which did not include her pastorals.

Aurore Dupin began her career as a writer around 1831, when, separated from her husband, she had to procure a means of living. She made famous the pseudonym, George Sand, at an early stage in her career; this name originated from a collaboration with Jules Sandeau. Each year for forty years she wrote one or two novels, short stories, news articles, biographies or critical essays.⁵ Elme Marie Caro of l'Acadé-

¹Karenine, op. cit., p. 148.
²Maurois, op. cit., p. 70.
⁴Tbid., p. 174.
⁵Gustave Lanson, Histoire Illustrée de la Littérature Française (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1923), II, 229.


CHAPTER II

THE FOUR RUSTIC NOVELS

The novels are presented in this chapter with emphasis on their most outstanding individual characteristics. The author's immediate inspiration for the subject matter presented in them is given special attention. La Mare au diable exhibits a reaction to the philosophy of an engraving by Holbein; the authenticity of Berrichon people is also of importance in this work. La Petite Fadette was written as a means of easing the tension caused by the Revolution of 1848, as can be seen in the famous preface to this novel. A struggle against social prejudices is presented as the high-light of François le champi. Les Maîtres sonneurs, the last of the four novels, is an example of the author's style at its peak.

George Sand's first tale of exclusively peasant life is La Mare au diable. It was written in the autumn of 1845. She was inspired to write this novel after she had made a comparison between Holbein's engraving of a ploughman and a real scene of a Ploughman. Simulachres de la mort, Holbein's engraving, presented the sad image of a miserable laborer. George Sand wished to paint the image of a happy peasant as she had seen him in real life. This idea is introduced in the first chapter of the novel which, along with the second chapter, is impregnated with a humanitarian philosophy. After a description of Holbein's engraving, the author states, "Nous n'avons plus affaire à la mort, mais à la vie." She further implies that everyone should be happy, peasant as well as nobleman. In a general opinion of art, she reflects her belief that the mission of art is one of sentiment and love. This idea,

1 Maurois, op. cit., p. 374.
3 Ibid., p. 8.
which contradicts the implications of Holbein's engraving, is that, because "La nature est éternellement jeune, belle et généreuse," those who work closest to it should enjoy a spirit of happiness.¹

In the novel, George Sand describes and presents regions and places which by experience were familiar to her. Belair, where the hero of the story lived, is a small town situated at one and a half kilometers to the north of Nohant. La mare is located in the Chanteloube woods. Other regions mentioned with which George Sand had been familiar were Ormeaux, Fourche and Mers.² In this authentic setting, the author brought to life some authentic Berrichon people. She took for a model a peasant named Germain Renard and the young girl he married, Marie Jouhanneau. He is honest, courageous and pure, but he is intellectually dull. Marie is alert, and is the epitome of peasant girls whom George Sand desired to idealize. The author used these characters to exhibit some general traits of the Berrichon: their simple souls, their mediocre interests, their superstitions, and their regional dialect.

The story itself is a very simple one of Germain, the ploughman with three children, who had been a widower for two years. His father-in-law encouraged him to re-marry because he needed a wife to take care of his children. Maurice, the father-in-law, had already chosen for him a widow who lived on the other side of the woods. One Saturday he sent Germain to visit her. He carried with him his son, Pierre, and Marie, a young peasant girl, who was going to work as a servant on a nearby farm. The weather was extremely foggy and they got off trail. Germain and his companion


²Ibid., p. xviii.
had to spend the night under an oak tree near la mare au diable. Germain, ten years her senior, fell in love with Marie and married her.

The contrasting characteristics of Marie and Germain represent an interesting account of the author's ability to create images. Marie was introduced as the young shepherdess who lived with her mother, the poor widow, Guilette. Guilette described Marie in this manner:

Marie est courageuse autant que fille riche et à la tête d’un gros travail puisse l’être. Elle ne reste pas un instant les bras croisés, et quand nous n’avons pas d’ouvrage, elle nettoie et frotte nos pauvres meubles qu’elle rend clairs comme des miroirs. C’est un enfant qui vaut son pesant d’or.

During her trip with Germain, Marie exhibited her ability to be helpful. She took care of Germain’s son Pierre, with competence. She said to Germain, "Donnez moi l’enfant, je le porterai forte bien, et j’empêcherai mieux que vous, que la cape, se dérangeant, ne le laisse à découvert." Marie also helped Germain to decide what to do while in the woods. For example, she prompted, "La pluie ne perce pas la feuillée de ces grands chenes, et nous pouvons allumer du feu." The mare they rode had run away with their provisions on its back. They had no way of lighting a fire. Marie showed Germain how to start the fire. When Germain complained that he was hungry, she reminded him that he had a sack of rabbits and game; this was a gift Maurice was sending to his friend. Out in the open woods, without pots pans or other cooking utensils, this energetic young lady cooked a meal. Throughout the novel she displayed much good humor and good sense. In contrast to this animated

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2 Ibid., p. 61.
3 Ibid., p. 63.
personality, Germain revealed deep emotional feelings which were the results of his experiences. He was introduced as the humble son-in-law listening to the advice of Maurice, the head of the house. Germain mourned his wife's death and remained faithful to her memory. The author affirmed this impression in the following statement:

Il n'avait aimé qu'une femme dans sa vie, et depuis son veuvage, il n'avait ri et folâttré avec aucune autre. ... Il était triste. Il se passait peu de jour qu'il ne pleurât sa femme en secret.

At this point in the story, he felt that no other love could console him. As mysteriously as if by magic, he fell in love with Marie. In attempting to persuade Marie to marry him, Germain revealed for the first time his "bon sens de paysan." The following statement is an example of his expression:

J'ai toujours eu de l'amitié pour toi, et à présent je me sens si amoureux que si tu me demandais de faire toute ma vie tes mille volontés, je te le jurerais sur l'heure. Vois, je t'en prie, comme je t'aime, et tâche d'oublier mon âge. Pense que c'est une fausse idée qu'on se fait quand on croit qu'un homme de trente ans est vieux. Une jeune fille craint de se faire critiquer en prenant un homme qui a dix ou douze ans de plus qu'elle, parce que ce n'est pas la coutume du pays; mais j'ai entendu dire que dans d'autre pays on ne regardait point à cela. ... D'ailleurs, les années ne font pas toujours l'âge. Cela dépend de la force et de la santé qu'on a.

There are also scenes in the novel in which Germain exhibited his piety. He said to his son, Pierre, "Il faut toujours prier." Another example of his piety was illustrated after the wedding. "Il se mit à genoux dans le sillon qu'il allait refendre, et fit la prière du matin avec une effusion 

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2 Ibid., p. 86.
3 Ibid., p. 74.
si grande que deux larmes coulèrent sur ses joues encore humide de sueur." Again Germain's tendency to be extremely emotional is exhibited. His belief in superstitions was indicated in the middle of the woods when he said:

Je crois que nous sommes ensorcelés, car ces bois ne sont pas assez grand pour qu'on s'y perde. ... Il y a deux heures que nous y tournons sans pouvoir en sortir.

This emotional, pious, and superstitious Germain is George Sand's representation of the peasant as a simple laborer. Marie is her ideal of the young peasant girl. They are admirable characters. The differences in their personalities are skillfully combined to render this contrasting element a supreme example of the author's ability to portray the peasant and his way of life.

In many instances the author gives insight into the lives and customs of the Berrichon peasants. In chapter five she notes, "La chasteté des moeurs est une tradition sacrée dans certaines campagnes éloignées du mouvement corrompu des grandes villes." With this idea the entire novel reflects a tone of an almost unbelievable purity of the Berrichons. For example, when little Marie leaves home on a trip alone with Germain to be placed as a hired servant in a stranger's household, no one even implies that unchaste activities should be considered. The purity of the minds of these people is underlined by the evil thoughts of an intruder. As far as religion is concerned, they are Catholic as well as superstitious; this mixture of Catholicism and superstition is one of the characteristic traits of "l'âme berrichonne." It is customary also for peasants

1 George Sand, La Mare au diable (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962), p. 175.
2 Ibid., p. 60.
3 Ibid., p. 43.
to marry when they are young. Maurice explained to Germain, "Tu approches de la trentaine, mon garçon, et tu sais que, passé cet âge-là, dans nos pays, un homme est réputé trop vieux pour entrer en ménage." The entire story builds up to the marriage, the only grand festival in the life of the peasant; it is elaborately carried on for three days. The author ends *La Mare au diable* with a vivid illustration of the idea with which she began; everyone should be happy, nobleman and peasant alike.

After three months and a half of active participation in the Revolution of 1848, George Sand expressed a desire to plunge into the gentleness of the simple life of the country. At Nohant, she wrote *La Petite Fadette* during the summer of the same year. In beginning the novel, the author wrote a charming preface. It was published under the title, *Pourquoi nous revenons à nos moutons*. In it she reports a conversation which she had with her friend François Rollinat. They discussed the problems and misfortunes caused by the Revolution. She implied that though one can not expect a bed of roses during a revolution, it was time to settle down. She further indicated that from troubled times a new and more beautiful life would be born, invoking the idea that after winter comes the spring. Her talent as a writer, her compassion for the peasants and her unhappy experiences during the Revolution enabled her to transpose the reminiscences of her youth and tales told by the old chanvreur into a delightful work of art.

The initial theme of *La Petite Fadette* is the story of

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a set of twins, Landry and Sylvinet; it is developed parallel
to the story of Fadette, an important character toward whom
the interest tends to converge. The twins were born in the
village of La Cosse, not far from Nohant. Old superstitions
of neighboring peasants had the mother to believe that one
of them would not live. As they grew from childhood to adult-
hood they became partly estranged by character but they re-
mained wholly united by affection. Fadette is introduced as a
little sorcerer who lives bravely in the woods and helps her
grandmother who dies and leaves her a large sum of money. She
undergoes a complete change in character and becomes a very
sincere and beautiful maiden. She and Landry marry, Sylvinet
goes into the service of his country and becomes a good soldier.
The life of Fadette is strongly marked by the childhood of
George Sand. The condition of her parents, her father's death,
and her manner of living like a tomboy indicate experiences
Aurore had at Nohant as a child. The two themes of the novel,
the friendship of the two brothers, and the sentimental in-
trigue of Fadette and Landry are gracefully interlaced. The
creation of this story which is so delightfully told was
prompted by the horrors of the civil war.

The images of nature and descriptions of characters
constitute one of the principal elements of this novel. The
images of nature are important because they are expressed by
the peasants and as such, they become a part of the interesting
language. Though it is prose the rich and varied similes,
metaphors, and other figures of speech have caused it to be
referred to as a kind of poesie paysanne. Descriptions be-
come details which stimulate the imagination of the reader.
In a conversation with Landry, Sylvinet states, "Le
foin quand on le rendre, c'est comme une odeur de
baume qui reste tout le long du chemin."1 Another example

1George Sand, La Petite Fadette (Paris: Garnier Frères,
of the poetic nature of this language is, "La belle terre rouge, humide de la pluie d'automne." These expressions are really specific but because of their word power, they create general pictures. The author uses this same method to describe and create images of characters. "Deux bessons qui sont fier comme deux coqs." and, "Sa figure pale et ses mains mignonnes avait l'air aussi net et aussi doux que la blanche épine du printemps." are examples. The former is somewhat general but the image is vividly portrayed. In the latter, an image of Fadette is created by using the most humble details. Phrases and sentences such as these are found throughout the novel. They are a part of the presentation of the universe as the peasants saw it. Thus, the poetic temperament which unfitted George Sand for success in politics aided her in finding consolation in rustic life.

General characteristics of the peasant and his way of life are clearly illustrated in this novel. In chapter two the novelist defines peasant wisdom as that which is made, "Moitié de patience et moitié de confiance dans l'effet du temps." Barbeau, the twins' father, is the chief example of one who practiced well this idea. Professional pride, another trait which characterizes the peasant, was usually exhibited as he viewed a well cultivated field, an animal well cared for or the prairie with which he was familiar. Landry had been hired out to Father Caillaud. One day when Sylvinet went to visit him, he was immediately inspired to show off the fields and animals which he had cared for and helped to grow.

2 Ibid., p. 80.
3 Ibid., p. 170.
4 Ibid., p. 35.
5 Ibid., p. 57.
His father and other villagers had this same type pride, for peasants were extremely proud of their work and their property. Superstitions also played an important role in the life of the peasant. In chapter eight the author introduced Mother Fadet by stating, "Dans la campagne on n'est jamais savant sans être quelque peu sorcier."\(^1\) Mother Fadet lived in the woods away from the other villagers. They went to her, however, for advice concerning illnesses and other problems which they had. Landry asked her to help him find his brother, Sylvinet, who had run away into the woods. Mother Fadet and little Fadette hold the position of emphasizing the superstitions of the peasants in this novel. The author further confirmed the belief that the peasant was superstitious when, in referring to Landry, she wrote:

> Il n'eût pas été de son âge et de son pays s'il avait aimé à se trouver seul la nuit sur les chemins, surtout dans l'automne, qui est une saison où les sorciers et les follets commencent à se donner du bon temps.\(^2\)

Belief in superstitions, professional pride and wisdom are three traits by which the peasants in this novel may be commonly characterized.

One could not complete a discussion of *La Petite Fadette* without citing an example of the author's superb ability to create characters. Fadette is most outstanding. She presents a portrayal of two completely different personalities. First, she was the little mischievous girl who hampered Landry with her pranks. Ugly, and unfashionably clothed, she roamed the woods and became familiar with many of nature's secrets. The villagers called her Grelet for *grillon* which means cricket. The children were afraid of her but she feared nothing. She spoke with a hateful meaning and her actions revealed that she was full of spite. One night after she had helped


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 103
Landry out of a predicament she made him promise to dance the bourrée with her after mass the following Sunday; the bourrée is a little folk dance. All the people of the village danced after mass and Landry had been accustomed to dancing but not with Fadette. No one wanted to dance with an ugly little sorcerer. Landry was forced to dance with her because of his promise. Though Fadette did it spitefully, this dance led to a metamorphosis in her personality. The author also changed the manner of presenting her. Fadette had been exhibited through the eyes and opinions of other characters. From this point to the end of the novel she revealed her character in her own words. She began to dress more appropriately than before and her cleaned face appeared beautiful. She became serious about life. In a gentle and sweet voice she expressed herself almost philosophically. One night she stopped Landry in the woods and asked him to sit down beside her and talk. He did not want to sit there. This is what she replied to him:

Tu ne trouve point l'endroit agréable parce que vous autres riches vous êtes difficiles. Il vous faut du beau gazon pour vous asseoir dehors, et vous pouvez choisir dans vos pré et dans vos jardin les plus belles places et le meilleur ombrage. Mais ceux qui n'ont rien à eux n'en demandent pas si long au bon Dieu, et ils s'accommodent de la première pierre venue pour poser leur tête. Les épines ne blessent point leur pieds, et là où ils se trouvent, ils observent tout ce qui est joli et avenant au ciel et sur la terre. Il n'y a point de vilain endroit, Landry, pour ceux qui connaissent la vertu et la douceur de toute les choses que Dieu a faites. Moi, je sais, sans être sorcière, à quoi sont bonnes les moindres herbes que tu écrases sous tes pieds; et quand je sais leur usage, je les regarde et ne méprise ni leur odeur ni leur figure. Je te dis cela, Landry, pour t'enseigner tout à l'heure une autre chose qui se rapporte aux âmes chrétiennes aussi bien qu'aux fleurs des jardins et aux ronces des carrières; c'est que l'on méprise
trop souvent ce qui ne paraît ni beau ni bon, et que, par là, on se prive de ce qui est secourable et salutaire.

This expression from the lips of a little peasant girl includes the humanitarian philosophy of the nineteenth century. At this time Fadette became more important than before because she expressed the philosophy in which the author was profoundly interested. After the conversation with Landry, Fadette continued to exhibit the beautiful and wise manners which caused her to be esteemed by all the villagers. Even after her grandmother died and she became rich, she still adhered to living the life of an ideal peasant.

Fadette is a delightful character. Though she is quite mischievous in the beginning of the novel, she was never one to be hated. Her sensitive and paradoxically strong heart experienced the warm or inflictive emotions of love, hate, loneliness, depression and happiness. She is George Sand's creation which exemplifies the height of the ability of the author to create complex but charmingly human characters.

The emotional experiences which pervade the peasant and help him mature are clearly presented in this novel. The images of nature from the peasants' tongues reveal a poetic language. The customs of rustic life provide an appropriate setting for idealized characters. These things are combined with other elements of the novel to make La Petite Fadette an interesting account of peasant life.

With François le champi George Sand abandons her flight to escape reality and expresses her disapproval of social prejudices. In March of 1843, a little girl named Franchette was found roaming the streets of La Châtre. The nuns of the

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1George Sand, La Petite Fadette (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1958), pp. 139-140.
local orphanage found her a home but she refused to stay there. The Mother Superior of the orphanage sent the little girl out of the village in a carriage and instructed the driver to abandon her on the road. George Sand and her friends, notified of this scandal, found Franchette and entrusted her to an old and poor woman of Nohant. She used this theme in François le champi. The main idea invokes a question. Since the state in which the foundling finds himself is not his fault, why is he disdained? Motivated by this idea, George Sand makes of her foundling an honorable man. Parallel to this theme is another one which presents the passion of a young man for an older woman, or one who is mature. Madeleine loved François as her son; he loved her as his mother. This love gradually evolved into a different passion which ended in marriage. Traces of this same type of relationship may be found in the author's own life.

The pastoral setting is as explicit in François le champi as it is in the novels previously discussed. The novelist endeavored to be carefully exact geographically and as usual, she wrote in a familiar setting. The action of the story takes place between La Châtre and Aigurande. The Blanchet and Vertaud mills add the necessary atmosphere to a story about millers. The language used in the novel adds considerably to the reality of peasant life. The author implied in the foreword that language might be a problem because the story was written during the time when the Parisiens spoke a refined language and the peasant knew only the language of his region. She compromised and arrived at an acceptable literary language.

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2 Ibid., p. 184.
3 Ibid., p. 212.
The novel itself is another picturesque study of Berrichon customs. François, the foundling, is entrusted to the care of old Isabelle. Madeleine, the miller's wife, informally adopts him and nurses him back to health. When he is old enough to be hired out, the miller pays François a small salary and regards him as a hired hand. The custom of hiring out young men and women was common among the peasants. Two special days were set aside for this purpose. June 24, la Saint-Jean, was the main day, but those who were not employed on this day could seek employment on November 11, la Saint-Martin.1 Cadet Blanchet, the miller, was undeniably the head of his household until after his mother's death. He then began to neglect his work as well as his wife; this was not a common habit of the hard working peasant. François went into the service of Jean Vertaud. After François heard that Blanchet had died, he discovered that he had grown to love his mother Madeleine so much that he was very unhappy away from her. One day he revealed to Vertaud that he was a foundling. Peasants looked with scorn and disdain upon foundlings. When François was talking to his mother Madeleine one day, he asked:

C'est pourquoi ils croient me faire en m'appelant champi. Est-ce que c'est mal d'être champi?
Mais non, mon enfant, puisque ce n'est pas ta faute.2

This also caused François to worry. In understanding his unhappiness, Jeanette, Vertaud's daughter, wished to comfort him. She made François aware of the fact that he loved Madeleine with a passion more intimate than that of the mother-son relationship, and helped him make arrangements for

2Ibid., p. 261.
the marriage. This neighborly type friendship is another trait which was quite prevalent among the peasants. In this novel the author presented the emphasis the peasants placed on being hired out, their disdainful regards for foundlings, and their good neighborly type behavior as important customs.

The hero and heroine are depicted as very pious persons. The author indicated that the candor, grace and charm of primitive life rendered the peasants religious. In expressing sympathy for them she exalted their simple qualities of life by writing:

Je voudrais être paysan; le paysan qui ne sait pas lire, celui à qui Dieu a donné de bon instincts, une organisation paisible, une conscience droite; et je m'imagine que, dans cet engourdissement des facultés inutiles, dans cette ignorance des goûts dépravés, je serais aussi heureux que l'homme primitif rêvé par Jean Jacque.  

François' pious qualities are strongly exhibited in statements such as, "J'aime mieux suffrir le mal que le rendre." Those are his own words, but the author further expresses his purity with this idea:

Il arriva donc en âge de quinze ans sans connaître la moindre malice, sans avoir l'idée du mal, sans que sa bouche eût jamais répété un vilain mot, et sans que ses oreilles l'eussent compris.

Madeleine is portrayed as being equally as pious as François. She is a good example of the paysanne religieuse. She prayed often and amused herself by reading the lives of the saints. Her husband, and some unpleasant events in her life, placed her in a situation which was not at all ideal.

2 Ibid., p. 238.
4 Ibid., p. 263.
for a young wife. The novelist affirmed, "Il fallait que Madeleine fût une femme bien chrétienne pour vivre ainsi seule avec une vieille fille et deux enfants." This statement also indicates that George Sand sympathized with her pious peasants.

In François le champi the berrichon customs are portrayed in their most simple forms. The naive characteristics of the peasants are exhibited in an environment of piousness. By expressing her dislike for prejudiced actions and her sympathy for the peasants, George Sand presented a realistic account of peasant life.

Les Maitres sonneurs completes the series of rustic novels. Many critics regard it as George Sand's masterpiece. Ten years before it was written the author related publicly a conversation which she had had with a piper. He revealed that he had learned to play in the woods and the people who taught him were woodcutters. From this bit of inspiration she dreamed of writing a berrichon opera and even consulted the great composer, Gounod, for this project. In an attempt to depict more clearly than before a true picture of peasant life, she assembled her ideas into what became the richest and most dramatic of her rustic novels. It is presented in thirty-two veillées narrated by Tiennet which is short for Etienne Depardieu, the name of the old chanvreur of Nohant. As the title suggests, it is ostensibly a story about musicians. The musical theme of the story recalls the importance of music in the author's own life. During her childhood at Nohant her grandmother was faithful.

4 Karenine, op.cit., I, 137.
to the family tradition of cultivating a love and respect for music in the hearts of all its members. Thus, George Sand became intimately acquainted with music at an early stage in her life. Later she became the friend of celebrated musicians such as Franz Liszt, Pauline Viardot and Frederic Chopin.

The story is told in the manner of the Berrichon storyteller. Tiennet, Brulette his cousin, and Joseph are friends from infancy. Joseph, who is rather introverted, appears to be a little simple. He wants to be a musician but he can not sing. He learns to play a bagpipe and consents to give Brulette and Tiennet a private concert. This scene is a mystical interpretation of the powers of music. Joseph had made the acquaintance of Huriel, a muleteer from Bourbonnais. He left Berry with Huriel in order to perfect himself in his art; Huriel's father was a maître sonneur. A maître sonneur was a master musician who was a member of an organization of musicians who called themselves Les Maîtres Sonneurs. Soon Huriel returned to Berry with news that Joseph was ill. Tiennet and Brulette went to the Bouronnais Woods to care for him. Thérence, Huriel's sister, and the Grand-Bûcheur, his father, received them. Here they had occasion to see and learn the customs of a people whom, because of hearsay, they had unjustly criticized. The two families became close friends. The men even risked their lives for one another. Tiennet, Joseph and Huriel were charmed by Brulette's beauty. Huriel was finally the winner of her hand. Tiennet married Thérence. Joseph, in an attempt to become a maître sonneur had to undergo an initiation which had serious consequences for him. He was later found dead.

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2 Salomon, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
Throughout the novel Berry and Bourbonnais oppose each other. The two provinces had their heroes, Tiennet from one and Huriel from the other. Both of them attempted to win Brulette's hand. They never expressed this to each other in words but the atmosphere of competition was always present. The girls were in opposition because both of them were interested in Joseph. Thérènse, in her Bourbonnais manner, expressed her dislike quite frankly in the following statement:

Je la connais qui ne se pouvait surmonter davantage! J'ai assez questionné Joseph et mon frère pour juger, à sa conduite, qu'elle est un coeur ingrat et un esprit trompeur. C'est une coquette, voilà ce qu'elle est, votre Berrichon, et toute personne franche a le droit de la détester.

This strong sentiment of resentment lost its emotional touch only after they were able to observe one another soberly. There remained, however, the general atmosphere of a conflict between the different manners and customs of the two provinces. Toward the end of the novel, the Bourbonnais victory appeared almost assured. Brulette indicated this idea when she said to Tiennet, "Il faudra, je le vois, que le Berry soit vaincu en nous par le Bourbonnais." The differences of the characters in ideas, in personalities and in manners were mingled into a web which the author skillfully untangled. The novel ends with the two families living together in harmony. The method of using two regions instead of one is one of the elements which distinguishes Les Maîtres sonneurs from the author's previous rustic novels.

The novelist illuminated every important scene with music. Every Sunday Brulette, Tiennet, and Joseph went to Mass together. After services, the priest, who was a maître sonneur, played music for them to dance by. Once, when


2Ibid., p. 475.
Joseph ran away into the forest, Tiennet went after him. The first thing that invoked his attention was the sound of mysterious music. The young people traveled to Bourbonnais; the initial indication of welcome they received was the Grand-Bûcheur playing his music. Huriel affirmed, "Mais écoutez! Voilà qui me réjouit le coeur! C'est mon père qui cornemuse, je reconnais sa manière." After the visitors from Berry were accepted, the woodcutters and muleteers gathered in an opening in the forest to dance to the music of the Grand-Bûcheur and to welcome them formally. Joseph's two important scenes are the two in which the novelist presented him playing his pipe; he played for Brulette and Tiennet, and before the musicians of the Maîtres sonneurs. After his demonstration the chairman of the group informed Joseph, "Le conseil des maîtres sonneurs du pays vous fait assavoir que, par vos talent sans pareils, vous êtes reçu maître sonneur de première classe." The constant allusions to music had a bizarre effect on the characters. This is illustrated in the following expression by Tiennet:

Cette musique, dans un lieu si peu fréquenté, me parut endiablée. Elle chantait trop fort pour être naturelle, et surtout elle chantait un air si triste et si singulier, que ça ne ressemblait à aucun air connu sur la terre chrétienne. Je doublai le pas, mais je m'arrêtai, étonné d'un autre bruit. Tandis que la musique braillait d'un côté, une clochette sonnait de l'autre, et ces deux résonances venaient sur moi, comme pour m'empêcher d'avancer ou de reculer.

As regards the style, the problem of language is mainly to be considered. The author had to strike a happy medium between the language of the peasant and the language of the

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2Ibid., p. 437.
3Ibid., p. 52.
people of Paris. She solved this problem by choosing from the patois some picturesque terms which were not considered as vulgar, and which were easily comprehensible. She also created some new locutions either by adding a word or an unusual metaphor, by suppressing a word, or by an arbitrary modification of a construction. For example, "Je perdis ma connaissance." or "dormir tout d'une lampée."¹ She used many infinitives. The following is an example:

Comme Thérence avait termoigné à Brulette ne vouloir point de ma compagnie pour aller trouver les muletiers, souhaitant ne pas lui déplaire, je me déterminai de la suivre à portée de l'ouie, sans me montrer à elle, si elle n'avait pas l'occasion de crier à l'aide.²

The awkwardness of this long sentence illustrates rather well George Sand's tendency to disguise the current language in order to present a style which vividly represents the peasant's mode of speech.

Les Maîtres sonneurs is a work which includes the same characteristics of the rustic novel as those which had preceded it. It is longer, however, and more complex in form and sentiment. The main plot is supported by two sub-plots, its setting includes the vast region of two provinces, and its characters exhibit a conglomeration of personalities. It is a delightful pastoral, woodland fantasy in which the gay, light-hearted aspects of life predominate. It does have, however, its tragic features and its serious import. As a novel in which music plays such an important role, it has the ingenious distinction of being told from the point of view of the inartistic and non-musical Tiennet, a typical Berrichon. His language, along with other elements of the presentation, plays an important part in making Les Maîtres

² Ibid., p. 236.
sonneurs the masterpiece of the rustic novels.

The individual traits of the four novels discussed in this chapter are instrumental in helping one understand this series of works from the pen of George Sand. They have many common characteristics the most important of which will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER III
CONCLUSIONS OF STUDY

Many activities and experiences caused the life and works of George Sand to be related to peasant life in several ways. First of all, she was close to the peasants personally because she lived among them. As a child at Nohant, she grew up with them. Ursule, her little playmate and closest friend, was a little peasant girl. It was with Ursule and other peasants that Aurore met the old chanvreur, Etienne Dispardeau. He appears as the story-teller in Les Maîtres sonneurs. This type of personal relationship with the peasants was provided for George Sand by her ancestors, especially her grandfather who was a disciple of Rousseau. The location of Nohant is ideally pastoral and this is the place where George Sand lived most of her life. After she became Mme Dudevant, her social status was not one which was conducive to mixing with peasants as she did as a child, but she was constantly surrounded by them as servants and as foundlings. In her introduction to François le champi she stated that she had had several foundlings reared at Nohant.\(^1\) Her personal relationship with peasants, therefore, was close enough for accurate observation.

As she observed their habits and customs, she was entranced by their way of life. Their dress, their speech, their superstitious beliefs, their religious devotions and their festivals were extremely inspiring to her. She frequently pointed out the eccentricities among them. In making it known that Fadette in La Petite Fadette did not dress as the other young girls of the village, she stated, "Elle avait une coiffe toute jaunie par le renfermé."\(^2\) In the foreword


to *François le champi* she exalts the language in the following explanation:

*C'est pour moi une cause de désespoir que d'être force d'ecrire la langue de l'Académie, quand j'en sais beaucoup mieux une autre qui est si superieur pour rendre tout un ordre d'émotions, de sentiment et de pensee.*

All the novels portrayed a bit of superstitious belief but her most mystifying scene is found in *Les Maitres sonneurs* when she illustrates the power and effect of music on the human imagination. The wedding festival was so esteemed by Mme Sand that it merited in *Le Mare au diable* an event by event and day by day explanation. Examples of inspirations from peasant manners are unlimited in the rustic novels.

George Sand was engaged in many activities which were far removed from the life she portrayed in the pastorals. Several love affairs placed her in Paris, in the busy and chaotic life of the city. Her interest in literature required frequent company with prominent writers such as Saint-Beuve, Prosper Mérimée and Honoré de Balzac. Politics also caught her eye. She wrote many articles and participated in the Revolution of 1848. She became an integral part of all these events, but when she wished to gain peace of mind and consolation she returned to the simple and quiet life of the country. In the preface to *La Petite Fadette* she wrote, "Revenons à nos moutons, c'est-à-dire à nos bergeries." By so doing, she used the pastoral setting of peasant life as a means of escape from chaotic times. These experiences did much to inspire the creation of the rustic novels.

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In these novels the author does not attempt to present a general opinion of nature. She only inserted a few details which are necessary for atmosphere and creation of character. She viewed natural scenery as an artistic work from the hands of God. She gave her reason in this manner:

La nature est une œuvre d'art, mais Dieu est le seul artiste qui existe, et l'homme n'est qu'un arrangeur de mauvais goût. La nature est belle, le sentiment s'exhale de tous ses pores; l'amour, la jeunesse, la beauté y sont imperissables. Mais l'homme n'a pour les sentir et les exprimer que des moyens absurdes et des facultés misérables. Il vaudrait mieux qu'il ne s'en mêlât pas, qu'il fût muet et se renfermât dans la contemplation.

As a specific kind of literature the four novels contain eight common characteristics:

(1) They are regionalistic. George Sand, who was geographically exact, placed the action of these novels in the province of Berry. Les Maîtres sonneurs includes Berry and Bourbonnais. Places such as La Vauvre, La Priché, La Cosse, Nohant and the entire department of L'Indre are readily recognizable to readers who are familiar with this region of France.

(2) The settings are pastoral. La Mare au diable is found in the Chanteloube Woods. Its main character is a ploughman who earns his living by tilling the soil. François le champi acquaints the reader with beautiful fields of grain and the dramatic mill. La Petite Fadette introduces the reader to small scale farming and the mystifying woods. Les Maîtres sonneurs exhibits the rough life of woodcutters in contrast with the humble tillers of the soil.

(3) The language represents the peasant's mode of speech. It includes words from the patois dialect.

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(4) The heroes and heroines are honorable, pure, neighborly and pious.


(6) All the novels reflect the strong religious traits of the peasants. Catholicism was the religion practiced by the characters. Germain went to mass the Sunday he went to visit the widow. Fadette and Landry danced after mass. Madeleine found consolation in reading the lives of the Saints and in prayer. Huriel went to confession after killing a man in Brulette's defense.

(7) The novels are presented as tales told by an old chanvreur or some other peasant.

(8) All the novels reflect the superstitious traits of peasant life.

With these outstanding characteristics in common, La Mare au diable, François le champi, La Petite Fadette and Les Maitres sonneurs may be considered a specific unit of work by George Sand.

In writing the rustic novels, Mme Sand revealed herself as a great portrayer of peasant life. Prompted by personal experiences, she returned to her native Berry, enclosed herself there, and described the aspects of her dear province. The simple rustic scenes, unblimished and without disturbing doctrines, have become masterpieces of the idyllic genre in French literature. The idealized peasants with their delicate dialogues and strong resemblances appear natural. They become so much alive that one must think, it is not reality but it is a literary vision which transfigures reality without deforming it.¹ George Sand's ability to depict the character and

¹Gustave Lanson, Histoire Illustrée de la Litterature Française (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1923), II, 229.
daily life of the peasant, therefore, features the best expression of her talent.
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