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George Sand et la Vie Littéraire dans les Premières Années du Second Empire (book review)

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George Sand is widely recognized today as not only a remarkable individual, but also as a major writer, thanks in part to the publication of her *Correspondance*, together with the proliferation of scholarship surrounding the bicentennial of her birth in 2004. Indeed, the last forty years have worked wonders in opening access to her lesser-known writings, in paying homage to her feminism and political engagement, and in debunking old stereotypes of the cigar-smoking cross-dresser lacking in literary talent. However, this renewed interest applies almost exclusively to her work prior to the Revolution of 1848. Her Second Empire novels, with the exception of *Les maîtres sonneurs* (1853), are still considered inferior to those published during the July Monarchy, while her biography is seen as regretfully missing the passion, brilliant liaisons, and commitment to major political events of earlier times. For Delamaire, this understanding of Sand as tied only to the Romantic movement has caused us to overlook her later contributions as a playwright and theoretician of the novel, to ignore her as an active participant in the literary and political debates of the Second Empire and, most regretfully perhaps, to neglect her contributions as a vital witness to the tumultuous transition from Romanticism to Realism. Hence, by examining Sand's life and writings during the years 1848–57, Delamaire seeks to reevaluate this unjustly neglected period, thereby restoring her rightful place in literary history. Part 1 studies Sand's correspondence during the years 1848–51, offering insights into the increasingly difficult working conditions caused by upheavals in the publishing world. Her pages on censorship, agents, contracts, translations, writer's rights, and the precarious quest for financial security all offer a unique understanding of Sand as a skilled businesswoman at the center of important changes in the material existence of writers and in the commerce of books. Part 2 breaks new ground in analyzing Sand's little-known success as playwright and dramatist. Whether treating her staged adaptations of her novels or of Shakespeare, her intense involvement with productions, her respect for actors, her love of improvisation, her admiration for Molière, or her adroit use of the stage in Nohant as a kind of theater laboratory, Delamaire paints a fascinating picture of an established novelist who boldly embarked on a whole new career at age forty-eight. Part 3 seeks to articulate a kind of "art poétique de George Sand" (285) by

exploring the place of literature in her everyday life. A picture emerges of a writer who never abandoned her idealism. Of particular interest are her friendships with Dumas fils and Champfleury, her appreciation for her American contemporaries Cooper and Beecher-Stowe, and her epistolary exchanges with fans. It is high time we discover this amazingly prolific period that saw the completion of *Histoire de ma vie* and produced eight novels, fifteen plays, numerous articles, and a thirty-volume *Correspondance*. Delamaire's ambitious and important book thus opens new vistas while filling a large void in Sand scholarship.