

GEORGE SAND
LE ROMAN CHAMPÊTRE

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INTRODUCTION

Amandine Aurore Lucie Dupin, known to literature as George Sand, was the descendant of kings and daughters of the people. The most distant ancestor to whom we need trace her, is Frederick Augustus II, elector of Saxony, who was her great-grand-father and is described by his great-grand-daughter as "the most amazing débauché of his epoch".¹ His mistress, or one of his mistresses, was the successful and celebrated courtesane, Aurore Von Konigamark. She bore him a child, Maurice de Saxe, the Marshall who won the battle of Fontenay. It was not to be expected that Maurice de Saxe would refrain from amours of the kind to which he owed his agreeable existence...and he did not. Among the courtesanes were two sisters, Mlles. Marie and Genevieve Rinteau. Marie Rinteau found favor in the eyes of Maurice de Saxe and bore him a daughter, Aurore.

Aurore de Saxe was educated at the famous Saint Cyr school founded by Madame de Maintenon, and married at the age of fifteen to the Count de Horn, an illegitimate son of Louis XV. Three weeks after his marriage he was killed in a duel, and the child bride was left a widow. At the age of thirty she was married a second time, to a Monsieur Dupin de Francueil. Not until after his death did she discover that

¹ Francis Gribble, George Sand and her Lovers, p. 18.

he had squandered the greater part of his fortune, and that she and her son were practically penniless. With her meager savings she paid his debts, and bought the Nohant Estate in the Berry Province of Central France, now the Indre department, which was to affect the life of George so greatly. She settled down there in 1795 to devote her life to the education of her son Maurice.

Maurice Dupin became a soldier, and finally worked his way up to aide-de-camp to Murat. Like his ancestors Maurice was as much a playboy as he was a soldier. His adventures led him to elope with a camp follower, one Sophie Delaborde, of whose past the less said the better. Although his mother knew of her son's infatuation, she forbade the marriage. Over the mother's protest they were married. Out of this union a daughter was born...born in somewhat dubious circumstances during a party given in honor of the coming marriage of Sophie's sister to a French officer. As his sister-in-law said "She has been born in the midst of roses and music, she will be happy." "She shall be called Aurore after my mother who will give her blessing someday"² exclaimed the father... but the world was to know her not as Aurore Dupin, but as George Sand..

When Aurore was four, her father was accidentally killed by a fall from a horse, a misfortune the result of which was to be of tremendous consequence for the little girl. The

² Ibid., p. 22.

mother on whom her happiness depended was separated from her at an early age. Instead of possessing two parents she had sustained the loss of both. Grief for her mother wounded her spirit, and the wound was never completely healed. The grandmother into whose charge she was given was too old and remote to meet the needs of the heart-hungry child. Loneliness drove her to create an imaginary object of worship. This sublimation of her need of love she named Corambie, and for many years this glorified being was her constant companion. When she first began to write it was Corambie who composed her stories; she merely heard and recorded the words he spoke. During adolescence Aurore was educated in a convent, where she lived through an excessive religious experience which absorbed and exhausted her emotional energies. Her marriage was a tragedy. The eighteen year old mystic with the nature of a poet became the wife of Casimir Dudevant, a common-place soldier who prided himself on his possession of an obedient and submissive wife. Two years after the birth of her son she fell in love with a young lawyer, Aurelie de Sèze. This infatuation was dutifully suppressed, while, like her love for her mother, it was nourished by separation and frequent letters. After six years of unsatisfying affection sent by mail, Sèze grew weary of post-office devotion, and showed his disenchantment by discontinuing his letters. Up to this period therefore, every love affair of Aurore's life had been blocked.

When she was twenty seven years old, she realized that she had spent nine years of marriage in devastating devotion to

duty. Casimir it must be pointed out, was notoriously unfaithful. His neglect, his drunkenness, together with the knowledge that he hated her, gave the unhappy woman courage to free herself from an intolerable situation. There was no divorce in France in those days, so the alienated wife went to Paris with the ambition to support herself by writing. In collaboration with Jules Sandeau, a young writer who was later to make a name for himself, she wrote a novel entitled "Rose et Blanche," and some newspaper articles which she signed Jules Sand. Her friendship with Sandeau finally developed into another of her tragic love affairs which were to be so numerous during her life. It is difficult to understand the attraction this woman held over all the men who had her as their mistress. She was neither beautiful, nor even attractive; in fact she has been described as homely and mannish in features. Her actions held her open to gossip. She was very eccentric and it was not unusual to see her walking around dressed as a man.

After the Jules Sandeau incident, she then went on alone, and published her first novel, Indiana, under the pseudonym of George Sand, a name suggested to her by Henry Delatouche, a clever popular writer of the day. The book made a sensation, and the Barroness Dudevant was henceforth wholly merged in the brilliant authoress George Sand.

Although it is to Jules Sandeau that goes the honor of finding and primarily developing the creative genius of George Sand, as it was he who first encouraged her to come to Paris and have her stories printed by the newspaper on which he

worked, he was not the most important man in her life. That honor would have to go to Alfred de Musset who was George's constant companion for a period of seven years. Over this period punctuated by frequent lovers' quarrels George and Musset travelled all over Europe living as common-law man and wife. When he became violently sick of tuberculosis George with her own money accompanied him to Naples, and there stayed with him until he was much better. George was not given to faithfulness, and her infatuation for Musset waned, until one day she ran off with an Italian doctor named Pagello, who was treating Musset. The two new lovers went to Paris leaving Musset in Italy. George soon tired of her new conquest and through a twinge of conscience returned to Naples. She was very shocked on her return to Musset, to find him living happily with a new mistress, and not wanting anything to do with the woman who had so ruthlessly deserted him. This hurt George, and over the years which followed she lived unhappily and alone, retiring to Nohant where she worked on "Histoire de ma vie". George never could forget Musset, and although she had numerous other love affairs, none ever had the influence on her that he had. She had another affair with the young Polish composer, Chopin. She and Chopin were the life of the Polish Court, but George was old enough to be the composer's mother, and the artist never could return the maternal love that George exerted over him. Their alliance lasted four years. However, as in the Musset affair George wandered, and Chopin was not immune to do likewise. The two were in constant

disagreement and it was not a surprise when they parted forever, Chopin returning to Poland, and George again returning to Nohant.

A most prolific writer, she speedily attained world-wide celebrity. A complete list of her books would have no place here; the only ones we are interested in are the "romans champêtres": La Mare au Diable (1848), which was the first of her four such novels; François le Champi (1849), in which for the first time George tells us of her use of real people for the characters in her stories; La Petite Fadette (1849), the touching story of a poor peasant girl; and the last and most complicated of the series, Les Maîtres Sonneurs (1853). These stories are what immortalised her forever in French literature. Everyone of these novels was written in the space of a short time, and all were originally published in newspaper columns.

George Sand's indomitable spirit would not allow her to remain inactive in the field of politics. In 1848, therefore, she joined her pen to the side of the "Communards", but with the failure of the Revolution her ardor waned, and she retired to Nohant, from where she never again dabbled in politics. She also wrote for the stage, adapting several of her novels. Her later years were spent at Nohant, where she died on June 8, 1876.

THE PLOTS

In all the "romans champêtres" the main characters are the peasants, with the greater part of each story taking place in the immediate vicinity of the farm house and its surrounding lands. The four stories take place around Nohant, and their main characters are modeled upon live people whom the author found around her. The stories and their plots are basically the same. They are concerned with the life of the peasants, their loves, their superstitions and their customs. With these things in mind George was able to weave stories from everyday happenings at Nohant. In all the novels, the hero and heroine get married and live happily ever after. All are forced to overcome some obstacles, such as age and position of wealth. The question of dowry is foremost in mind; difference in age was unimportant. In La Mare Au Diable Germain was twenty-eight years old, while Marie was sixteen; in François le Champi Madeleine Blanchet was old enough to be François's mother, but she still married him, after having reared him as a mother would her own child. All the persons in every story are going from one village to the next through woods and across rivers. In all the stories we have the man who wants to marry the girl in question presenting himself to her guardian or to her elders to ask permission to speak to her. All the stories run approximately the same course. All are idyllic romances, the work of a woman with a brilliant vivid imagination..

La Mare au Diable

Germain, a poor but industrious peasant, is left through the death of his wife to take care of three children, the oldest being Petit Pierre, who is not yet seven. Germain, the ploughman, lives with his father and mother-in-law, who are rearing his children. One day Père Maurice called him aside and told him that it was time for him to abandon his mourning and marry again. Père Maurice tells him further that he has in mind a wife for him, a certain widow living in the neighboring village just a few miles from the farm. He persuades Germain to say that he will go to that village and call on the widow to ask her hand in marriage. Germain, although sad at heart, makes his plans to leave the next morning, so as to obey Père Maurice's wishes.

At the same moment that this scene is taking place between Germain and his father-in-law, at another farm house plans are being made which are to influence the hero's life. La Petite Marie, a young farm girl, has become of age to leave home and make her way in the world. As is the custom of the countryside arrangements have already been made between the girl's grand-mother and a neighbor to employ the girl as a shepherdess. For her services she is to receive sufficient wages to allow her to send most of it home for her grand-mother's support. She is to go to a farm named "Les Ormeaux". There had always been an unwritten understanding between Père Maurice and Mère Guillette, Petite

Marie's grand-mother, that when the girl became of age she would be sent to the Maurice farm to work instead of going elsewhere. However, unseen circumstances have arisen that have forced Marie to leave before the St. Jean, the date on which she was supposed to begin her labors at the Maurice farm. La Guillette, Marie's grand-mother, comes to the Maurice farm to offer her excuses for Marie's not coming to work. In the course of the conversation between the two women La Guillette tells Père Maurice that Marie is to leave on the morrow for La Ferme des Ormeaux.

Mère Maurice tells her that Germain, her son-in-law, is also leaving on the morrow for Fourche, the neighboring village, to visit the widow Guérin, who has completed her mourning, and is looking for a husband. As the Ormeaux farm is on the way to Fourche, it is decided that Germain and Petite Marie can go together, and thus be company for each other. It will make the trip more pleasant and make time pass much faster. The next morning when Germain and Petite Marie are about to start, Petit Pierre, the ploughman's son decides he wants to go along. After much pleading, crying and begging, Germain agrees to let him come with them. It is decided that Petit Pierre will stay over night with Petite Marie, while his father continues on to the village where he has his business. He will pass by Les Ormeaux, and pick up Petit Pierre on the way back.

The trip starts out uneventfully. The three people and La Grize, their trusty horse, plod along until late in the

afternoon, when what has been a clear blue sky turns into a grey somber mass. Darkness suddenly seems to engulf them, and before they realise it they find themselves hopelessly lost in the midst of the woods. It begins to rain, and the three seek shelter under some trees which have not yet been penetrated by the downpour. The horse runs away, and their only means of transportation gone, the travelers sit and wait for the storm to subside. However the downpour continues and soon they are enveloped by a thick fog and are completely lost. All hope of finding their way gone, the three decide to spend the night. Petite Marie occupies herself with the welfare of Petit Pierre, and hovers over him constantly. Germain builds a fire and busies himself finding dry wood which he stocks aside for the night. Petit Pierre soon goes to sleep in Marie's arms. Germain and Marie carry on a long, seemingly insignificant, conversation which is to have an important bearing on the story later on. All through the night Germain cannot help but notice how this young girl treats his little boy. Therefore, it is not surprising to find Germain thinking of Petite Marie in terms of a wife. When Petit Pierre wakes up in the middle of the night, it is Petite Marie who puts him back to sleep.

Germain spends the greater part of the night pondering the strange idea which has come to him. Finally he takes his courage in hand, and when Marie awakens he tells her of his love. Marie does not show any sign of love for him and he is bitterly disappointed. Daylight arrives, and the three start

out on the continuation of their journey. Petit Pierre and Petite Marie go to the Ormeaux farm. Germain continues on to Fourche where he meets the widow Guérin. Although the idea of marrying her does not appeal to him at all, he goes to her home and presents himself to her father, Père Leonard, a cold calculating man, whose only interest in his daughter's welfare is the amount of money her successful marriage will bring. Germain finds the widow Guérin vain, coquetish, and almost vile in her ways and actions. He is forced to sit at dinner with the rest of her suitors, and is forced to accept their jibing and joking regarding who will win the widow's hand.

Germain leaves disgusted with the whole proceedings. He makes his way back towards his village, passing by the Ormeaux farm where he is to pick up Petit Pierre. Before he arrives there he runs into Petite Marie and Petit Pierre who are returning home because the farmer of the Ormeaux has insulted Marie. The farmer is chasing her, and has caught up with her when Germain arrives miraculously on the scene. Germain drives the farmer away after having him apologise to Marie. The return trip otherwise is uneventful. Germain returns to his work but continues to think of Petite Marie. Petit Pierre keeps asking to see Marie, something which does not help Germain's frame of mind. Germain continues his moping until his mother-in-law, Mère Maurice, asks him what is wrong. He then confesses his love for Petite Marie. Mère Maurice is surprised, but she promises to speak to her husband about what Germain has said. He in turn is to speak to Marie's grandmother regarding

Germain's wish. The old man speaks, as he has promised to Marie's grand-mother and gets the grand-mother's consent to the marriage, if Marie is willing. Germain speaks to Marie and she accepts him, although she has done everything in her power to dissuade him because of the difference in their ages. However she admits her love for him, and they are married in the near future.

François le Champi

François le Champi is the name given to a little peasant boy who tends a flock of sheep in the neighborhood of Nohant. Whence he comes no one knows. The word "champi" denotes an orphan of the storm, probably abandoned by his parents, or an illegitimate child left in the care of some farmer in the neighborhood. The champi himself knows neither his name nor his age, nor where his home is. He trusts no one except la Zabelle, an old farm woman who has taken it upon herself to rear him. His job is to tend a flock of sheep. He is as wild and innocent as the animals and the birds, who are his constant companions. The novel begins with George Sand's telling the story of François le Champi to a group of peasants who had gathered to hear Madame Sand, as she was known at Nohant, weave a tale.

Madeleine Blanchet is the young, unhappy wife of Cadet Blanchet, the miller of Cormouet. While walking through the fields one day, she accidentally runs into a little boy who is seemingly as shy as the sheep he is tending. Madeleine enters

into a conversation with him. He knows absolutely nothing of his past. His name is François; he lives with la Zabelle at a farm house near the Moulin de Cormouet. Madeleine Blanchet, the miller's wife befriends this little orphan, takes pity on him, and finally gains his confidence. She then persuades him to take her to see la Zabelle. There at the "champi's" humble dwelling the two women make an agreement, by which la Zabelle is to make clothes for François from material supplied to her by the miller's wife, and François is to be sent every morning and evening to the Moulin de Cormouet where Madeleine is to give him food. However, Madeleine runs into difficulties when her husband, Cadet Blanchet, a domineering, willful man, has no use for this new-found ward. There was already discontent in the marriage. The husband with the help of alcohol and encouraged by his mother has lost all love for Madeleine. She has promised herself to be a good wife, taking this harsh treatment from her husband, and overlooking his drunken rages and fits of anger.

Through all these trying times Madeleine was caring for François secretly and made of him a playmate for her little boy, Jeannie. She taught François how to read, write, and add, and made of him a dependable, useful, aggressive worker. One day Blanchet in a fit of anger forbade his wife ever to allow François and la Zabelle to set foot in the mill again. La Zabelle, behind Madeleine's back, makes a bargain with Blanchet's mother, by which she is to send François away forever, and in return receive a substantial sum, which will allow her to live comfortably for the rest of her days.

However, both Francois and Madeleine find out about it. Francois, for the good of all concerned, decides to leave. Blanchet's mother dies of a stroke, and in the excitement which follows Francois is all but forgotten.

After the death of his mother, Blanchet lets the mill fall slowly apart. He embarks on a life of drinking and gambling, and takes up with the local "femme fatale". He gambles and drinks his way out of his wife's love. The "femme fatale", "la Sévère", as she is called, finally makes Blanchet hate his wife violently. La Zabelle dies the following winter, and Francois is left to fend for himself. Francois in growing older finds that he feels ill at ease in the presence of Madeleine, and finds that he has developed a strange feeling towards her. He sees what is happening to Madeleine's marriage, and he decides to do something about it. He goes to see la Sévère, the woman who is taking Madeleine's husband away from her, but is not successful in obtaining la Sévère's word that she will leave Blanchet alone. In fact she tries to add Francois to her string of suitors, but is severely defeated in the attempt.

Blanchet comes home one night more inebriated than usual, has a violent argument with his wife, and accuses her of being in love with what he called "cette marchandise d'hôpital". He threatens to kill Francois if she persists in having him around. Madeleine makes Francois leave the neighborhood, and, as he is a willing and dependable worker, he has no trouble in finding employment on a farm some distance away. Madeleine is thus left alone and broken-hearted with her son, who has been reared almost as a brother to the "champi."

François has been gone three years and is working at the Moulin D'Aigurande in the Creuse department. He has acquired a wonderful reputation as a worker and his employer, Maître Vertaud, one day asks him why he isn't married. François tells him his story, and tells him that there is only one woman he can ever love. Vertaud had thought of marrying his daughter to François, but he sees it is no use.

François inherits 4000 francs from his mother, whom he does not know. He leaves this money with the local parish priest, and tells the priest to keep it until he calls for it. One day during the course of a conversation with one of the peasants of the neighborhood François finds out that Madeleine Blanchet is in dire need of help. He asks permission from his employer to leave and he returns to Cormouers. There he finds that Blanchet has died leaving his widow with nothing but debts and creditors. At the mill he finds Madeleine very sick from over-work and worry. No one knows him. Madeleine finally awakens from a coma that she has been in for the last twelve hours and recognises him, and the two of them have a long talk.

François puts the mill back into operation, with the object of paying off all the law-suits and debts incurred by Cadet Blanchet. He again goes to see la Sévère, and makes an arrangement with her, by which she drops her pretention to the property of Cadet Blanchet. Through François's efforts the old mill is soon producing again.

While working at the mill François meets a young girl named Mariette. He believes himself in love with her, but she

falls into the evil hands of la Sévère and turns out worthless. Francois returns to the mill of Cormouet and decides to stay there and keep it going. To pay off the final debts, François sends for the money that he has left with the priest at the place where he used to work. After the transaction is completed, he takes his courage in hand, and tells Catherine, the faithful old maid at the mill, of his love for Madeleine. Catherine tells him to speak to Madeleine, who admits her love for him, and they are married.

La Petite Fadette

At the farm of Père Barbeau twin sons, Landry and Sylvenet, are born. Following the superstitious advice of the midwife, and also the customs of the countryside, the parents decide to separate them from each other as much as possible. However, the children become so attached to each other, that they cannot stand the thought of being separated, and the father and mother are forced to give up the idea of keeping them apart. Thus, they grow up together very closely and are constant companions until the day comes when the two boys have to be separated and sent to work on neighboring farms. Landry, who is the older of the two by a few minutes, and who is also the stronger, decides to go.

Landry rapidly accustoms himself to his surroundings, but Sylvenet cannot stand the idea of being away from his brother, pouts, and carries on continuously to a point which threatens to ruin his health, already not very good. He becomes jealous

and envious of his brother, and makes himself believe that he is not wanted at the farm any more. Having made himself believe he is worthless, one Sunday he disappears from home, and goes towards the river. His mother fears the worst, believing him capable of drowning himself. Landry who has returned home to inquire into the state of mind of his brother, runs to the river bank, and vainly searches for him. As a last resort he goes to the home of Mère Fadet, who is considered by the inhabitants of the countryside as possessing a quality of witchcraft. The daughter of Mère Fadet, la Petite Fadette, makes fun of Landry for believing that his brother is drowned and that her grand-mother is a witch. Fadette offers to show Landry where his brother is, if he will promise her that someday he will do whatever she asks of him. Landry agrees. Without further words Fadette leads him to a clump of grass where Sylvenet is fast asleep beside the river bank. Landry and Sylvenet have a long conversation where all their problems are worked out. Both brothers then return home safely. Sylvenet is a different person altogether. He loses the jealousy which he had for his brother.

Landry and Fadette do everything in their power not to see each other, but fate steps in, and they are forced together. One night when Landry is coming back from work on the farm where he is employed, he seeks a short cut by crossing the river, but he loses his footing and falls in. His cries are heard by Fadette, who helps him out of his predicament. She then shows him a way to cross safely. She also reminds him of

his promise to her. Landry, who has been well reared, remembers, and tells her he will do whatever she asks of him. Fadette asks him to dance on the morrow the "bourrée" seven times with her, and not to dance with any other girl. Landry, although hurt by this demand, agrees. He had wanted to dance with Madelon, the very attractive daughter of his employer. However, much to his chagrin he dances with Fadette all the dances she asks of him. She is not at all well dressed and he sees people talking behind his back, wondering what is going on between the two.

On the way home Fadette is insulted by some farmers and Landry comes to her assistance. He again goes on his way only to find Fadette a little farther on lying by the side of the road, crying. He sits down by her, and asks her why she is crying. She tells him that people make fun of her and are always insulting her. Landry tells her why they do that; that she is a tom boy, and does not act as a nice girl should; that she throws rocks, climbs trees and has been nicknamed "malot." Landry realises his love for Fadette. He tries to tell her of his feelings, but she believes him to be just trying to make fun of her. Fadette tries to reconcile Landry and Madelon by explaining to her what has happened, but Madelon will not listen to her, and continues to insult her.

Landry finally tells Fadette he loves her, but she still refuses to believe him; however, they become the best of friends and are inseparable. At one of their many meetings they are overheard by Sylvenet. He is jealous of Fadette, and again

starts to pout and fall ill. He does not want her to take his brother away from him. He becomes worse and worse.

Madelon has Landry and Petite Fadette spied upon with the idea of causing trouble for them. When she realises that the two young persons are in love, she starts ugly rumors regarding them. The rumors finally reach the ears of Père Barbeau, who publicly reproaches Landry. Landry denies the things that have been said, and defends both his and Fadette's honor. Sylvenet knowing that Landry is telling the truth, comes to his help and finally gets him under control.

Fadette sees that the best thing she can do to help Landry is to leave the country-side. She leaves for two years, but first admits to Landry her love for him. Landry then transfers his attention to Fadette's brother, and in this way again antagonises his jealous twin. Through Sylvenet's efforts, Landry is sent far away from Fadette's house to work. Fadette comes back two years later to nurse her grand-mother, who is dying. Landry cannot keep away and comes to see her. The two young people are very much in love, and decide to ask Landry's grand-father for permission to be married. Fadette goes to see Père Barbeau and shows him the money that her grand-mother has left her at her death. Père Barbeau inquires all over the country-side regarding Fadette's character, but cannot anywhere find fault with it. He gives his consent. However, the ever-jealous Sylvenet threatens to ruin Landry's happiness by becoming violently ill at the idea of a marriage which will take his brother away from him. Fadette cures him

and reproaches him for his jealousy. She makes him see he is wrong. He finally gives his blessing to his brother. The two young people are married, but Sylvenet decides that for the good of all concerned he shall leave and join the Army of Napoleon, as he has become too attached to his brother's wife.

Les Maîtres Sonneurs

"Les Maîtres Sonneurs" is the name given to the player of the "cornemuse", the musical instrument of the people of the woods around Nohant. This story is told by Père Brulet; it is his story, a story which takes place during his early manhood.

Père Brulet is a poor farmer who lives with two children, Tienet and Brulette, not far from Nohant. One day while coming back from Nohant he finds his way barred by a wagon which is stuck in one of the ruts of the path. The man whose wagon is stuck is a complete stranger to him, but following the customs of the hospitality of the country-side he gives the man a hand. He tells Tienet to hold the little girl who is on top of the wagon so she won't fall off. The strange man tells Père Brulet that his name is Grand Eucheux, both because he lives in the woods and makes his living by the wood he chops, and because he is the best wood chopper of them all.. Tienet has never seen a child as beautiful as the one he carries in his arms for a short distance. The woodsman thanks Père Brulet for his help and before going on his way, tells him that he will return someday and repay him for his hospitality.

Père Brulet and Tienet go on their way, but over the period of years that follows, Tienet cannot forget the strange couple which they met years before. One day Tienet, Père Brulet, and Brulette, his adopted daughter, go to town to buy some mules. While completing their transactions they hear music such as one hears from the "corneuse." When they go to investigate, they are surprised to see two men and a beautiful blonde girl entertaining the crowd with their playing. Tienet recognises them as the Grand Bucheux and the little girl he carried so many years before. The Grand Bucheux recognises them right away and invites them to join him and his party. He then introduces his son, Huriel, and his daughter, Therence, the same girl that captured Tienet's imagination so many years before. The two groups of people become the best of friends. They are joined by Joset, a strange type of boy who likes Brulette, something which makes Tienet both angry and jealous. Joset is infatuated by the "corneuse" of the Grand Bucheux and his son, and decides to learn to play it. So, with much confidence he goes back into the woods with Therence, Huriel and Grand Bucheux. He stays there for years and finally learns how to play it until he is considered one of the best of the "sonneurs" of the country-side. The plot becomes more and more complicated as the story drags on. Tienet and Therence continue to see each other, as do Brulette and Huriel. More complications set in when the "mauletiers" of the neighborhood, who are good friends of Grand Bucheux and the other "maîtres sonneurs", decide that Huriel and Brulette should not see each other any

more, and send a man named Francois Carnat, one of their number, to break up this romance. Carnat insults Brulette and he has a fight with both Huriel and then Tienet. When this happens the "muletiers" declare war on the Grand Bucheux, Père Brulet, and Tienet. Carnat has told them that these two men jumped on him and fought him unfairly. Huriel, Tienet and Grand Bucheux are caught by the "muletiers," but through the intervention of Joset, who was a member of the "muletiers," while learning to play the corneuse, they escape. Joset goes to live in the woods with the Grand Bucheux who teaches him how to become proficient with the "corneuse." Back at the farm of Père Brulet, beautiful Brulette suddenly ceases going to all the dances and just contents herself taking care of a small child. A scandal explodes at St. Chartier; people begin to say that the small child is really hers, and that the father is Huriel of the woods. Joset and Huriel both go to Tienet and ask an explanation of him, but he, like them, knows nothing of the matter. Huriel, violently in love with Brulette, is determined to marry her no matter what the circumstances may be. This only adds to the suspicion which surrounds the couple. Circumstances keep appearing which add to the scandal, and soon Tienet finds himself suspecting the character of Brulette.

There is to be a big contest to decide who is to become a member of "les Maîtres Sonneurs", and who is the best player of them all. The contest is to be held at the Auberge du Boeuf Couronné. There the contestants all meet, and battle lines are drawn, when Huriel sees the Carnat brothers and the rest of the

"muletiers," there to take part in the contest. One of the Carnat brothers insults Brulette regarding her child. It is then that Mariton, the woman who runs the inn, tells the whole assembly that the child is hers. Then Joset L'aubervigé, the owner of the inn tells the assembly that he and Mariton have been secretly married for two years. However, since Brulette has been insulted, it is decided that the man who insulted her and Muriel will fight for her honor. In the fight Muriel wins, but the "muletiers" are not beaten as yet, and they plan an ambush for Grand Bucheux and the rest of his friends. Grand Bucheux falls into the trap, but through the intervention of the tavern owner, he is rescued. Thérénce tells Tienet she will marry him, and Muriel and Brulette plan a double wedding. Joset, the eccentric friend of Tienet and Grand Bucheux, disappears and decides to make his fortune by playing his "cornemuse." Brulette is married and very happy, but Thérénce, who has never been away from her family, misses her father, who has gone back to his beloved woods.

Finally after a lapse of about six months Grand Bucheux comes back by himself. He explains that Joset is dead. He was found one morning dead by the side of the road. He had been drinking and had sat down to play his "cornemuse." While under the influence of alcohol he had gone to sleep and had frozen to death. Although both Thérénce and Brulette are brokenhearted, the Grand Bucheux tells them that it is for the best, for the music would have eventually broken Joset's heart.

THE STYLE

George Sand's stories have always been enjoyable to read. Not only are they simple in plot, and hold the reader's attention, but the choice of words is such that anyone can read what she has put down on paper without having recourse to the dictionary at every turn. Sainte Beuve said "La Mare au Diable" est tout simplement un petit chef d'oeuvre. Le style est simple et clair et ne laisse presque rien à l'imagination."³

L. Vincent said of her:

"A force de converger avec les gens simples de la campagne elle a deviné dans ces natures rustiques, des goûts, des idées exprimées d'une manière rudimentaire, aussi a-t-elle entrepris de nous communiquer leurs pensées."⁴

This explains to us many of the expressions that we find in the "romans champêtres." She has been accused of being lax in her use of the French language, especially for the over-use of certain expressions and verbs:

"Le style de George Sand ne saurait être donné pour modèle, car sa facilité va parfois jusqu'à la négligence... On notera par exemple que dans le premier paragraphe de La Petite Fadette, le verbe être se trouve répété six fois en quelques lignes."⁵

Of her writing ability there is no doubt. It was unavoidable that she would write in the simple language she heard all

³ G. Sand, La Mare au Diable, p. 3.

⁴ L. Vincent, George Sand et le Berry, p. 137.

⁵ G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 4.

about her and used in telling her stories to the peasants. She did not have to fabricate a style; she wrote as she felt. Many of her phrases are short and jerky, but they are self explanatory. Of this Balzac has said:

"Elle est un écrivain spontané qui n'a pas eu besoin de se fabriquer un rythme artificiel comme Flaubert ou un vocabulaire précieux comme Concourt."⁶

She was able to use the language in such a fashion as to hold the reader in the palm of her hand constantly.

"Elle parle tout naturellement le langage qui lui vient aux lèvres, sans aucune recherche d'un effet à produire. Clarté et simplicité, tels sont ses attributs officiels."⁷

We know that most of the "romans champêtres" were written at one sitting and on the spur of the moment. She wrote what she saw. She did not ponder for hours on the turning of phrases, or the correct use of adjectives. The style of the "romans champêtres" is lacking in finish. They are not embalmed in style, but are written in "ce style courant cher aux bourgeois,"⁸ and works so written age rapidly.

In order to introduce the expressions of the country-side in her stories, she used an intermediary.

"George Sand a voulu introduire dans son roman un bon nombre de tournures et de locutions Berryhones. Elle a donc pris la précaution de passer la parole à un "chamvreux," ce qui lui a permis de rendre provisoirement l'existence à beaucoup d'archaïsmes et

⁶ G. Sand, François le Champi, p. 7.

⁷ G. Sand, François le Champi, p. 4.

⁸ G. Sand, La Mare au Diable, p. 5.

de provincialismes très expressifs dont il n'est pas interdit en certains cas de regretter la disparition."⁹

She did this in "Les Maîtres Sonneurs;" Père Tienet tells us the story, which in reality is his own. All through it he continually injects himself.

"La Mare au Diable" and "François le Champi" are personally told by the author. She tells the story of "La Mare au Diable" to a group of peasants who have come to her estate to hear her spin one of her wonderful tales. In the preface to "François le Champi," she introduces us to him by telling us of her meeting with François.

We cannot emphasize too greatly that George claimed she wrote purely for the pleasure of writing. Time and time again she has emphatically told us that she was writing only for her own pleasure.

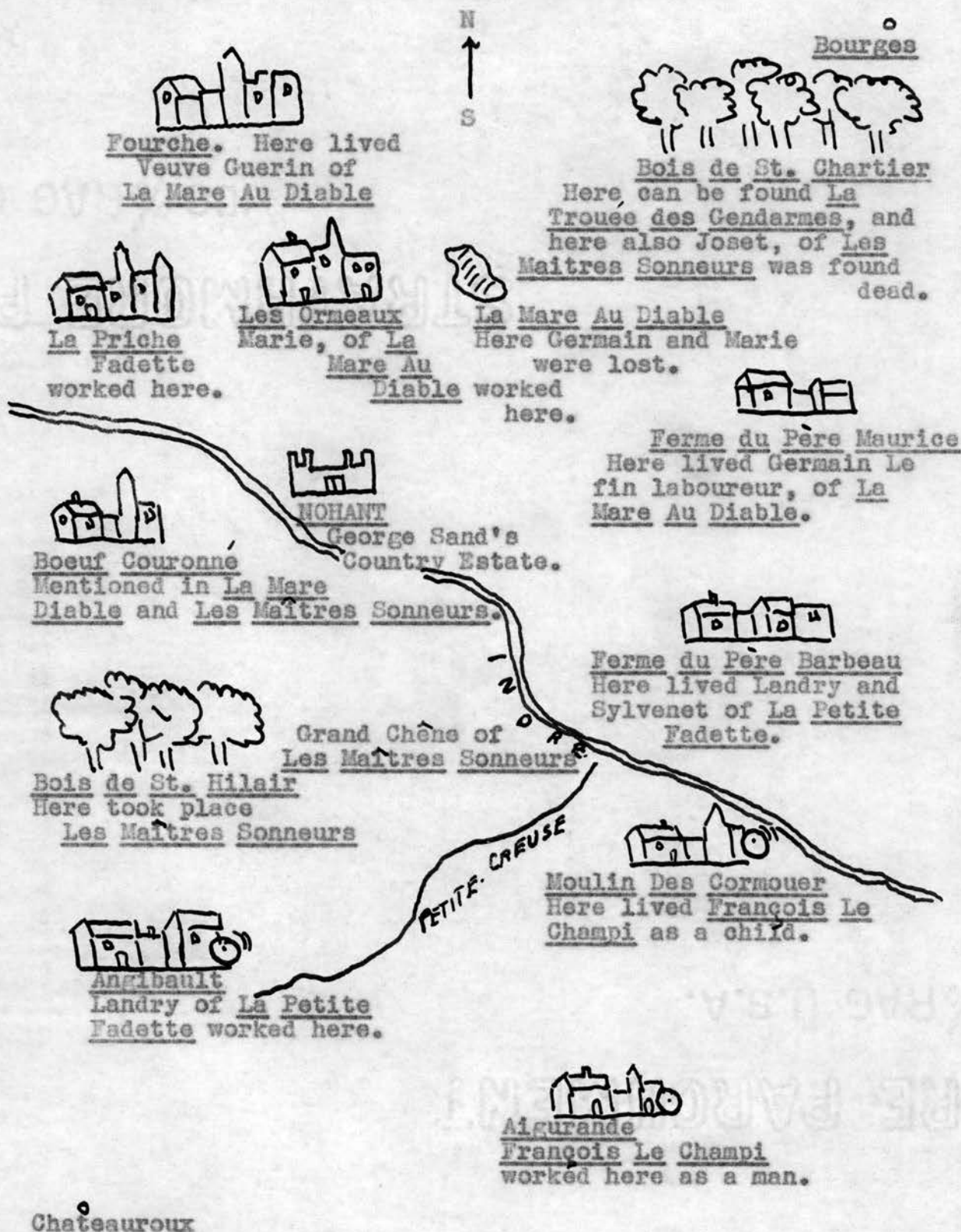
"Je n'avais pas la moindre théorie littéraire quand je commençais à écrire. Je ne crois pas en avoir eu quand un envie de roman m'a mis la plume à la main. Cela n'empêche pas que mes instincts ne m'aient fait à son issu, la théorie que je vais établir... en résumé idéalisation du sentiment qui fait le sujet en laissant à l'art du conteur le soin de placer le sujet dans des conditions et dans un cadre de réalité assez sensible pour le faire ressortir."¹⁰

I believe that in that statement lies the gist of George Sand's theory of writing, a theory that she faithfully carried out in all the "romans champêtres." It should be said that

⁹ G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 7.

¹⁰ Mary F. Winwar, The Life of the Hearth, p. 116.

before her appearance the French peasant had no place in French literature. George Sand gave him an important role. She saw on his noble forehead the mark of a great man, for he was in her eyes the king of the earth even more than the owner who had paid cash for it, and she immortalised him accordingly.



THE SETTING

The "romans champêtres" had for their setting the Berry Province of Central France. The place so dear to George Sand was only a portion of that Province immediately surrounding her country estate of Mchant. It was bordered on the North-east by Bourges and on the Southwest by Chateauroux. It is what we would know today as the Indre department of Central France. To this region George Sand gave the name of Vallée Noire.. She has told us she named it so because of the somber, sad appearance it made upon her when she was first exposed to it. On the maps of France, of the Berry, and of the Indre department there is absolutely no mention of any place called "La Vallée Noire;" that name is the author's creation.

"Le Berry... tout Le Berry n'est pas également chère à George Sand, c'est le Bas Berry.. La Vallée de L'Indre, Le Boischaud, c'est à dire les environs de Mchant qui ont captivé son intention et attire son admiration."¹¹

It is in this so called Vallée Noire that are to be found all the places in the romans champêtres. George Sand made up very few other names; she did not need to; they were there at the touch of her hand. The greater part of the towns, villages, and farms are real and still exist today. It is in this Vallée Noire that are to be found St. Chartier, Belair, Cormouet, Angibault. All these places can be found on detailed maps.

¹¹ L. Vincent, Le Berry Dans L'Oeuvre de George Sand, p. 37.

In all the novels the setting for each is practically the same. In all there is the typical peasant farm house, those houses so common to the inhabitants of the country-side in France. The farm house we encounter in La Mare Au Diable, Les Maîtres Sonneurs, La Petite Fadette, and François Le Champi could easily be, and are probably the same one or a composite of several. In La Petite Fadette, George Sand says of the house where the twins were born:

"La maison du Père Barbeau était bien bâtie, couverte en tuile établie en bon air sur la côte, avec un jardin de bon rapport et une vigne de six journaux."¹²

Of the dwelling occupied by Germain "le fin laboureur" of La Mare Au Diable she wrote:

"Le Père Maurice habitait avec son gendre une ferme bien propre et bien bâtie, entourée de vignes qui se trouvait sur le haut d'une colline dominant le paysage."¹³

These descriptions of the farm houses certainly are not very great in detail but it does not take much close scrutiny to see the resemblance in them. All these descriptions could fit any of the farm houses in which much of the action takes place.

It is not difficult to understand why George used the farm house as one of her basic starting points. The farm houses which surrounded her estate were as familiar to her as her own house. She used to pass many hours with her peasants

¹² G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 15.

¹³ G. Sand, La Mare Au Diable, p. 26.

sitting around their fireplaces. She was as much at home in their humble dwellings as she was in her spacious estate. If George Sand was to immortalise the peasants of the Berry, it seems sensible that she start with their homes.

The woods are also prevalent in her stories. All those mentioned in the novels are woods which can be found in the immediate country-side surrounding Nohant. The names are real. She was correct in all the details regarding them. It is in those woods of St. Hilaire that Germain and Petite Fadette were lost in their excursion to the neighboring village. It is in those woods that can be found today "le grand chêne" where Huriel and Tienet had their strange interview in the gathering darkness. It is here that can be found "la trouée des gendarmes" by which Thérèse and Brulette escaped the wrath of the "muletiers." It was said of the author:

"George connaît toutes les petites trouées de lièvres, et personne ne craint qu'elle se perde dans l'étendue de cette grande forêt qui longe sa propriété. Elle est la maîtresse de toute cette basse campagne si bien connue par tous les paysans mais si étrange aux gens de la ville."¹⁴

She knew the country-side intimately, for through it she took long, solitary, daily walks ending, as we have already seen, on the banks of her beloved Indre.

"La trouée des gendarmes," although known in Nohant by the older inhabitants, has never really been identified as one certain place. "Le grand chêne" of Les Maîtres Sonneurs still stands as a living monument to George Sand in the middle of

¹⁴ L. Vincent, George Sand et le Berry, p. 127.

the forest of St. Chartier. It was there while first sitting under the shade of that tree that the story of Les Maîtres Sonneurs was born. In the stories we also find the ever present Indre, and also the ever present mill. We know of the Moulin de Cormouet of François le Champi and le Moulin Aigurande of the same book. Their descriptions are also very much alike. Perhaps they are the same mill. Of the Moulin de Cormouet she tells us:

"Les abords du moulin étaient bien gelés en revanche, et si coulant qu'il ne fallait pas être maladroit pour courir sur les pierres et le talus de la rivière. Il vit la vieille roue du moulin, toute noire à force d'âge et de mouillage, avec des grandes pointes de glaces qui pendaient aux alochons menues comme des aiguilles..."¹⁵

The Moulin d'Aigurande where the "champi" went to work is described in the following manner:

"Les moulins y sont, de plus conséquence que chez nous et celui où résidait François était des plus forts et des meilleurs."¹⁶

These descriptions are those of the two mills we encounter in that single novel. Although there is no detailed description of any mills in La Mare au Diable, le Moulin de Corlay was mentioned in a passing remark that Germain made to Marie. There is mention of a mill in Les Maîtres Sonneurs. Again it is not described in detail, but just mentioned in a passing remark between Huriel and Tienot. The mill mentioned was "le Moulin de St. Hilair," which still exists.

¹⁵ George Sand, François le Champi, p. 137.

¹⁶ George Sand, François le Champi, p. 149.

Last but not least, in all the "romans champêtres" there appears in one way or another the inevitable river. In François le Champi, the mill of Cormoussier was situated on the Indre. In La Petite Fadette, le Moulin d'Angibault was located on the "Petite Creuse," a tributary of the Indre. It would have been highly surprising not to encounter these rivers, for the Berry country-side is "sillonnée, de petits ruisseaux et de petites rivières."¹⁷ The river was a necessity to the peasants, both for their flocks and for themselves in their everyday lives. The river first appears in La Mare au Diable when Germain is receiving instructions on how to get to Fourche. He is told by his father-in-law:

"tu auras à descendre un bout de côte très rude, à traverser une immense prairie, et à passer deux fois la rivière à gué. Il lui avait même recommandé de rentrer dans cette rivière avec précautions, parce que au commencement de la saison il y avait eu de grandes pluies, et l'eau pouvait être un peu haute."¹⁸

"La rivière" again appears on numerous occasions in La Petite Fadette. We are first exposed to it by Landry seeking his brother Sylvenet who he fears has drowned himself in it:

"La rivière n'est pas large dans son parcours, de plus de quatre ou cinq mètres, mais qui est par endroits aussi creuse que large."¹⁹

Landry and Fadette had numerous interviews on the banks of the river where Landry might have drowned without the help of

¹⁷ L. Vincent, George Sand et le Berry, p. 35.

¹⁸ G. Sand, La Mare au Diable, p. 42.

¹⁹ G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 55.

Fadette. In François le Champi Madeleine Blanchet and Champi meet on the passerelle of the river which fed the "moulin."

"La passerelle de Cornouet était pour moi un endroit bien heureux," wrote the author. This passerelle²⁰ crosses the Indre River a few kilometers from Nohant.

²⁰ George Sand, Histoire de Ma Vie, p. 137.
quoted in . Vincent, George Sand et Le Berry.

THE CHARACTERS

The persons we find in the "romans champêtres" are the typical French peasants not only those of the Berry, but those of any part of France. They are so much alike in appearance and habits, that only the fact that we know they are from the Berry helps to distinguish them in any way from those of other provinces. It seems while reading any of the stories that once we know the basic characters of one, we know them all. This appears to be one of the weaknesses of the "romans champêtres;" although George was endowed with a rich fertile imagination, it seems as though she was unable to create all the various types of personages needed for her stories. All are of peasant origin, for the greater part honest, hard working, dependable individuals. They all have a certain self-respect which seems to have been idealised by the author. They all have a love for their homes, their children, their elders. In La Mare au Diable Germain, no matter how unhappy it was to make him, was willing to marry a woman he had never seen just to please his father-in-law; François in order to preserve Madeleine Blanchet's happiness left to go elsewhere to work, and Landry listened to all the implications that Père Barbeau made towards him and Fadette without once raising his voice in defense of the two until the old man had finished.

To study in detail these personages it is sufficient to take one of the novels and compare the characters in this book

with the characters in another. Let us take as our book, La Mare au Diable. The main characters are Germain le fin laboureur, the typical hero; La Petite Marie, the typical heroine; Petit Pierre, the little boy whom we are to meet time and time again in various other stories; Père Maurice, the typical old man of the "romans champêtres;" and la vieille Guillette, the old peasant woman who has been immortalised in other forms throughout the various stories.

For a description of Germain, George says:

"Un jeune homme de bonne mine conduisait un attelage magnifique. Il appelait ses boeufs d'une voix puissante mais malgré celle-là, il y avait un sentiment de douceur et de calme profond qui planait sur sa personne."²¹

In La Petite Fadette she described Landry in the following fashion:

"Il avait le tempérament doux et bien faconné. Il était blond et restait blond toute sa vie. Il avait tout à fait bonne mine, de grands yeux bleus, les épaules bien avalées, le corp droit et bien planté plus de taille et de hardiesse que n'importe qui de son âge."²²

If we need further proof as to the interchangeability of her characters in the various novels, we have the following description of François le Champi upon his reaching manhood and returning to see Madeleine Blanchet:

"Il était bien beau garçon. Un grand jeune homme au visage frais qui commençait à être couvert de

²¹ G. Sand, La Mare au Diable, p. 11.

²² G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 20.

barbe. Grand et fort avec de belles mains, et de fortes jambes."²³

It seems as though once George had a definite character in mind she was unable to change his or her appearance no matter what the circumstances of the story might be. We have seen three examples of the principal characters in her stories. To emphasise the point let us look at another of the men in her stories besides the three we have just seen. His name is Jean Vertaud. He is the miller of Aigurande where François worked after leaving Cormouet.

"Jean Vertaud, le meunier d'Aigurande, était bon patron bien vu de ses voisins et honnête envers ses employés."²⁴

Thus for the important men characters in her novels. They can easily be transplanted from one to another without injuring the plot in any way. This is also true for the other characters. Let us examine carefully Petite Marie of La Mare Au Diable.

"Marie était la plus belle fille du pays. Elle n'a pas de couleur, mais elle a un petit visage frais comme une rose de buissons.. Quelle gentille bouche et quel mignon petit nez.. Elle n'est pas grande pour son âge, mais elle est faite comme une petite caille et légère comme un pinson."²⁵

This description will fit any of the Maries, Fadettes, Brulettes of the novels, as we see from the following description of Petite Fadette:

²³ G. Sand, François Le Champi, p. 179

²⁴ Ibid, p. 140

²⁵ G. Sand, La Mare Au Diable, p. 64.

"On aurait dit une petite fée, tant elle était petite, maigre, ébouriffée et hardie. Elle avait une figure qui n'était point sotte mais noire comme un grelet."²⁶

Not many more words are used to describe Madeleine Blanchet, but those words could fit any of the heroines.

"Madeleine Blanchet n'était ni grande ni forte. C'était une très jolie femme d'un fier courage et renommée pour sa douceur et son bon sens."²⁷

In this manner we are introduced to the physical qualities of our main characters. The subordinates are treated in the same way. In everyone of the novels we have the little boy, whether he be known as Petit Pierre, François le Champi, or Jeannie, and any description woven around them can fit the other. George says of Petit Pierre of La Mare au Diable:

"Petit Pierre regardait autour de lui d'un air tout pensif.. il s'agenouilla sur la jupe de la jeune fille, joignit ses petites mains et se mit à réciter sa prière."²⁸

Sauteriot, the little brother of Fadette, is described in La Petite Fadette as follows:

"Il était noir comme du charbon. Ses habits étaient des guenilles tant ils étaient déchirés et noircis."²⁹

Although these descriptions give almost no physical details one can easily see how these two little boys could exchange places and still be at home in the plot of the story.

²⁶ G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 48.

²⁷ G. Sand, François le Champi, p. 30.

²⁸ G. Sand, La Mare au Diable, p. 52.

²⁹ G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 89.

We can see them both doing the same things, playing the same games, as any small child would do under the given circumstances.

Not only these main characters, but also the insignificant supporting personages of the various stories, can be interchanged. As I have already tried to point out, there is an old man in every one of the novels. We may know him as Père Maurice, Père Barbeau, or Grand Bucheux, but basically they are the same.

"Le vieux laboureur travaillait lentement en silence, sans efforts inutiles. Son docile attelage ne se pressait pas plus que lui. Son dos était large et sa figure rappelait celui d'Holbein, mais ses vêtements n'annonçaient pas la misère."³⁰

This is the description given to us of le Père Maurice of La Mare au Diable. It could be used to describe any of the old peasants in the stories. It could certainly be used to describe Père Barbeau, the father of the twins, Landry and Sylvenet, of La Petite Fadette, of whom the author says:

"Le Père Barbeau de la Cosse n'était pas mal dans ses affaires. Il était un homme de bon courage, pas méchant, et très porté pour sa famille, sans être injuste à ses voisins et paroissiens."³¹

These two old men are in different stories but the resemblance is there. This resemblance is almost forced upon the author, for she used real persons as models for her

³⁰ G. Sand, La Mare au Diable, p. 4.

³¹ G. Sand, La Petite Fadette, p. 15.

characters, as she has told us herself, and her sources had much in common. Of Benoit Rival, the inn keeper in Les Maîtres Sonneurs, George has told us in her "Histoire de ma vie":

"Benoit Rival était en effet l'aubergiste du Bocuf Couronné. Il fut si fier de figurer dans Les Maîtres Sonneurs qu'il vint me remercier et me prier de faire un autre roman où il jouerait un rôle plus important."³²

L. Vincent says in her book regarding Petite Marie of La Mare au Diable:

"Sans doute la Petite Marie rappelait une amie d'enfance de George, ou peut-être sa fille qui avait été ignorée aux frais de son fils."³³

This should be sufficient proof of George's use of real people as her models, but the greatest proof that George gives us herself is the statement regarding François le Champi. Of him she said:

"Un enfant de six ou sept ans monté à poil sur un cheval nu, sauta avec sa monture le buisson qui était derrière moi, se laissa glisser à terre, abandonna le poulain à son paturage et revint pour sauter lui-même l'obstacle qu'il avait si lestement franchi à cheval un moment auparavant. Ce n'était plus aussi facile pour ses petites jambes, et je l'aidais. J'eus avec lui une conversation semblable à celle rapportée au commencement du Champi avec la meunière et l'enfant trouvé. Quand je l'interrogeais sur son âge qu'il ne savait pas, il accoucha textuellement de cette belle partie, deux ans. Il ne savait ni son nom, ni celui de ses parents, ni celui de sa demeure... tout ce qu'il savait c'était se tenir sur un cheval indompté, comme un oiseau sur une branche secouée par l'orage..."³⁴

³² G. Sand, Histoire de ma vie, p. 117. ^V Vincent, op.cit.

³³ L. Vincent, Le Berry dans l'Oeuvre de George Sand, p. 107.

³⁴ G. Sand, François le Champi, p. 3.

She goes on to tell us that in her life time at Nohant she has reared many "champs" of both sexes and has been happy to see them develop into self-respecting human beings.

In all the stories written by George Sand there seems to be a place for all the characters with the exception of one. In François Le Champi, we are introduced to one who seems to appear in the story for only a fleeting moment and then disappears from view, without having any apparent bearing on the story. Her name was Mariette. That is about all that George tells us besides the fact that the girl was no good, and in bad company. Perhaps George meant to write a story in itself about this girl, but whatever happened to her, she has never told us in any other books or in her memoirs.

In all the novels all the simple peasants are turned into well bred, educated human beings. George raised them from toilers of the land to farmers of high class. There is little wonder that she knew her subjects intimately when we realise that she was a beloved person around Nohant, respected and adored by those whose stories she made to live in her "romans champêtres."

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