

INTRODUCTION

GEORGE SAND

George Sand was born Amantine-Aurore-Lucile Dupin on July 1, 1804, in Paris, and was known simply as Aurore. Her father, Maurice Dupin, a lieutenant of the Revolution, was a great-grandson of Augustus II the Strong, King of Poland. Her mother, Sophie Delaborde, was the daughter of a bird fancier who, according to Sand, belonged to the vagabond race of Bohemians.¹ When Aurore was four years old her father died, and from then, her mother having few resources, she was raised by her paternal grandmother at the family estate, Nohant, in the French region of Berry.

In 1822, at the age of eighteen, Aurore married Colonel Casimir Dudevant. Their affection was genuine, but the relationship deteriorated over its nine-year life. Aurore produced two children, Maurice and Solange, before leaving Casimir and moving to Paris in 1831, Maurice remaining with his father, and Aurore taking Solange.² From 1836 Aurore officially separated from her husband, divorce not being authorized in that era,³ and in 1838 she gained custody of both her children.⁴ From 1831, for a “brief and incidental time”⁵ when she was a single mother in Paris, her husband’s financial contribution was insufficient and Aurore willingly took to writing, hoping to make a living by it.⁶ She managed her small income by living in attics, cropping her hair, temporarily abandoning the layers of women’s drapery and donning

a redingote, trousers, vest, and tie. Her unconventional life made her paradoxically invisible and visible: the trousers and short hair allowed her to mingle invisibly as a female in the male-only theater pits, studios, clubrooms, and cafés,⁷ and, once her reputation had developed as a woman who dressed in men's clothing, her visibility attracted valuable attention for her as a new author.⁸

While keeping company with theater-goers, artists, and writers, Aurore met a law student, Jules Sandeau, and in 1831 they wrote a novel together, *Rose et Blanche*, and published it under his shortened name, J. Sand. Aurore Dudevant soon adopted this surname, and chose the first name of George for its meaning, "one who works the earth," appropriate, she said, for someone from rural Berry.⁹ During her life as George Sand, she was idolized as an author and widely read in French, with her works quickly translated into a number of European languages. Extraordinarily for a nineteenth-century woman, George Sand became financially independent as an author. She was still writing when she died in 1876 at the age of 71.

As an exceptional French novelist, Sand considered herself an equal among her male peers.¹⁰ During her career her books were "in everybody's hands,"¹¹ but by the end of her century her work was little read. Interest was renewed toward the end of the twentieth century, and in recent years a few new English translations have been published, among them *Indiana* (1994), a novel which upset social conventions on marriage, and *The Devil's Pool* (2004), a romantic novella of preindustrial country life, very popular when published and still recommended.¹² But many today wouldn't know that George Sand produced 70 novels, 50 volumes of other works including novellas, short stories, poetry, plays, memoirs, and 26 volumes of correspondence. Within her diverse oeuvre she explored many of the genres of fiction, among them feminist romances, the *Bildungsroman* and utopian socialist novels. In the late 1830s Sand reflected on her continuing belief in God amidst her disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church, and wrote a gothic novel of ideas, the darkly introspective *Spiridion*.

SPIRIDION: THE PLOT

You would search in vain for a less tarnished monastery and for better monks; they are all like this. Faith is lost on the earth and vice is unpunished.

—Alexis in *Spiridion*

In the beginning Spiridion created a monastery, a place of enlightenment where faith could increase through science, and monks could search for truth. But he became obsessed with his own studies and forgot to watch over his monk family, leaving them to degenerate into brutal, idle conformists responding only to dogma and emotional torture, “victims of ignorance and imposture.” Then he died.

Now, Spiridion had written the “truth” in an illuminated manuscript, and his beloved disciple, Fulgence, had buried it in Spiridion’s sepulcher according to his dying wish. The treasure could be exhumed only by a sincere and selfless spirit. “Plunge a firm and pious hand into my dried entrails,” said Abbot Spiridion, and you will find “the fruit of my whole life’s meditations.” Fulgence was timid, made to love more than to know, so he passed the secret to his successor, Alexis, a rational scientist who for years was disturbed by the irrational nighttime visits from Spiridion’s ghost, and could not defy the Dantesque terrors of the sepulcher. Only an innocent novice, not yet indoctrinated, could boldly descend into the crypt and open the coffin—the astronomer’s sixteen-year-old disciple and only friend, Angel.

And so Angel was initiated into the clandestine tradition of passing on a spiritual truth. When the soldiers of the Revolution entered the monastery church, the old monk was slain on the stone over the crypt, whereon was engraved the legend *Hic est veritas*. Providence commanded Angel to live, “to leave the cloister and return to life.” This is Angel’s manuscript, his testimony passed

on to us, his tale of books and their terrible passage from writer to reader.

Spiridion is a gothic philosophical novel warning of the fate awaiting monks who banish benevolence as a useless virtue. It's a strange tale in an undivided text, a nesting of narratives in an impossible world of characters who are clearly good or evil and exclusively male. Not one woman is seen or heard within or without the monastery walls.

Goodness is embodied in Father Alexis, a scientist monk in his sixties, and in his disciple, Angel, an intelligent, devoted novice. Angel narrates the tale beginning with his ostracism, introducing the reader to a community of cruel, controlling monks, a brotherhood of the godless godly who represent human evil; the prior, Donatien, in particular, leads by the example of selfish ambition, falsehood, and delegation of dirty deeds. But there are also beings of a lesser substance, unrepentant evil spirits that populate not only the monastery but the protagonists' visions and nightmares.

The story is Sand's reaction against the cloistering of men who forget not only the importance of intellectual activity, but also how to be compassionate and loving toward one another and to those outside their community. But she was also aware that the fear of knowledge is learned; the founding father she created for her monastery is himself its inadvertent teacher. Abbot Spiridion chooses intelligent, virtuous men to join his religious community, confident that "with them, he could devote himself to the research of all the truths." He settles down to zealously write and theorize, not mindful that his disciples need a leader who is present. In their unsupervised state they become as children: idle, gluttonous, and uncharitable.

Spiridion makes knowledge his idol in an institution where God alone is to be worshiped. His spiritual punishment is severe: his soul will not rest in peace, but for a century will roam in search of a living monk to right his wrong. Most of his successors will consider him fallen, not to be imitated. They warn the brothers that:

In the cloister, it's not good to cultivate knowledge too much. The spirit becomes excited, pride often takes hold of the best minds, and boredom makes you grow weary of always believing in the same truths. You want to discover new ones; you wander from the straight path.

Monkish reading is restricted to such orthodox texts as *The Lives of the Saints*, but there are other books within these walls that are not for their eyes, heretical banned books locked in a haunted library or hidden in a coffin or written in invisible ink.

While our monks are forced to remain on the straight path, they are also discouraged from forming friendships and questioning the devious ways of the leaders who, to obtain perfect obedience from the brothers, keep them ignorant and terrify them with the “crass charlatanry” of lies and tricks and superstitions. Angel enters the Benedictine order believing it is a virtuous community and is perplexed and distraught when none will befriend him. Alexis explains this oppression:

They have sensed in you a man with a heart, sensitive to insults, compassionate to suffering, an enemy of violent and cowardly passions. They have told themselves that in such a man they would not find an accomplice, but a judge. . . . They want to teach you, through mysterious and vile plots, through clueless riddles and groundless chastisements, to live brutally in the love and esteem of yourself alone, to do without sympathy, to lose all confidence, to despise all friendship. . . . They want, in a word, to make a monk of you.

Spiridion's monastery, established in the late seventeenth century, is portrayed as an ideal institution corrupted, where most of the inhabitants had drifted irredeemably away from the practices of meditation and truth-seeking, and were now given over to the

laziness of habitual prayer and repetitive readings, the hypocrisy of sin-seeking in one another, and division into factions. To those who fight for the progress of humanity, monks are those who “outrage liberty,” as Alexis says at the end of his life, and they must be killed. For, in the cloister,

all light, all progress, all greatness must perish there if
some of us do not persevere in the dreadful fight that
ignorance and imposture are now waging against truth.

It is a harsh view of monastic life.

Yet, George Sand shines a light on a few good men who don't fit the stereotype, who live under the Benedictine Rule but according to their consciences, and through the qualities of these characters she points to paths of hope. Abbot Spiridion is a searcher with an ideal who wants to share his discoveries and increase learning among men; his successor, Fulgence, while not a searcher, is a kindhearted monk. The solitary scientist, Alexis, learns the value of friendship through a lay brother who nurses him during illness, and the value of selfless dedication to others through a hermit who nurses rejected and dying men. And Angel, our narrator, is righteous, compassionate, and detests evil.

A gothic novel set in a monastery might be an anti-Catholic statement, but Sand uses *Spiridion* to offer solutions for living with Church teachings. She even suggests that the truth is hidden within Catholicism: *Hic est veritas, Here is the truth*. Alexis (and through him, Sand) searches for the truth that he believes can be found paradoxically in an institution which operates on lies. He is convinced Spiridion's manuscript will be a source of wisdom, its writer being a Jewish-born student of Judaism who had converted to Protestantism and then Catholicism, reading the works of numerous philosophers like Luther and Bossuet before founding his monastery in 1690 to provide a sacred, separated environment where monks could study. When the monastery is

physically destroyed about a century later, Alexis the old monk is murdered, and Angel the young monk is spared. The death of Alexis, as a representative of the Church, is a step toward a new society. Angel, with no monastery to shelter him now, will have to take his mentor's advice to "return to the world," where he will have to think for himself. For George Sand, this is human progress.

Sand began writing *Spiridion* in France early in 1838, and completed it the following winter during a sojourn on the Spanish island of Majorca. Between October 1838 and January 1839 the novel was published in five serial episodes in the Parisian *Revue des deux mondes*, the first three having been sent while she was still in France, and the final two parts written in and sent from Majorca.

The ending of the 1839 edition—completed too quickly at the demand of the editor of the *Revue des deux mondes*, anxious not to keep readers waiting for the final parts—was unsatisfactory both to George Sand and her readers. "What can you do when you're being rushed by a damned magazine?" she asked.¹³ This version of *Spiridion* was published in book form in 1839, dispensing with the five-part division. A few years later Sand reworked the ending, shortening the secret manuscript and expressing her sympathies with the French Revolution and its ideas of progress for mankind; and the monks, originally Franciscans, became Benedictines (a more scholarly order). The revised novel was published in December 1842. Despite the changes, Sand excused her philosophy; in a letter to a friend that month she wrote about *Spiridion*:

This is only a novel, or a nightmare if you like. I have never claimed to be writing the solution to anything. That is not my role. Perhaps my whole life will be consumed in searching for the truth, without my being able to formulate a single aspect of it: each to his task.

And about the new ending, she said in the same letter:

These few pages . . . will teach you nothing but they will make you think, and if I have stirred you to find the solution that I'm asking for, that I'm searching for, let me know.¹⁴

SOURCES AND INSPIRATION

Spiridion draws on Sand's experiences in religious milieux, her philosophical readings and discussions, and gothic tales of terror, *romans noirs*, which had been in favor since the end of the eighteenth century. Unlike many of Sand's novels inspired by her rural home in Berry, *Spiridion* was in part a reflection on her schooldays in the Paris convent of the Augustines anglaises which she attended as an adolescent. Her autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie* (*The Story of My Life*), turns up a few striking parallels between incidents in her convent and in *Spiridion's* monastery. Aurore and her schoolgirl friends had once descended a forbidden staircase and discovered a locked door; she had been locked in a small room, then released; she had felt indescribable emotion before a sunlit painting; and heard a voice murmur in her ear, "*Tolle, lege,*" "Take up and read," only to turn round and find she was alone.¹⁵ Her convent experience also furnished Alexis's judgment about his cold-hearted religious brothers; she writes in *The Story of My Life*:

I understood that nuns cannot and must not love with their hearts. . . . Outside friendships avail them nothing. Worldly things, in their eyes, are of value only to the extent that they support the exceptional conditions of their existence. I stopped longing for the convent when I saw that, there, the ideal had been subordinated to such conditions.¹⁶

Following her break with the Roman Catholic Church in 1834, Sand spent years reading and debating other philosophies

and alternate interpretations of the Bible. During a friendship with a utopian Christian philosopher, Pierre Leroux, she wrote *Spiridion* and dedicated it to him. His theory was that a new religion would follow three ages of Christianity, a theory which Sand liked and recommended to her friends.

I believe in eternal life, in eternal humanity, in eternal progress; . . . in this regard, I have embraced the beliefs of Pierre Leroux . . . I don't know if they will satisfy you, but I can't give you any better.¹⁷

It was once believed Leroux's influence on *Spiridion* extended to his having written parts of it. A curious handwriting, thought to have been his, has now been identified as that of George Sand's son Maurice and his tutor Mallefille, who wrote to her dictation when she had rheumatism in her arm and could not hold a pen.¹⁸

By November 1838 Sand had been writing *Spiridion* on and off for a year, but she had completed only three of the five parts when she left on her voyage to Majorca to escape the Parisian winter, accompanied by her children and her lover, Frédéric Chopin. Maurice had rheumatism like his mother, and Chopin had been ill for some time with a disease, possibly tuberculosis;¹⁹ it was hoped the warmer Mediterranean winter would help them both recover good health. During the first weeks on the island, Sand encountered "superb monasteries in ruins with palms, aloes and cactus amid broken mosaics and dilapidated cloisters,"²⁰ and this put her back on track to work on *Spiridion*, though inadequate accommodation made it impossible. After a month the family group moved further north on the island to the Royal Carthusian Monastery of Valldemossa, secularized in 1835 and now renting out its cells. There, for two months, they lived in a sparsely furnished, three-room cell, where Sand finished *Spiridion* to the sounds of Chopin composing his *Preludes*:

With what poetry his music filled that sanctuary, even in the midst of his most pain-ridden restlessness . . . It was the most beautiful place I have ever lived in.²¹

Until now her fictional monks had lived only on the interior of their monastery. Sand took such pleasure in the poetry and solitude²² of the Majorcan autumn that she introduced an epidemic into the community, driving Father Alexis outside into a beautiful autumn of dried leaves under foot and migrating birds in symmetrical flight overhead. His sensibility was stimulated through gardening and sea-gazing, and an encounter with sick and dying men. In her travel account about these few months, *Un Hiver à Majorque (A Winter in Majorca)*, published in 1842 like the revised *Spiridion*, Sand wrote of the environment of the Valldemossan monastery. On her walks she had been inspired by the grand spectacle of the sea, an element of nature that also deeply affected her character, Alexis. If she was not greatly influenced by the monastic architecture of the Charterhouse, she “asked its abandoned walls to reveal the intimate thoughts of the licentious recluses whom they had, for centuries, separated from human life.”²³ The same account tells of her visit to a nearby hermitage²⁴ and her observation of a reclusive former monk still living in a Valldemossan cell;²⁵ both were sources for the hermit and the ascetic who feature in the final installments of the novel.

Sand was fortunate to land by happenstance in this cell and for a while to live the isolated, cloistered life of her characters, for aging monks and an abandoned monastery were ideal food for the gothic imagination. She had read works by pioneers in the genre, among them Ann Radcliffe and E. T. A. Hoffmann,²⁶ and was familiar with the physical elements designed to terrify—ruined castles or monasteries, lugubrious subterranean spaces, echoing vaults, secret rooms, secret manuscripts, animated portraits and statues—and a gothic cast of characters which typically included

a corrupt tyrannical leader, a persecuted maiden, a simple-minded servant, and of course a hero who challenged the tyrant and saved the virgin. *Spiridion* has it all, with the exception of the maiden: here the persecuted virgin is a virtuous adolescent boy, Angel.

Yet, while the first three parts of the novel are greatly dependent for interest on oppression and hauntings and secrets, the last parts, written in the Charterhouse of Valldemossa, have a more sober tone and less supernatural activity. Sand may have ceased to be Catholic but she was yet a believer in an omnipotent God, and, for her, a religious institution was a place where the truth had at one time been preached and where it was still buried. Although the dim, cavernous spaces of a regressed monastery hold Alexis prisoner, here he does indeed discover the truth, but will be confined to his gloomy tower even to his dying days. Angel, on the other hand, will also learn the truth but will leave alive, symbolizing the liberty that must be offered to Catholics, and that, in the end, the French Revolution will bring. George Sand must have considered her fifteen-year-old son, Maurice, as she was writing of Angel, the sixteen-year-old novice, trusting and innocent and under the instruction of a wise mentor encouraging him to go out into the world, telling him to remember “to live.”

One other possible source must be considered. The real Saint Spiridion may have played a role in Sand’s creation, and may have suggested the ideas of a precious manuscript buried with its keeper and a guiding voice from the grave. Saint Spiridion, a Greek bishop in Cyprus in the fourth century, was a married man who had been, and who remained all his life, a shepherd.²⁷ A valuable object was left with his daughter, Irene, for safekeeping, but she died without telling anyone where she had put it. The story goes that when the owner returned to collect it, the bishop went to her burial place and asked her where she had put the article. She answered that it was in the safest place: her coffin. . . .

SPIRIDION AS INSPIRATION

For books continue each other in spite of our habit of judging them separately.

—Virginia Woolf

The powerful presence of Sand's gothic novel in French literature inspired gifted writers by its characters and ideas of moral reform—in particular Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Matthew Arnold, Henry James, and Ernest Renan. Dostoyevsky's reading of *Spiridion* prompted him to say of George Sand:

there was no thinker or writer in the France of her time who understood with such force that man shall not live by bread alone.²⁸

And readers of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) by Dostoyevsky would have recognized Father Alexis and Angel in two of its characters, the old dying monk, Father Zosima, and his young disciple, Alyosha.

If Sand was influenced by her century's gothic mania, then readers of *The Name of the Rose*, written 140 years after *Spiridion*, will wonder whether Umberto Eco was influenced by *Spiridion* when they recognize its terror and mystery in Eco's grim Italian abbey and corrupt, friendless monks, traitors and torturers hiding behind Church-sanctioned walls, and his two protagonists—again, a wise old monk, Brother William, and an innocent young novice, Adso, who, like Angel, narrates the tale. A few gothic details will also seem familiar in *Spiridion*'s twentieth-century descendant—a secret library, invisible ink, a mysterious illuminated manuscript, and at the end, a monastery physically destroyed.

SPIRIDION FOR TODAY

Today George Sand is an author more talked about than read, yet her works engage issues that are still relevant. Her *Spiridion* is essentially a heated criticism of certain Catholics—in this case, monks—who live a regimented and unquestioning existence controlled by abusive, power-hungry men. She takes them to task and proposes alternative ways of living, for monks and readers alike, urging us to question philosophies and doctrines and leaders, not to follow rules mindlessly.

Like many nominal Christians today, Sand, once she had begun pursuing her career as a female author, did not obey the Church's commands and stopped attending mass. Yet though she broke with the Roman Church in the early 1830s, by the end of the decade she was exploring faith in God (if not in a divine Christ) while questioning religious institutional authority. She seems to find an answer here in *Spiridion* when Father Alexis, during a dispute with the prior, realizes:

a moment of indignation had drawn a line in my mind
between the authority of faith and the application of
this authority in the hands of men.

Abbot Spiridion's failure—as a man with an ideal of creating a small scholarly community and then neglecting it in favor of his own personal scientific goals—is alarming and should not be ignored. The message of *Spiridion* can appear self-contradictory: study is encouraged and ignorance condemned, but at the same time study can become an obsession leading to forgetfulness and insensitivity to life's duties and pleasures, so we must learn with Alexis as he learns the lesson of moderation and adherence to a few Christian principles: transparency among monks, even friendship; supporting the sick and the poor; testing all things. If many of the

changes proffered in *Spiridion* have not occurred within Catholic institutions over the past century and a half, Sand's exhortations nonetheless demand a response in this twenty-first century when Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant, are seeing droves of people turn their backs on the clergy in particular, and on rigid teachings in general. Many religious institutions today operate with an unspoken code of secrecy around decades of neglect and abuse. Much of the blame must be laid on those whom society has allowed to remain as unaccountable as the evil monks we meet in *Spiridion*, committed only outwardly to worshiping and working for God.

REVIEWS

There are reasons to regret that *Spiridion* has been almost forgotten and reasons to reintroduce, in English, this gothic story with its philosophical turn. That the editor of the *Revue des deux mondes* found the novel suitable to publish in five episodes and then to issue it as a book in its own right, twice, suggests the story had a powerful effect on its editors and readers. Reactions in 1839, as well as reviews written at the end of the twentieth century, were positive, praising Sand's style even if in some ways criticizing the subject matter.

A few months after the novel was completed, William Makepeace Thackeray wrote a review in *The Students' Quarter*. George Sand, he said, was "the most elegant writer, I think, that her sex ever produced, and the best writer of her day now in France."²⁹ He described her style in *Spiridion* as:

beautifully rich and pure. She has a very exuberant imagination, and with it a very chaste style of expression. . . . she leaves you at the end of one of her brief, rich, melancholy sentences, with plenty of food for future cogitation.³⁰

While Thackeray slammed the spiritual proposals expressed in *Spiridion*, he commended her writing and translated into English several extracts “from the dramatic and descriptive parts of the novel, that cannot, in point of style and beauty, be praised too highly.”³¹

Some years later, in 1868, Henry James rebuked Thackeray as a critic who had measured “his flimsy convictions against the serious and passionate ideas propounded in Madame Sand’s work.”³² Nevertheless, James says he “cherished the passage”³³ translated by Thackeray and says of *Spiridion* that George’s critics who “reproach her with being too erotic” should see that in this work she “performed the very rare feat of writing a novel not only containing no love save divine love, but containing not one woman’s figure.”³⁴

Now we skip forward almost a century to 1966 and a valuable scholarly study by Jean Pommier, *George Sand et le rêve monastique: Spiridion*, which examined its origins and composition. Pommier demonstrated, with remarks by Théophile Gautier and Ernest Renan, that the novel would draw different reactions from different readers. For Gautier, reading *Spiridion* produced the same effect as looking at *L’Amende honorable*, a painting by Delacroix, “a kind of disturbing oppression and legendary dread.”³⁵ And for Renan, few books were more important in his intellectual development than *Spiridion*, which he described as “one of the books dearest to me.”³⁶ A visit to a monastery once evoked for him “the very strange intellectual situation that George Sand depicted admirably in *Spiridion*.”³⁷

Since Pommier’s small book appeared in the 1960s, several scholars have examined *Spiridion*’s richness and complexity as well as George Sand’s moving search for truth, which reflected the ideas of the 1830s and 1840s. An essay by Pierre Machery published in 1990, translated by David Macey as “George Sand’s *Spiridion*: a pantheist novel,” noted that it was “one of the least read of

her books, and certainly one of the least accessible,” but “at the time of its publication it confirmed its author’s reputation as a mediator or intercessor who transmitted news of major intellectual developments.”³⁸ In 1991, Isabelle Hoog Naginski also wrote in her book *George Sand: Writing for Her Life* that she wished to reestablish Sand as a preeminent novelist of nineteenth-century French literature.³⁹ Naginski points to the variety of novelistic genres explored by Sand and even new genres she created, including the “metaphysical” genre of *Spiridion*, to which Naginski devotes several pages.

In 2000, Slatkine Reprints produced a new French edition of *Spiridion* with a foreword by Oscar A. Haac and an introduction by Michèle Hecquet. Hecquet justified this new publication of the 1842 edition, saying that while the novel *Spiridion* is “these days neglected and even unobtainable, it was welcomed in its time as a great book of ideas.”⁴⁰ A reviewer for the Slatkine Reprints edition, Annabelle M. Rea, noted that while several translations of *Spiridion* appeared in the nineteenth century it is regrettable that little critical attention is paid to this novel now, despite a renewed interest in Sand studies. The new edition of 2000 would, Rea believed, highlight Sand’s international influence during her lifetime, as well as the diversity of her writing, and suggest new areas of Sandian scholarship.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

While *Spiridion* is effective as a horror story, it bears examining for its questioning of doctrine and certain perversions of monastic mission, and for its warning that an aversion to knowledge, or conversely a deification of it, can subdue feelings of morality and benevolence. And as a rare example of a book excluding all females—unless the reader hears the voice of the author—*Spiridion* will reward analysis of its comment on an all-male microcosm written by a mother of two, a lover of many, a feminist whose

personal life was scandalous in her early writing years even if today it would raise few eyebrows.

If *Spiridion* is a fierce critique of the Catholic monastery as a patriarchal system that can morally corrupt its people, the novel does not condemn Catholicism to the flames, but rather, as we saw earlier, proposes ways to lift up its lifeless, loveless institutions. The abbot's secret manuscript, retrievable only by one who is bold and fearless, is symbolic of the truth which Sand herself sought within Catholicism and Christianity. Indeed, many of the beliefs expressed in *Spiridion* were her own; she wrote in a letter of November 1838 as she was working on the final parts of the novel: "It's not the easiest thing in the world to give the conclusion of one's own religious beliefs."⁴² Per Nykrog notes that *Spiridion* marks a point of reorientation in Sand's novels: previously, they were concerned with the blossoming of gifted heroines; afterward, her books reveal a warm, generous interest in modest people and humble peasants. But in the end she was happier than her tortured monk, Alexis, and never again returned to the spiritual confusion of the years before *Spiridion*.⁴³

Finally, if *Spiridion* has an anti-Catholic tone, it does not advocate atheism. Let's give George Sand the last word on her beliefs, defined for those who see unbelief as her motive for criticizing the Church. Years after *Spiridion* had been read and judged by many, she wrote in *The Story of My Life*:

My religion had remained the same, its foundation never wavering. The rituals of the past vanished for me, as for my whole century, in the light of study and reflection, but the eternal doctrine of believers—that God is good, that the soul is immortal, and that hope lies in the life to come—had resisted all examination, all disputation, even at times of desperate doubt. Some sanctimonious characters have judged me otherwise and declared me to be without principles, from the beginning of my literary career, because I allowed myself to challenge purely

human institutions which it pleased them to look on as God-given. Some political characters have also decreed me an atheist regarding their rigid or changeable dogmas. Evidently bigots and hypocrites find principles only where blindness and cowardice exist. Should it bother me?⁴⁴

FIN

NOTES

1. George Sand to Charles Poncy, December 23, 1843, in *Correspondance*. Textes réunis, classés et annotés par Georges Lubin (Paris, Garniers Frères, 1964–1995), Tome VI, 327–328.

2. Many biographers believe there is evidence that Solange is the daughter of Stéphane Ajasson de Grandsagne. See for example Paul Christophe, *George Sand et Jésus* (Paris, Les Éditions du cerf, 2003), 41.

3. www.amisdegeorgesand.info/fichfaq7.html.

4. George Sand, *The Story of my Life*, a group translation edited by Thelma Jurgrau (State University of New York Press, 1991), 1082.

5. *Ibid.*, 893.

6. *Ibid.*, 887.

7. *Ibid.*, 903.

8. The painting by Eugène Delacroix, *George Sand en habits d'homme* (*George Sand dressed as a man*), was commissioned by her publisher, François Buloz, to promote her books and reputation as a non-conforming female author. Janis Bergman-Carton, *The Woman of Ideas in French Art, 1830–1848* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 202.

9. Christophe, *George Sand et Jésus*, 46–47.

10. Isabelle Hoog Naginski, *George Sand: Writing for Her Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 14.

11. Cited in Bergman-Carton, *Woman of Ideas*, 199.

12. *1001 Books you must read before you die* includes *The Devil's Pool* in its nineteenth-century selection.

13. Sand to Charlotte Marliani, January 22, 1839. *Corr.*, IV, 561. My trans.

14. Sand to Henriette de La Bigottière, December 1842. *Corr.*, V, 826–828. My trans.
15. Sand, *The Story of My Life*, 655, 671, 695, 698.
16. *Ibid.*, 904.
17. Sand to Mlle M. Leroyer le Chantepie, August 28, 1842. *Corr.* V, 757. My trans.
18. Sand to Franz Liszt, January 28, 1838. *Corr.* IV, 337.
19. There is some doubt about the diagnosis of tuberculosis. See “Chopin’s disease,” Wikipedia.
20. Sand to Christine Buloz, November 14, 1838. *Corr.* IV, 515. My trans.
21. Sand, *The Story of My Life*, 1094.
22. Sand to Mme Marliani, November 14, 1838. *Corr.* IV, 522.
23. George Sand, *Un Hiver à Majorque* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, n.d.), 127. My trans.
24. *Ibid.*, 166.
25. *Ibid.*, 111.
26. Radcliffe is mentioned in *Consuelo*; Hoffmann’s story is in Sand’s Nohant library.
27. St Spiridion’s relics were transferred from Cyprus to Corfu where they are still paraded through the city of Corfu.
28. Naginski, *George Sand: Writing for Her Life*, 150.
29. William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Students’ Quarter* (Piccadilly, London: John Camden Hotten, 1839), 69.
30. *Ibid.*, 74.
31. *Ibid.*, 108.
32. Henry James, “George Sand” in *Literary Criticism: French Writers. Volume Two* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 697. Originally in *Nation*, July 16, 1868.
33. *Ibid.*, 696.
34. *Ibid.*, 726–727.
35. Cited in Pommier, *George Sand et le rêve monastique*, 94. My trans.
36. *Ibid.*, 99. My trans.
37. *Ibid.*, 98. My trans.
38. Pierre Macherey, “George Sand’s *Spiridion*: a pantheist novel” in *The Object of Literature*, trans. D. Macey (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38.

39. Naginski, *George Sand: Writing for Her Life*, 2.
40. Michèle Hecquet, Introduction to *Spiridion: texte de 1842* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 2000), 37. My trans.
41. A.M. Rea, Book review for *Spiridion* in *The French Review* 76, (May 2003), 1242.
42. Sand to Christine Buloz, November 1838, from Palma Majorca; *Corr.* IV, 515. My trans.
43. Per Nykrog, “La Tentation du Père Alexis: *Spiridion* ou l’Agonie du Christianisme” in *Revue des sciences humaines* no. 226, April–June 1992, 96.
44. Sand, *The Story of My Life*, 878.

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