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Lise Bissonnette, *Maurice Sand: Une œuvre et son brisant au 19e siècle*. Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2016. 484 pp. Illustrations, portraits, bibliography, and index. \$39.95 CAD (pb). ISBN 978-2-7606-3605-7; \$19.99 CAD (eb). ISBN 978-2-7606-3607-1.

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Maurice Sand's parentage has proved both a blessing and a curse: as the son of one of the most (in)famous women of the nineteenth century, he had ready access to the artistic milieu of his day, but his own contributions to the period have been occulted by George Sand's gargantuan status. Whilst scholars have shown a sustained interest in George Sand's life and works and *études sandiennes* have been thoroughly established as an integral part of the field, Maurice's work has fallen into obscurity. His literary texts have long been out of print, with the only marker of recent interest provided by Claire Le Guillou's edition of his 1864 novel, *Callirhoé*.^[1] When Maurice is discussed, he is usually summoned in support of a thesis being proposed about his mother, as a means of establishing her persona as the "bonne dame de Nohant." In short, what interest scholarship has shown in Maurice has been as a facet of George Sand's existence, his own works presumed to be of little value. Lise Bissonnette's contention in this book is that this perception of Maurice is erroneous and that the position of this "méconnu qui ne fut pas inconnu" (p. 20) within nineteenth-century French culture merits re-examination.

H-France subscribers, especially those in Canada, may well be familiar with Bissonnette's work. As a writer and journalist, she has achieved significant renown, but in this monograph, drawn from her doctoral thesis awarded by the Université de Montréal, she has channelled her longstanding interest in both George and Maurice Sand. Her methodology is indebted to the work of Jacques Le Goff, whose seminal study of Louis IX used the life of an individual as a means to illustrate the cultural developments of his age.^[2] To be sure, Maurice Sand is no Louis IX, and the traces he left behind are considerably more difficult to detect. Nonetheless, Bissonnette's approach echoes that of Le Goff in its exhaustiveness, taking in an impressive array of archival and printed materials, located on both sides of the Atlantic. Previous scholarly considerations of Maurice Sand have tended to limit themselves to his mother's correspondence, but the sheer volume of rich material Bissonnette has unearthed itself suggests a subject worthy of reappraisal. Yet Bissonnette's book is certainly not a biography. Its title announces her intention to place Maurice's oeuvre at the centre of her study, and even the choice of cover image (a photograph of Maurice's study at Nohant) reinforces the privileging of the works over the life of the artist, in contradistinction to those who have previously considered her subject. Rather, her aim is to uncover the means by which an individual whose oeuvre is not insubstantial in scale and scope could be so universally ignored or, at best, misunderstood.

In her first chapter, Bissonnette traces the reception of Maurice through biographies. Since George Sand's life has given rise to an astonishing number of biographical studies, Bissonnette sets out to establish the image of Maurice these biographers have conjured and finds that it is often of a doting son whose artistic talents were limited and whose forays into various artistic fields are entirely dependent on his mother's patronage. Astoundingly, Bissonnette exposes that some of these biographies propagate myths surrounding Maurice by repeating wholesale statements or anecdotes that Bissonnette is able to prove are undeniably false. Even on the rare occasion that Maurice forms the ostensible focus of a text, the image of the mother proves inescapable, as in the case of Maurice Toesca's pseudonymously-published biography of Maurice, tellingly entitled *Le plus grand amour de George Sand*.^[3] If Maurice is considered to have a worthwhile contribution to nineteenth-century culture, it is as the much-loved son of George Sand, not as a creator in his own right. It seems almost perverse, then, that these biographers often appear to have only a cursory familiarity with Maurice's works themselves, drawing their conclusions instead from his correspondence with his mother, a correspondence Bissonnette then reconsiders, finally asking: "Maurice Sand a-t-il existé?" (p. 95). This question seems central to Bissonnette's method, since the image of Maurice Sand that has prevailed in modern scholarship is but a pale reflection of the artist detailed by Bissonnette's study.

The second chapter of Bissonnette's book is also its most substantial and considers Maurice's oeuvre in its entirety. Through a careful and systematic appraisal of his output in all fields, Bissonnette takes, in turn, his paintings and book illustrations, his literary works, and finally his work in marionette theatre, with each subsection adopting a chronological approach to its respective focus. Helpfully accompanied by a range of colour images, the processes of genesis, editing and, where this can be established, reception, of each work are explored. What emerges from Bissonnette's discussion of his works is the image of an impressively productive individual whose talents in art were nurtured by Eugène Delacroix and whose literary works were appreciated by Flaubert. A sustained interest on Maurice's part in the fantastic also surfaces, with a particular concern with ideas of metamorphosis and metempsychosis, alongside a scientific fascination—in entomology and mineralogy in particular—that informs much of his work. Bissonnette's extensive archival research enables her to dispel the many myths surrounding Maurice. She definitively disproves the claim often made by critics that upon the death of George Sand in 1876, Maurice's literary career came to an end, emphasising a frequently overlooked novel published in 1886 entitled *La Fille du singe*. Bissonnette has also made the significant discovery of an unpublished manuscript for a novel—*Palabran*—uncovered in Yale's Beinecke Library and mentioned in a letter of 1882 from Maurice to his sister, Solange. Analysis of Maurice's manuscripts further allows Bissonnette to demonstrate that although his mother did read some (and importantly not all) of his drafts, her amendments were less extensive than has hitherto been implied and were not always incorporated into the final published editions. She thereby puts an end to the suggestion that recurs across biographies of George Sand that she had a large hand in the editing of Maurice's texts.

His predilection for largely marginal artistic forms means Maurice's oeuvre as a collective defies categorisation. Turning in her third and final chapter to the mechanisms of misrecognition, Bissonnette seeks to move outward from the works themselves to place them within a wider context, discerning what the case of Maurice Sand might tell us about the processes of canonisation. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's *Les Règles de l'art*, Bissonnette makes a convincing case for the influence of Francisco Goya, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and Edgar Allan Poe on Maurice's

aesthetic practices, positing the idea of a “fantastique transversal” (p. 325) as the unifying thread of Maurice’s oeuvre. In each discipline with which he engaged, Maurice was experimental, but not forward-looking. This is perhaps a significant factor in his obscurity. Whilst George Sand’s novels are regularly considered to have a future-oriented perspective, Maurice’s inspiration is drawn largely from the past: his fiction, whilst fantastic with apparent connections to surrealism, is also historical, drawing on his interest in archaeology; his theatre might anticipate modern forms like that of Dario Fo, but is indebted to *commedia dell’arte*.^[4] Moreover, Maurice has not left written explorations or treatises on his own aesthetic or creative practices and cannot be associated with any identifiable artistic school. Bissonnette is therefore careful not to claim Maurice as a precursor. He is, rather, “un expérimentateur, inconscient du potentiel de ses travaux” (p. 405).

If there is a “brisant” to Maurice’s oeuvre, then, we may well say that it is himself. Bissonnette offers a useful parallel with Frédéric Moreau of Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale*: Moreau is similarly born into a privileged position with access to an artistic milieu and fails to achieve his potential. Moreau suffers from inertia; Maurice, too, in a letter to his sister shortly before his death berates himself for his lack of drive. But as his exceptionally productive period during the 1850s attests, Maurice and Moreau’s own work ethics are hardly comparable. Instead, it may be fairer to assert, as Bissonnette does, that it is his choice of marginal or unfashionable genres in all his creative endeavours that have contributed to his obscurity and that the “transversalité” that exemplifies his oeuvre is simply not of his time. Although major novelists of the period often pursued visual arts in private, including Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, and indeed George Sand herself, the notion of an “écrivain-peintre” (or “peintre-écrivain”) is alien to the nineteenth century, with only Eugène Fromentin and Odilon Redon perhaps breaking the mould. The multidisciplinary figure is a twentieth-century phenomenon, and Maurice’s dilettantism was destined to leave him on the outside, misunderstood in his own era. Perhaps it is now, in an age where inter/multi/cross-disciplinary approaches are positively encouraged, that the work of Maurice Sand can finally be appreciated.

Bissonnette states in her conclusion that her intention is not to “ajouter une pierre à l’immense bâti des études sur George Sand” (p. 439), but her study is nevertheless destined to become a touchstone of Sand scholarship, providing a welcome and long-overdue corrective by rehabilitating Maurice’s position within current critical trends. Yet as Bissonnette convincingly argues over the course of her monograph, Maurice Sand’s story is one that is of significant import to a broader cultural history that omits what it cannot readily categorise. His oeuvre is of an unapologetically multidisciplinary nature, and the most substantial achievement of Bissonnette’s book is to effect a gesture towards the processes of misrecognition, and to a wider relevance of Maurice Sand to the study of interconnections between art, literature, and science. Since the revival of her works that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, George Sand’s place in the history of Western literature has been assured; Bissonnette’s thoroughly readable study goes some considerable way towards writing Maurice’s own part back into this narrative.

NOTES

[1] Maurice Sand, *Callirhoé*, ed. by Claire Le Guillou (Limoges: Les Ardents Éditeurs, 2009).

[2] Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

[3] Maurice Roy, *Le plus grand amour de George Sand* (Paris: Rieder, 1933).

[4] Isabelle Naginski has described Sand's aesthetic as a "réalisme prophétique", *George Sand mythographe* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2007), pp. 165-179, and Manon Mathias has argued that Sand develops a "conceptual vision that is future-driven," *Vision in the Novels of George Sand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 41.

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