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## The Edifying Spectacle of a Drowned Woman: Sympathy and Irony in Indiana

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## The Edifying Spectacle of a Drowned Woman: Sympathy and Irony in Indiana

### 1. L'écrivain n'est qu'un miroir

Indiana: escapist romance or early feminist roman à these? Issues of stylistic choice and social conscience are intertwined in the question of how Sand positioned—and re-positioned—her first independent entry into the changing field of the novel. In 1842, Sand declared without equivocation that the novel was written under a heartfelt sense of outrage at the “barbaric” gender inequities entrenched in French law. Moreover, she quite clearly stated that the novel itself is intended to play a distinct role in the betterment of women’s status: “Je n’avais point à faire un traité de jurisprudence, mais à guerroyer contre l’opinion; car c’est elle qui retarde ou prépare les améliorations sociales” (46). Indeed, critics who emphasize the dimension of social engagement of Sand’s later novels tend to group Indiana among them, as an early but unmistakable demonstration of Sand’s commitment to bringing about real social change through the medium of her fiction.<sup>1</sup> Certainly it is valid to read Sand’s first solo novel within the context of her later, more obviously idealistic works, or within the more general climate of socially engaged Romantic novels of the 1830s and 40s. However, at the moment of initial publication (May 1832), Indiana was equally emphatic in denying any ulterior purpose. The novel’s authorial persona compares himself to a mirror, warning readers from the outset that Indiana endeavors to represent life as it is, rather than as it should be: his elected task is “de vous amuser et non de vous instruire” (Indiana 38), and that “avant d’être moral, [l’auteur] a voulu être vrai” (39). Sand reiterated these denials even more emphatically in a private letter to Hortense Allart: “Je crois même n’avoir jamais songé à soulever une question pour ou contre la société dans Indiana ou dans Valentine (...) je suis

excessivement femme pour l'ignorance, l'inconséquence des idées, le défaut absolu de logique (...) Voyez si avec cela je puis être utile à quelqu'un et trouver quelque idée salutaire" (Correspondance 2: 389-90). One should not be too quick to dismiss these declarations as mere pro forma modesty, or even as the honest hesitations of a young writer not yet fully conscious of the scope of her own interests and abilities. Sand's early refusals to attribute any social utility to Indiana need to be examined within the framework of ideas and points of reference under which she first presented the novel to the reading public of 1832.<sup>2</sup>

In 1832, Sand's concept of a roman utile was notably different from her declaration of war on public opinion ten years later. A letter to Émile Regnault reveals the specific literary lineage that Sand had in mind during the writing of Indiana:

Mon livre est déjà jugé par moi. Il plaira à peu de gens. Il est d'une execution trop sévère, pas le plus petit mot pour rire (...). J'ai peur d'ennuyer souvent, d'ennuyer comme la vie ennuie. Et pourtant, quoi de plus intéressant que l'histoire du cœur humain quand il est vrai? Il s'agit de la faire vraie, voilà le difficile (...) beaucoup de gens diront, ce n'est pas ça, fût-ce écrit comme Bernardin, fût-ce pensé comme Jean-Jacques. (Correspondance 2: 47)

Together, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre form a powerful tradition with which Indiana is in extended—though painfully equivocal—dialogue. This is the tradition of the literary island, begun by Rousseau with the pedagogic treatise Émile (1762)<sup>3</sup> and continued by Bernardin with his best-selling novel Paul et Virginie (1788).<sup>4</sup> Both authors promote the image of a secluded tropical island (whether imaginary or real) as the ideal site where human beings might be reared according to “natural” principles, kept apart from the corruptive influence of mainland, “civilized” mores. In this isolated island sphere, knowledge can be transmitted to the pupil directly through the senses, without the tools of a more worldly education such as maps, calendars

or books.<sup>5</sup> This last prohibition is problematic, of course. Both authors advocate unmediated contact with the natural world through the medium of their own written works: a clear epistemological paradox. Diana Loxley emphasizes the strangeness of this model of reading, in which the text apparently performs “a process of erasure upon its mode of signification: there will be minimal confusion between signifier and signified or diversion by the symbol away from the symbolized because the text seeks to deny its own conditions of possibility of existence” (7-8).

Rousseau himself was well aware of the woeful gap between the lived experience of his readers and the ideal conditions of existence to which they could have only partial access through the compromise medium of the printed page. Resolution to the paradox appears to lie in the intense imaginative engagement that Rousseau hoped his ideal readers would have with certain exceptional works of fiction:<sup>6</sup> for his hypothetical pupil Émile, the elected novel is Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1719). As Rousseau writes, “Je veux que la tête lui en tourne, qu’il s’occupe sans cesse de son château, de ses chèvres, de ses plantations; qu’il apprenne en détail non dans des livres, mais sur les choses tout ce qu’il faut savoir en pareil cas; qu’il pense être Robinson lui-même” (4: 455; my emphasis). By imagining himself in Robinson’s place, Émile creates for himself a virtual island space that (Rousseau argues) will shape Émile’s values and guide his choices throughout his life in society. In similar fashion, Rousseau invites readers of his own novel Julie (1762) to identify strongly with its characters, drawing useful lessons from Julie’s renunciation of romantic love in favor of virtuous domesticity: a sacrifice of the self which culminates in Julie’s fatal dive into Lake Léman to save her son from drowning. Rousseau emphasizes the practical value of Julie’s example in the second preface to the novel:

J'aime à me figurer deux époux lisant ce recueil ensemble, y puisant un nouveau courage pour supporter leurs travaux communs, et peut-être de nouvelles vues pour les rendre utiles. Comment pourraient-ils y contempler le tableau d'un ménage heureux, sans vouloir imiter un si doux modèle? Comment s'attendriront-ils sur le charme de l'union conjugale, même privé de celui de l'amour, sans que la leur se resserre et s'affermisse? (508)

Here the act of reading is figured as the contemplation of a visual tableau: an image of the reading process from which the book itself seems oddly banished, as the contents of the novel move off the printed page and into the lives of its readers (Darnton 251).

The island fantasies of *Émile* and the spectacle of the virtuously drowned Julie had a demonstrably profound impact on at least one of Rousseau's readers: his friend and literary legatee Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Bernardin followed closely in his mentor's footsteps with his own fiction: *Paul et Virginie* (1788) and *La Chaumière indienne* (1790). Like Rousseau, Bernardin condemns the printed medium, yet also credits certain exceptional novels with the power to bring humankind together in a community of shared sentiment that transcends differences of race, class or culture. Bernardin's own works dramatically foreground the Enlightenment concept of sympathy, or the belief that all human beings are instinctively drawn to share the emotional state that they witness in others, especially a state of suffering or distress.<sup>7</sup> In particular, *Paul et Virginie* vividly demonstrates the transformative force of universal sympathy. The novel's catastrophic climax shatters the idyllic family community of its protagonists, when the prim Virginie dies in a shipwreck, preferring to drown with her modesty intact rather than remove her clothes and allow a sailor to effect a rescue: a "virtuous" drowning death which recalls Julie's. Yet the family's traumatic loss itself transforms the disparate inhabitants of Ile de France; the colony founded on maritime commerce and a cash-crop agriculture fueled by slave labor is now re-formed (and reformed) into a community united by shared grief. The

point is underscored dramatically at Virginie's burial, where mourners perform an extended and diverse series of African and Indian funerary rites; as the narrator observes, "tant la perte d'un objet aimable intéresse toutes les nations, et tant est grand le pouvoir de la vertu malheureuse, puisqu'elle réunit toutes les religions autour de son tombeau" (183). Moreover, like Rousseau, Bernardin hoped that this affective circle would extend beyond the pages of the novel to encompass its readers. Indeed, Bernardin even seems to have entertained visions of international détente founded on the widespread sympathetic response to Paul et Virginie, declaring in the 1789 preface that "j'ai la consolation d'éprouver que la langue de la nature est toujours entendue, même chez les nations rivales, et qu'elle peut encore les rapprocher mieux que la langue des traités diplomatiques" (217).<sup>8</sup>

Moral utility is thus a central component of the model of reading that both Bernardin and Rousseau promote with their shared image of the literary island. Of course, the concept of a roman utile was not new; by the latter half of the eighteenth century, defending the genre as a pleasant source of moral instruction was an old and familiar argument. The peculiar novelty of Rousseau and Bernardin's literary island model is that for these authors, reading the literary island is coextensive with actually witnessing the events that the novel relates; both reading and witnessing entail an instant recognition of moral truths that universal instinct confirms. The hermeneutic process itself is forestalled in favor of a swifter discovery of pre-ordained truths: seeing and knowing equalized, to use Loxley's phrase (7). It is this particular image of reading, far more than the accessories of the tropical island setting, which links Indiana to the earlier tradition of the literary island. Indiana herself is, after all, a thoroughly bookish protagonist whose reading habits have led more than one critic to compare her to Emma Bovary (Schor 53, Booker 226-36). The

comparison is certainly apt; yet rather than look forward to 1857, it is more useful to refer back to Sand's eighteenth-century predecessors in order to comprehend Indiana's complicated relationship to what the heroine herself terms "ces riantes et puériles fictions où l'on intéresse le cœur au succès de folles entreprises et d'impossibles félicités" (247). As this painfully self-conscious characterization suggests, Indiana calls into question the core tenets of Rousseau and Bernardin's island narratives. Indeed, Sand's inaugural novel employs a deeply unsettling irony to ask what role a novel "should" play in the lives of its readers. Happy ending notwithstanding, the original Indiana offers no single or final answer to this crucial question.

## 2. La règle du cœur

In Rousseau's Émile, the figure of the vicaire savoyard offers an infallible rule for determining the truthfulness of whatever he reads: "Portant en moi (...) une règle facile et simple qui me dispense de la vaine subtilité des argumens, je reprends sur cette règle l'examen des connoissances qui m'intéressent, résolu d'admettre pour évidentes toutes celles auxquelles dans la sincérité de mon cœur je ne pourrai refuser mon consentement" (4: 570; original spelling respected). The vicaire's rule of the heart resonates strongly with the epistemological convictions of Indiana's heroine. A model Rousseauistic reader, Indiana believes that her desire to escape into desert island seclusion derives from the same instinctive source. As she declares to Raymon: "Si j'écoutais la voix que Dieu a mise au fond de mon cœur, et ce noble instinct d'une nature forte et hardie, qui peut être la vraie conscience, je fuirais au désert (...), je vivrais pour moi seule au fond de nos belles montagnes; j'oublierais les tyrans, les injustes et les ingrats" (250). The narrator observes, however, that Indiana's romanesque desire stems not so much from her conscience or

natural instinct as from her socially-mandated subjugation to an abusive husband: “Alors elle ne rêva plus que de fuite, de solitude et d’indépendance; elle roula dans son cerveau meurtri et douloureux mille projets d’établissement romanesque dans les terres désertes de l’Inde ou de l’Afrique (...) elle se faisait un monde à part qui la consolait de celui où elle était forcée de vivre” (273-4). On similar grounds, Raymon complains to Indiana, “Où avez-vous rêvé l’amour? dans quel roman à l’usage des femmes de chambre avez-vous étudié la société, je vous prie?” (217). Viewed from this perspective, the voice in Indiana’s heart is not an instinct shared by all humankind, but the learned beliefs of a specific demographic: restricted to a disenfranchised and even denigrated gender and class. Moreover, the self-serving Raymon manipulates Indiana’s romanesque ideals by counterfeiting the lover-messiah that he (quite accurately) guesses she has been awaiting throughout her adult life. In other words, in stark contrast to Rousseau’s *Émile*, whose Crusoe-inspired fantasies form a mental and moral quarantine that protects him from society, Indiana’s imagined insular paradise leaves her culturally primed to become Raymon’s dupe.

Indiana’s distance from its idealistic predecessors may further be measured by the narrator’s treatment of Noun’s drowned corpse. The mode of Noun’s death clearly recalls both Virginie and Julie’s dramatic deaths by water. In both Rousseau and Bernardin’s narratives, these climactic scenes take place in the midst of a group of onlookers who are powerless to intervene. The reaction of the crowd is instant, unanimous horror and grief: a powerful performance of universal human sympathy which anticipates the reader’s own response, “naturally” extending the affective circle beyond the pages of the novel. Indeed, Paul et Virginie’s narrator explicitly invites readers to find such scenes not only distressing,



but edifying; he declares axiomatically that “Les images du bonheur nous plaisent, mais celles du malheur nous instruisent” (141). In contrast, Indiana’s narrator does not draw lofty moral lessons from Noun’s death; rather, he mordantly evokes the potential entertainment value of yet another drowned young woman:

Je pourrais, pour peu que je fusse à la hauteur de mon siècle, exploiter avec fruit la catastrophe qui se trouve si agréablement sous ma main, vous faire assister aux funérailles, vous exposer le cadavre d’une femme noyée, avec ses taches livides, ses lèvres bleus, et tous ces menus détails de l’horrible et du dégoûtant qui sont en possession de vous récréer par le temps qui court. (383)

A later passage returns to the subject with the playful, even flippant prediction that readers will be annoyed with the course of the narrative thus far: “Je m’abstiens des richesses de mon sujet. J’ai refusé de vous faire l’autopsie d’une femme noyée, je me refuse maintenant à vous peindre la mer des Indes et les montagnes bleues de l’île Bourbon (...); c’est que, voyez-vous, je n’ai pas le temps” (388). An “agreeable” catastrophe, a “fruitful” or “rich” subject for narrative treatment or readers’ enjoyment: this is a fairly eyebrow-raising characterization of the unhappy Noun’s suicide. Its detachment is deliberately jarring. Rather than aspire to draw readers into the affective circle of mourners—blurring the distinction between reader and witness—the narrator disrupts the illusion of presence by evoking alternative narrative possibilities or other current trends in fiction (the contemporary Gothic or “frenetic” fashions that relish such macabre details, for instance). The fact that Indiana’s narrator can approach Noun’s corpse with such a degree of detachment or even irreverent humor marks how far he diverges from the sentimental mode of Bernardin and Rousseau.

These two evocations of the drowned Noun are among the passages that Sand eliminated between publication of the first and second editions of Indiana (May and

September 1832); as such, they are crucial to understanding the original frames of reference in which the novel was produced. Sand may have made the cuts in response to her friend Henri de Latouche's comment that "hors la présence de l'auteur à travers le drame (imitation de la manière de Diderot) tout est bien" (*Correspondance* 2: 88): an oblique reference to Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* (wr. ca. 1773, pub. 1796). Whether or not Sand consciously sought to imitate Diderot, the original *Indiana* does indeed share points in common with *Jacques le fataliste*, which set Sand's novel at odds with Rousseau and Bernardin's literary island model. Rather than seeking to blur distinctions between the fictional text and the lived experience of his readers, the lively *je*-narrator of *Jacques le fataliste* frequently interrupts the course of his own narrative, calling attention away from the characters and their picaresque adventures in order to evoke alternative episodes or compare himself to well-known contemporary novelists, all the while assuring readers of his own tale's perfect truthfulness. Such interjections, as Thomas Kavanagh observes, have the opposite effect of their ostensible purpose: readers are deliberately prevented from approaching the text as a mimetic reflection of reality, the "imitative reproduction of a preordained real" (67). Rather, one is compelled to focus on and to question the narrative procedures by which novels create, in language, an illusory real.

From this perspective, one can better judge the repeated insistence of *Indiana*'s original preface, in which Sand's authorial persona declares that "avant d'être moral, [l'auteur] a voulu être vrai" (39). This insistence on "le vrai" resonates for *Indiana*'s *je*-narrator as well as its authorial persona; the "truthfulness" that the narrator aspires to is predicated, not on the novel's resonance within the hearts of its readers—a sympathetic identification that purportedly transcends the medium of the written word—but on the

differences between “cette véridique histoire” (388) and other forms of fiction. As in Jacques le fataliste, the first-person intrusions of Indiana’s slyly opinionated narrator foreground the reading process itself: asking, in effect, how readers come to respond to a given work of fiction as though it were a truthful representation of human experience. It is this sophisticated awareness of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “espace des possibles” within the literary field (143), and her carefully nuanced positioning of Indiana within that field, that set Sand’s novel apart from the literary island precedents which she clearly admired.

But these distinctions, which the narrator goes to great length to establish throughout the four main volumes of Indiana, seem abruptly to vanish at the novel’s short, puzzling conclusion. In its final few pages, Indiana appears radically to alter its prior relationship to the riantes et puériles fictions that shape the heroine’s own ideals. The novel that opens with the ambition to mirror human life faithfully seems to abandon this project, and ends by imitating its literary island precedents in almost uncanny detail. The salient question here is whether the heroine’s abrupt reversal of fortune has broader implications for readers of Indiana. Do the core convictions of Rousseau and Bernardin’s idealistic works—moral suasion through shared human sympathy, the reading process itself figured as an instinctive recognition of indisputable truths—also govern Sand’s novel in its final pages? If so, are there useful lessons to be drawn from the non-event of a drowning that fails to occur—in defiance of that well-established literary precedent?

### 3. Le bonheur est de trop

Ralph and Indiana’s suicide pact having been fortuitously thwarted, the couple is free to retreat to the secluded valley of Bernica, a virtual island-within-an-island that

closely recalls the childhood paradise of Bernardin's Paul and Virginie. Indeed, Indiana's final words, "Souvenez-vous de notre chaumière indienne" (344), refer directly to the title of Bernardin's second novella, La Chaumière indienne, in which a socially-outcast couple finds isolated happiness in the midst of an Indian jungle. Even Indiana's narrator appears transformed in the final pages of the novel, trading his acerbic wit and devastating irony for a newly naïve and timid profile. Characterized by Ralph as "une conscience pure que n'a pas salie le monde" (342), the transformed narrator both solicits and responds to the telling of Indiana's life story in statutory sentimental fashion: by shedding sympathetic tears.

Early critics of Indiana who praised the novel for its realism found the conclusion unsatisfactory, out of step with the main four volumes of the novel. Sainte-Beuve declares, "Il y a là un point, une ligne de démarcation où la partie vraie, sentie, observée du roman se termine; le reste, qui semble d'invention presque pure, renferme encore de beaux développements, de grandes et poétiques scènes; mais la fantaisie s'efforce de continuer la réalité, l'imagination s'est chargée de couronner l'aventure." Likewise, Gustave Planche complains that Indiana's happy ending considerably lessens the moral impact that the novel might have had: "Le livre devait finir au mariage de Raymon. C'était un dénouement sombre, impitoyable, à la manière d'Eschyle; l'expiation pour le crime voulu, le châtiment terrible pour une faute à laquelle le temps seul avait manqué: le bonheur est de trop dans les dernières pages" (qtd. in Salomon xlviii-ix).

Contesting this image of Indiana as a realist novel capped with a flawed "fantasy" conclusion, readers who focus on Sand's idealist œuvre tend to claim Indiana within this alternative canon, downplaying or dismissing the novel's professed allegiance to le vrai in

various ways.<sup>9</sup> Margaret Cohen argues that the minimal description of character and setting in Indiana's conclusion undercuts the authority of the realist description that reigns at the novel's beginning (152-3); Robert Godwin-Jones suggests that the attention paid throughout the main body of the novel to the characters' inner worlds—their superstitions, visions and fantasies—prepares the reader for Indiana's ultimate escape from the “real” world (16-21). Certain readers identify the realist position with the je-narrator, whose word is not taken at face value. Naomi Schor, for instance, argues that the narrator's first-person interventions in the text serve paradoxically to demonstrate his fundamental commitment to idealism. Citing one such passage, in which the narrator contrasts the “boring” idealized heroes of other novels with the excitingly realistic Raymon, Schor writes, “the double-edged irony of this passage suggests that even within these digressions designed to guarantee the author's realist credentials and hence his legitimacy, another aesthetic is being promoted” (52). Others argue that the narrator undermines his own credibility with his repeated misogynist generalizations on women's “natural” stupidity (Dayan 152, Cohen 153). In similar vein, Janet Hiddleston suggests that “rather than impersonating a male narrator, Sand is implicitly questioning his reliability; the reader may be persuaded that the opposite of what he says is the truth” (14).

As numerous critics argue, there are solid reasons not to take Indiana's narrator at his literal word; there is a strong current of irony that pervades the novel even in its revised form. Taken together with the narrator's frequent first-person interjections (which emphasize the factitious nature of the récit even as they announce its fidelity to reality), Indiana's irony creates a gap between the apparent and actual meaning of the text. This in itself is a startling stylistic choice on Sand's part, in a novel that ostensibly celebrates the

straightforward, artless speech of its naturally-reared protagonists. Moreover, difficulties arise when one begins to question the narrator's good faith; as Hiddleston asks, "it is impossible to know for certain when to read the narrator ironically and when not. When the irony is palpable, is it intentional (on his part) or unconscious?" (14). In other words, does Indiana succeed in setting aside portions of the text that are somehow exempt from the ironic viewpoint? By what markers can the reader reliably identify such passages?

Indiana confronts precisely this dilemma at the climax of the novel, when Ralph and Indiana are poised on the edge of the chasm for their suicide jump. Here, taciturn Ralph suddenly speaks for himself, recounting his own life story to Indiana and to readers in a momentous, fifteen-page monologue that assumes an eschatological importance: "Ralph réglait en ce moment ses comptes avec l'éternité. C'était le moment d'être lui (...), de se dépouiller, devant le Juge, du déguisement que les hommes lui avaient imposé. En jetant le cilice que la douleur avait attaché à ses os, il se leva sublime et radieux comme s'il fût déjà entré au séjour des récompenses divines" (313). The translation of Ralph's history into words is punctuated, its importance emphasized, by this figurative transformation of Ralph himself; the image of persecution and suffering on earth, divine judgment and heavenly reward serves to confirm Ralph in the role of Indiana's long-awaited romantic messiah. Indiana's own affective response to Ralph's speech also supports this identification: "une ardent sympathie religieuse l'initiait aux mêmes émotions, des larmes d'enthousiasme coulèrent de ses yeux" (313-14). Indiana's sympathy and tears resonate with the sentimental mode of earlier literary islands; yet her reaction is also figured as religious, enthusiastic in the original sense of enthusiasm as divine possession or inspiration. The extended metaphor seems intended to ratify Ralph's prise

de parole as a fuller, truer form of expression than any yet seen in the novel—in short, to differentiate as much as possible Ralph’s speech from the sly, false rhetoric of Raymon de Ramière and his contemporaries.

One may read Ralph’s metamorphosis through language as a triumphant event: indeed, as the watershed and emblematic moment of the entire novel. For instance, Isabelle Naginski argues that the conclusion of Indiana “proclaims the triumph of language, the discovery of the power of the word, and the transformation of silence into speech (...). Through the character of Ralph (...), Sand expressed her own coming into language” (7). It is quite true that the narrator of Indiana goes to extraordinary lengths to convey the power of Ralph’s speech, in sharp contrast to the profane and prostituted language that precedes it. The opposition is fully in keeping with Indiana’s series of contrasts: Raymon and Ralph; false step and true love; corrupt, civilized France and idyllic solitude on île Bourbon. Yet it is no less true that the narrator’s extended sacred metaphor—indeed, all of the narrator’s efforts to establish Ralph’s words as the truthful, perfectly transparent language that has been lacking in the novel until this point—serve a largely compensatory function. The novelty, authenticity and power of Ralph’s speech must be established by elements outside the speech itself. This is because the reader has no direct access to Ralph’s words; although the text presents the speech in the form of a direct citation, the narrator warns readers that this citation is in fact a mere paraphrase or approximation of words that no narrator could fully reproduce. Moreover, the eloquence and affective force of Ralph’s speech are contingent not only on the limitations of the narrator, but on the moment and circumstances of its utterance:

Si le récit de la vie intérieure de Ralph n’a produit aucun effet sur vous, si vous n’en êtes pas venu à aimer cet homme vertueux, c’est que j’ai été l’inhabile

interprète de ses souvenirs, c'est que je n'ai pas pu exercer non plus sur vous la puissance que possède la voix d'un homme profondément vrai dans sa passion. Et puis la lune ne me prête pas son influence mélancolique; le chant des sénégalis, les parfums du giroflier, toutes les séductions molles et enivrantes d'une nuit des tropiques ne vous saisissent pas au cœur et à la tête. Vous ne savez peut-être pas non plus, par expérience, quelles sensations fortes et neuves s'éveillent dans l'âme en face du suicide. (329)

To what extent does Ralph's transcendental monologue depend for its impact on extra-linguistic sensory accessories such as flowers, bird song and moonlight? Further, what does Ralph and Indiana's emotional state add in affective force to Ralph's speech, which is withheld from readers who are not or have not been on the brink of suicide? If suicide is so propitious to epiphany, why is it that every one of the four major characters of the novel has already been on the point of self-destruction at least once (not to mention Noun, whose suicide succeeds)<sup>10</sup> with no corresponding state of exaltation, eloquence or insight? Such efforts to explain why Ralph's words are so much less moving at second-hand would seem to demonstrate the limitations of language, rather than its power.

Even more disturbingly, Ralph himself deliberately limits the extent of his revelations to the narrator, on the grounds that only a select few are capable of understanding what might be termed an élite language of affect. As Ralph argues:

s'il est des douleurs qui ne se trahissent jamais et qui enveloppent l'âme comme un linceul, il est aussi des joies qui restent ensevelis dans le cœur de l'homme parce qu'une voix de la terre ne saurait les dire (...) vous ne les comprendriez pas, vous, jeune homme, que la tempête n'a pas brisé et que n'ont pas flétri les orages. Hélas! que peut-elle comprendre, l'âme qui n'a pas souffert? (341-2)

What are the implications of this extraordinary declaration for the literary island? As has been seen, one of the core tenets of Indiana's island precedents is their faith in universal sympathy: the ability of any human being to enter into the emotional state of another. The perfectly innocent Émile is thrilled by his vicarious experience of Robinson's adventures;



the récit of Paul and Virginie's happy childhood and edifying deaths passes from eyewitness to narrator to readers with no loss of affective force, and whether or not witness, listener or readers have suffered through emotional storms of their own. Indeed, the idea that the young or inexperienced could not comprehend Paul and Virginie's happiness is unthinkable in the context of Rousseau's "règle du cœur" or Bernardin's "langue de la nature." By such an assessment, Virginie herself could not have been happy until after she had been flétrie par les orages. In this sense, there is a fundamental gap between Rousseau and Bernardin's insular idyll and Sand's reprisal of it; between what Sand's je-narrator is able to relate to readers, and some more elusive vérité that words can never fully encompass.

This is why the final words of Indiana, "souvenez-vous de notre chaumière indienne" (344), may be read as profoundly unsettling rather than triumphant. Is this obvious reference to Bernardin a confirmation that one may indeed hope to escape from civilized misery into tropical island paradise? Or is it a final ironic wink at readers, an acknowledgement that such utopias do not exist outside the realm of fiction? A compelling case might be made for either interpretation. Indeed, efforts to single out one viewpoint from which the events of the novel may "safely" be judged—proclaiming its commitment to realism or the ultimate triumph of its idealism—are necessarily a partial and problematic enterprise. And when one begins to allow for multiple, opposed readings of a novel, one disallows sympathy—that is, Rousseau and Bernardin's concept of sympathy as an immediate, unambiguous and universal human phenomenon that reduces the reading process to an instant, almost visual recognition of an indisputable truth. Willfully or not, by introducing irony into the narrative of Indiana, Sand introduces the possibility of gaps

between the apparent and hidden meanings of words. Sympathy and irony in this sense are incompatible; narrative transparency is Indiana's most subtle paradise lost.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Schor, Cohen, Massardier-Kenney and Godwin-Jones. Margaret Cohen, in particular, cites the exemplary Indiana no fewer than fourteen times in her chapter defining what she terms the “sentimental social novel” (“The Heart and the Code: George Sand and the Sentimental Social Novel,” in The Sentimental Education of the Novel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. 119-162).

<sup>2</sup> On a related note, Massardier-Kenney rightly warns against anachronistic expectations in the use of the term feminism when evaluating Sand’s representation of gender relations in her earliest novels (11-15).

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau’s fascination with the idea of living on deserted or secluded islands recurs in varied forms throughout his œuvre. See Georges Pire’s “Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Robinson Crusoé,” Revue de Littérature comparée 30.1 (1956): 479-496.

<sup>4</sup> Among authors who consider in depth Bernardin’s influence on Sand, of particular interest is Pratima Prasad’s comparison of Paul et Virginie to Indiana in order to assess the ways in which both novels register the cultural impact of France’s colonial presence in the Indian Ocean (71-85). Pierre Laforgue also highlights references to Bernardin’s fictions in Indiana, arguing that such evocations of the romanesque, particularly in Indiana’s conclusion, serve a specific ideological goal: i.e., that the Sand of 1832 looked to novels (and not to political revolutions) to create change in women’s social status (27-37).

<sup>5</sup> Paul et Virginie, like Émile, admits one exception to the prohibition of books. Where Émile reads Robinson Crusoé, Bernardin’s family community listens to Bible stories read aloud by the group’s only literate member, Madame de la Tour. The children then act out pantomimes of the stories they have heard, with occasional help from the adults. Contact with the Bible itself is thus attenuated: printed word becomes spoken word becomes silent gesture, as the children intensely and imaginatively engage with the text they have never touched.

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed study of Rousseau's conception of this exceptionally engaged reading process, consult Robert Darnton's "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity." The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History. New York: Vintage Books, 1985. 214-256.

<sup>7</sup> For more about sentimental narrative, family loss and the Enlightenment ideal of a united human community, consult Jay Caplan, Framed Narratives: Diderot's Genealogy of the Beholder. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Even as early as 1789, Bernardin had some excuse for believing in the near-universal appeal of Paul et Virginie; within the novel's first year of publication, there were already seven French and translated editions. Its stunning success proved enduring: through the end of the nineteenth century, there were nearly four hundred French and foreign-language editions (Toinet).

<sup>9</sup> As an alternative to both these critical trends, Nigel Harkness emphasizes but also celebrates differences between the conclusion and the main body of the novel, citing the triumph of subversive, "feminine" ethics and aesthetics in the realization of Indiana's ideals (115-128).

<sup>10</sup> Ralph narrowly avoids drowning himself at age fifteen (157) and later nearly cuts his own throat (163); both Raymon and Delmar come close to blowing their brains out (127, 269); Indiana totters on various brinks: drowning (227, 283), willful starvation (300), suicide by an (of course) antique Spanish dagger to save herself from sexual assault (283).

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