

# The Problem of Evil in Sand's *La Mare au diable* and Carl Jung, The Ideology of Sentiment

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**Abstract:** My thesis insists on the theme of evil implicit in Sand's title to her pastoral novel, *La Mare au diable* (1846). The question of evil as death (*le mal métaphysique*) stands out in her preface, opens her novel, and defines the challenge faced by the hero in social prejudice (*le mal social*) and in the heroic journey to overcome internalized obstacles such as fear (*le mal psychologique*) in order to transform his values. The interplay between good and evil culminating in "the devil's pond" intuits Jung's theory of the convergence of good and evil and the necessity of the latter in the maturation process. The victory of the hero, Germain, is also that of Sand who rises above the ideological partisanship of her opening chapters to bring to life inspirational values open to all.

**Keywords:** evil, heroic voyage, Jung, pastoral novel, romanticism

Sand's best-known novel, *La Mare au diable* (1846), distinguishes itself not only as marking the reinvention of the pastoral genre but also as the best-known French novel of the period to implicitly identify "evil" as a primary problem, both as a turning point in plot development and as a social issue.<sup>1</sup> This distinction is all the more significant because Sand eschews the realism of Balzac and Flaubert in favor of the romantic aesthetic. Rather than criticizing her contemporaries in the defense of art as "une vérité idéale" as opposed to "une étude de la réalité positive," Sand questions the moral value of *Le Paysan perversi* (1775) and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by Restif de la Bretonne and Choderlos de Laclos (12). At

the same time, the eighteenth century offers inspiration. In opening her novel with an attack against the orthodox medieval depiction of evil as punishment for human beings' fallen nature, Sand echoes the biting satire of Voltaire's opposition to the equivalency of "le mal métaphysique" and "le mal moral" in *Candide* (1759).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in depicting her idealized view of human nature in the rustic landscape of chapter 2, "Le Labour," Sand echoes Rousseau's ideal of "la bonté naturelle" and his thesis on inequality as the origin of injustice, an implied concept of "le mal social." Moreover, as an observer of human nature, Sand outdistances both her eighteenth-century predecessors and her nineteenth-century contemporaries. Sand discreetly dramatizes the necessity of an encounter with evil in the development of consciousness. From this perspective, Sand's intuitive grasp of the role of evil in the attainment of maturity foreshadows the understanding of depth psychology as represented by Carl Jung. His theory of the coexistence of much good and evil (as in the instinctive energy of the Shadow archetype), his valorization of the feeling function as a valid means of knowing, and his insistence on a transcendent dynamic in personality transformation lead to "a romantic view of the unconscious" with religious overtones (Stein 4). In my judgment, Jung's stance proves to be compatible with the hero's journey in *La Mare au diable* and helps us to understand the broad context of the ideology of evil coming out of the nineteenth century to which Sand makes a small but heretofore unrecognized contribution in a tale so charming that its intuitive insight has been largely eclipsed.

My thesis insists on the theme of evil implicit in Sand's title, *La Mare au diable*. The question of evil opens her novel, defines the ideological thrust of her romantic aesthetics, and frames the story of its hero. In chapter 1, "L'Auteur au lecteur," Sand focuses on the question of death in an introductory quotation: "A la sueur de ton visage / Tu gaigneras ta pauvre vie, / Après long travail et usaige / Voicy la *mort* qui te convie" (6). She begins her pastoral novel with a scathing critique of Holbein's *Simulachres de la mort* (1545), a woodcarving depicting a haggard, aged peasant plowing into the setting sun behind emaciated horses whipped by a skeletal figure representing death. Sand objects to its allegorical representation of work as a condemnation and death as a punishment, "cette pensée stoïcienne du christianisme," as encapsulated in the orthodox dogma of original sin in Genesis and its story of exile from the Garden of Eden. In opposing this interpretation of "le mal métaphysique" (a concept popularized by Voltaire's *Candide*), Sand aligns herself with the secularist principles of the French Revolution—which had largely triumphed in the separation of church and state in France—and she prepares the reader for the impact of a death in her fictional plot starting in chapter 3 of *La Mare au diable*.

Additional introductory material takes place in the contrasting landscape description of chapter 2. Sand replaces Holbein as the artist with a scene depicting life as a good in itself, with values drawn more from the pagan past

of Europe: a young, healthy peasant plows behind muscular oxen urged on by a young son (a virtual cherub) who forcefully opens fertile sod in the joy of overcoming a resisting earth and in the satisfaction of acting in unison with the principle of fertility honored by ancient cults of fertility.<sup>3</sup> The peasant proves to be Germain, the hero of Sand's story, who lacks but the acquisition of consciousness for complete happiness: "Il lui manque la connaissance de son sentiment" (24). The narrator finds him to be "incomplet et condamné à une éternelle enfance" (24). So, too, she judges her educated readers who are prone to look down on Germain as being "incomplets" and "aveugles" because of their imbalance between mind and heart, "votre esprit a tué votre coeur" (24).

In the first two chapters, Sand's ideological strategy in her story takes shape. The plot revolves around the reported passing of Germain's wife. From the standpoint of her husband, death is cast implicitly in a theological light as "metaphysical evil," an incomprehensible development if not a kind of punishment. However, her family's resignation conforms more to "Le Labour" with its trust in nature and belief in the mystery of life so fundamental to Sand's romantic idealism.<sup>4</sup> From this Rousseauist perspective, anything deviating from nature comes to have the sense of "art" in its pejorative sense of contrived and with a lack of legitimacy, as in the attitude of cultural superiority identified by Sand. I term such prejudice *le mal social*, the evil imposed by society that tends to become part of people's unconscious self-concept and values. When these prejudices are not resisted by conscience, they attain a virtual state of "possession" and turn their energies inward to become self-destructive. On the personal level of this phenomenon, the harm that people do to themselves unconsciously (often with the collusion of friends and family), I term "le mal psychologique"; it represents the most deeply ingrained evil, and its cure requires a transformation not only of values but also of their underlying psychic structure. In essence, this call to change represents the challenge facing Sand's hero, whose mourning is blocked by a false self-image. The dynamics of Germain's recovery involve the interplay between good and evil culminating in the swampy area called "the devil's pond," and its understanding requires recourse to myth and ritual. Moreover, Germain's struggle to reconcile good and evil has an archetypal dimension; although played out on a minor scale, it speaks to an eternal personal dilemma and to a collective peril in the modern age.<sup>5</sup>

Germain's story opens in chapter 3 with the human tragedy of death, but the sense of a metaphysical evil gives way quickly to other forms of a general malady. The negative energy fueling all manifestations of evil seems to radiate from a deeper principle, the central emotion of fear (Tolle 23) or a denial of consciousness (May 76).<sup>6</sup> Germain has not recovered from the death of his young wife and mother to his three little children, and his father-in-law, Maurice, fearful of the burden placed on his growing extended family, asks Germain to court the wealthy widowed daughter of an old friend in a neighboring county. Negotiations encounter passive resistance. In spite of

Germain's good will and respectful deference to the family patriarch, he dreads courting for fear of never finding a wife equal to the one taken from him, and he takes cover in the subterfuge of shopping for oxen.

A number of problems arise under the surface of banal reality in this opening scene. First of all, a social evil reveals itself in the opening scene through the technique of conspicuous absence, at least to the reader trained in fairy-tale analysis. (Sand's pastoral novels are frequently referred to by her and by critics as *contes*, and fairy-tale analysis comprises a valid approach to her rustic tales.)<sup>7</sup> Woman is absent in the opening scene in which discussion about a deceased woman and a proposed replacement wife and mother takes place exclusively between two men. The primary feminine does not have a voice in the opening scene about a domestic change concerning women. The fact that this initial gender imbalance goes unnoticed so easily testifies to the extent that sexual roles are woven into the fabric of society. Father Maurice speaks for the family and gently but firmly imposes an agenda on his son-in-law based on his patriarchal goal of financial security as the top priority. One assumes that prior discussion has taken place offstage with his spouse, but Mother Maurice does not appear center stage until the penultimate chapter bearing her name, just before the final chapter named after Germain's future wife, "La petite Marie."

The sequence requires additional comment from the standpoint of gender issues; the external ones have to do with *persona* in society and the internal ones belong to the personal psychology of Germain. Although Father Maurice appears to reign supreme, his parental authority in the extended family aims at the general good through respect for complementary roles and talents. When the rational strategy of Father Maurice fails to produce a wife for Germain and thereby to correct the imbalanced workload in the care of Germain's children, Mother Maurice assumes leadership to resolve conflicting emotions in Germain and in Marie, the woman of his choice despite her lack of dowry and young age. Rather than seeing patriarchy as the problem or matriarchy as the underlying system of peasant society, these organizational principles may constitute two sides of the same coin.<sup>8</sup> So too, social roles and gender can vary in this peasant family. For example, Germain's deceased young wife had controlled their finances and planning, and Father Maurice advises Germain of his need of "une femme de tête," not only to support his household but also to lead the extended family one day, "C'est tant pis, mon fils, et voilà pourquoi j'aimerais que tu eusses une femme de tête pour me remplacer quand je n'y serai plus" (33).

Although the traditional system of balanced, complementary roles of parents can make sense—can seem to attain equilibrium between the mind and the heart, sense and sensibility, Logos and Eros—the patriarchal-matriarchal system (too prone to power imbalance and dysfunction) does not represent the goal of social evolution in Western culture. Not the family, not the clan, not the collective, but the individual represents the basic unit of identity in the West. The

negative effects of the “clan” mentality are readily visible in the personality of Germain—psychological fragmentation, passivity, and a lack of conscious identity as an individual. His “wounding” goes beyond that of a premature widowhood. He not only holds onto the past with regrets but also fears the future. Germain suffers from the polarity between mind and heart, the dislocation between thought and feeling prevalent in Western society at large. He is more than out of touch with his inner life; Germain does not know who he is, much less what he wants and how to get there. The cultural polarity represented by the separate gender roles of Father and Mother Maurice may contribute to organizational efficiency in the family but it comes at a cost. The secondary feminine in Germain suffers from a disconnect.<sup>9</sup> He is twice wounded—by a personal loss and by a defect in the culture that threatens him with “depersonalization,” the loss of his identity as a personal reality (Hillman 172).

The energy released by the tension between reason and feeling, mind and body, so characteristic of Europeans in their constant state of restlessness, leads to the mystification of sexuality in the West, as illustrated in the twentieth-century novels of André Malraux (Tucci 168). This potential energy remains inaccessible to Germain. Indeed, he not only shows himself to be impotent to break out from his static situation, he also seems to wallow in it. The “evil” suffered by him on a personal level derives from depression, a form of what I call *le mal psychologique*. As a collective phenomenon, it relates historically to “le mal du siècle,” the letdown and sense of betrayal felt by Sand and the romantics following the fall of the Napoleonic Empire and the failed idealism of the French Revolution.

Nevertheless, Sand’s tale plays out on the level of an individual destiny, and true to her idealism, it ends happily. How does Sand succeed in her stated objective as narrator in the introductory chapters to move Germain from the dependent, passive stance of the opening pages of his story to the confident, mature man in the novel’s closing scene—to ignite in him a consciousness capable of heartfelt purpose and commitment? This miraculous transformation comes about not through reason alone but (true to Sand’s romantic aesthetic) through lived experience with the body in movement and its contact with emotions restored. The process is known as the heroic journey that, aiming at “the development of human personality and character,” constitutes a “monomyth” or “a story of human life [that] reenacts ego development in the West” (Campbell 37).

The heroic journey breaks down into three phases: “the call to adventure” at the departure, a passage through danger constituting a kind of initiation, and a return with a treasure verifying the value of the journey. The departure is usually precipitated by a “wounding,” that is, a deflation of the ego in preparation for an authentic union with the Self in the ultimate goal of attaining wholeness.<sup>10</sup> Secondary personalities of the collective unconscious, energy complexes shaped by instinctual patterns, and archetypes such as the Anima/Animus, the Child, the Shadow, the Crone, and so forth serve to

bridge the gap between the ego-hero and the Self in the natural inclination toward wholeness in a developed personality.

The second phase of the hero's journey is featured in the title to Sand's novel, *La Mare au diable*. The bedeviling situation undergone by Germain begins when he loses his way at night in a swampy hollow with his traveling companions—Marie, a young neighbor en route to hire out as a shepherdess, and Petit-Pierre, Germain's little boy of six. In addition to having their own individual personalities, they represent in the context of Germain's male psychology archetypal energies necessary to his descent into the unconscious for the purpose of attaining greater consciousness and maturity. The dynamics of his personality transformation have been discussed in a recent article.<sup>11</sup> What remains to be explored, here, is the appearance of *le mal moral*—the harm that people do to others—in Germain's heroic journey and some reflections on the centrality of "evil" as a bridge to expanded consciousness.

Good and evil converge in the campfire scene at night when Germain's body instinctively draws near to the sleeping Marie. On a second approach, Germain is jolted into the awareness of his desire that—ignited by Marie's nurturing attention to Petit-Pierre and himself and by her vivacious grasp on life—reconnects his mind and body and reconnects his reason and emotions to free him from depression. Although Marie's initial rejection of his declared intentions plunges him into sadness, he attains a level of conscious maturity that allows him to avoid both self-pity and a repeated fall into depression. His character survives the temptation of taking Marie by force, and enhanced self-knowledge permits him to cast aside the false innocence of immaturity. In other words, exposure to evil thoughts partially actualized through the movement of his body over Marie allows Germain to attain a higher consciousness. By transforming the Shadow's potential for evil through the assimilation of its vital energy, Germain is better prepared to defend Marie with "moderation"; he doesn't beat or kill her lecherous employer. The latter approximates the archetypal rogue knight mounted on a black horse and typifies a Shadow figure (Whitmont 163–65), the polar opposite and negative double of our ego-hero, whom Germain instinctively recognizes. Similarly, the violence of *le mal moral* has the salutary effect of bringing Marie into contact with her deeper feelings for Germain.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the two are positioned emotionally for a relationship as a couple. Their return home is accompanied by the "treasure" of enhanced consciousness and maturity, but they require the intermediation of Mother Maurice to sort out their emotions in accordance with social form. Their subsequent marriage and, more importantly, the final stance of Germain on his knees alone in his fields—calm, composed, prayerful in his gratitude, and conscious now of being in harmony with the beauty of nature—testify to the success of his hero's journey to a vastly improved integration of self, made possible, I contend, through contact with evil.<sup>13</sup>

The literary theme of evil within the context of psychology and the modern narrative converge in Carl Jung's works. One of the leading psychoanalytical

theorists and humanists of the twentieth century, he attempts to reconcile secular thought founded on phenomenology and the romantic's inclination in postrevolutionary Europe to restore heartfelt values of the human spirit. Addressing a similarly traumatized audience in post-World War II Europe, Jung seems at times to echo Sand's defense of a healing idealism and rejection of a realism referred to in *La Mare au diable* as "la réalité positive" (12):

It is as necessary today as it ever was to lead the libido away from the cult of rationalism and realism—not, indeed, because these things have gained the upper hand (quite the contrary), but because the guardians and custodians of symbolical truth, namely the religions, have been robbed of their efficacy by science. Even intelligent people no longer understand the value and purpose of symbolical truth, and the spokesmen of religion have failed to deliver an apologetic suited to the spirit of the age. (Jung 226–27)

Indeed, as a young man of thirty-five, "Jung was caught up in a more romantic view of the unconscious" (Stein 4). This son of a Protestant minister voiced the ambition of revivifying the image of Christ through a revival of "feeling for symbol and myth" to transform Jesus "back into the soothsaying god of the vine" (Jung ctd. by Stein 4). In spite of his inflated enthusiasm at attaining new insight into the foundations of culture and civilization, Jung saw himself primarily as a practicing psychiatrist focused on what I term *psychological evil*, and he remained true to the secular tradition of Europe.

Even though Jung shares with Sand the pagan ideal of nature's wisdom, they would seem to part company on a major theological tenet. Jung defends the concept of original sin as the necessary precondition to the opposition of good and evil, which acts as the prerequisite to the rise of consciousness in the West. The bipolarity reflects, in his theory, the structure of the psyche and promotes the capacity to make distinctions. The feeling of guilt flowing from the good/evil opposition reinforces a moral sensitivity, which promotes, in turn, the sense of personal responsibility. More compatible to the thinking of Sand, Jung criticizes the exclusive male symbolism of the trinity. He does so to expose an imbalance in Western civilization between the Masculine and the Feminine, Logos and Eros, and thinking and feeling, which undermines its well-being.<sup>14</sup> So, too, in negating the Church's principles of *Summum Bonum*, the Creator's all goodness, and *privatio boni*, the explanation of evil as the absence of good, it is for the purpose of taking evil seriously, on a personal and on a collective level. Jung's psychology echoes the existentialist call to assume responsibility for creating one's being and the world: individuals are called on to engage evil as a personal reality by confronting the Shadow and by withdrawing their negative projections on others. Only through a general rise in consciousness can the world attain an enduring equilibrium in peace.<sup>15</sup>

Literature contributes to the evolution envisioned by Jung in its creation of healing myths and symbols and in its illustrations of heroic journeys. Such

is the accomplishment of Sand's portrayal of a simple peasant, Germain in *La Mare au diable*, who relives in miniature the story of Job on a more mundane level. Wounded by loss and bedeviled by circumstance, he proves himself capable of rising above calamity, cultural inhibitions, and temptation to arrive at a happiness beyond reason through an engagement with life, leading to enhanced consciousness. His victory is also that of the author, who rises above the ideological partisanship of her opening chapters. Sand attains a depth of humanity capable of inspiring transcendental values in a rehabilitated spiritual sentiment based solely on human suffering in its struggle to attain self-understanding, harmony with nature, and peace with one's fellow citizens.

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## NOTES

1. See Sand's "Notice": "Quand j'ai commencé, par *la Mare au Diable*, une série de romans champêtres" (3). All quotations from the novel are from the Garnier edition. In her discussion of Sand's canonicity, Schor quotes Faguet in 1887 who identifies as Sand's claim to fame her pastoral novels "and above all, *la Mare au Diable*" (25). For the question of content as opposed to pastoral form, see Hamilton: "Although readers tend not to take seriously the surfacing of evil in the fantastic ambience of the devil's pool, the confrontation with evil constitutes an inherent turning point in the narrative mechanism used by Sand in *La Mare au diable*" ("Sand's" 46).

2. See Havens 256–59 who stresses Voltaire's preoccupation with the question of evil: "His philosophy in *Candide* is one of active work against all the man-made evils about us" (219). Voltaire's *Candide* excels in the exposé of *le mal moral* of war, slavery, and the *auto-da-fé* of the Inquisition and contrasts it with "le mal naturel" of shipwrecks, the Lisbon earthquake, pestilence, etc. His distinction aims at invalidating any metaphysical link between moral and natural evil, as in the divine punishment for sins.

3. Dionysus, a deity of agriculture and corn, "is reported to have been the first to yoke oxen to the plough" (Frazer 387).

4. See Schor, who reinterprets "idealism in the novel" (essentially, the idealist novel) to reconcile idealism and feminist criticism in recanonicalizing Sand so as to include more than the pastoral novels (23–25).

5. See Neumann, who asserts the impotence of Judeo-Christian values to counteract the eruption of collective evil symptomized by two world wars. His call for "A New Ethic" opens with this declaration: "The problem of evil is one of the most central problems of modern man. No appeal to old values and ideals can shield us from the recognition that we live in a world in which evil in man is emerging from the depths on a gigantic scale and confronting us all, without exception, with the question: 'How are we to deal with this evil?'" (25). In the context of the nineteenth century, such a dire warning would seem to belong more to the second half of the century as in Émile Zola's indictment of anti-Semitism, "J'Accuse" (1898).

6. Both May and Tolle may be optimistic in their contention that calculated evil, especially evil for evil's sake, is fairly uncommon.

7. See Hamilton, "Symbolic" 51.

8. See Grant 215 for the thesis of an underlying matriarchal culture in *La Mare au diable* and Bly 230 for the complementarity of patriarchy and matriarchy.

9. Jung's theory of contrasexuality approximates a kind of psychological bisexuality by positing an inherent linkage between genders, a primary feminine in woman's ego and a secondary feminine, the Anima, in man's unconscious. Together they constitute the Feminine. The masculine counterpart of the Anima in woman's psychology is the Animus.

10. This model reflects the psychology of the traditional male hero but does not fit Germain well. His initial mindset comes closer to that of woman's heroic journey, which usually begins not in hubris but in a "submission, humiliation, or humility" (Clift and Clift 33).

11. See Hamilton, "Sand's."

12. Jung summarizes his theory on the relationship between good and evil and eternal opposites in his Foreword to Neumann: "No one stands beyond good and evil, otherwise he would be out of the world. Life is a continuing balance of opposites, like every other energetic process. The abolition of opposites would be the equivalent of death. . . . There is no good without evil, and no evil without good. The one conditions the other, but it does not become the other or abolish the other" (16–17). The relationship between good and evil is explored by Jung in his *Answer to Job* (1952).

13. See Frey-Rohn: "Studies of the individuation process corroborate the fact that *there can be no self-realization without the experience of evil*" (185).

14. "Jung extolled the celebrated *Declaratio Assumptionis Mariae* of Pope Pius XII as the greatest spiritual deed of the century." Von Franz indicates some of its reverberations in the Church and in the collective psychology (14–15).

15. See Ulanov and Dueck: "Jung goes so far as to say that the inner voice calling us to be all of ourselves usually sneaks in through something negative, making us conscious of evil" (53).

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