

THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH LITERATURE:  
MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONS AND  
PORTRAYALS OF IDENTITY IN  
GEORGE SAND AND MARCELINE DESBORDES-VALMORE

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationships between mothers and daughters against the background of education in early nineteenth-century France. This era was the first time that a large population of French girls was separated from their mothers. Because of their attendance at school, girls created an identity separate from that of the one that their mothers had helped them to create. By using George Sand's autobiography Histoire de ma vie and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's poem "Ondine à l'école," the process of distinguishing the daughter from the mother has been analyzed from both the mother's perspective and the daughter's perspective.

For Sand, who writes from the daughter's perspective, her maternal figures (mother and grandmother) push her away from them so that she could get an education. As a result of being pushed away, she is 'forced' to create her own identity. For Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, the opposite occurs. Writing from the mother's perspective, she becomes very protective of her daughter and seems threatened by Ondine's success at school through which she creates a distinct identity away from Desbordes-Valmore.

By studying these two works together, one can learn about the mother-daughter dynamics at work and the emotional hardships suffered by both mothers and daughters, as girls began school during this era. Both mother and daughter experienced a feeling of loss, and relationships were permanently changed as daughters created unique identities for themselves.

## INTRODUCTION

For girls in the nineteenth century, starting school was something that changed their lives forever. These girls were exceptional in that there were no laws governing French girls' education during this era. Going to school was purely voluntary on the part of either the girl or her guardian. These girls distinguished themselves from their mothers by having experiences that their mothers never had, thus the girls created distinct identities for themselves. Reading excerpts of George Sand's autobiography Histoire de ma vie and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's poem "Ondine à l'école" against this social background, one can learn a great deal about how mothers and daughters coped with separation.

In addition to her own memories, Sand's autobiography shares her perceptions of her mother's and grandmother's perceptions at the time, as well. For Sand, I will argue that because her maternal figures pushed her away from them and towards an education, George Sand was 'forced' to create her own distinct identity. Desbordes-Valmore's poem, a much shorter work than Sand's book, showcases solely the mother's perspective. While Sand's maternal figures pushed her to distinguish herself, for Desbordes-Valmore, the opposite is true. I will argue that Marceline Desbordes-Valmore became very protective of her daughter and was threatened by the distinct identity that Ondine created away from her mother. Through these two works, one can learn how girls and their guardians during this era dealt with the distinct identities that these girls were obliged to create for themselves.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

When reading literature about girls attending school in nineteenth-century France, one must remember that this action was not as common then as it is today. Girls attending school was not commonplace; who did attend school were considered exceptional. To understand the exceptionality of a girl attending school in this era, one must consider the approximate year, the girl's age, her social class, the type of education (public or private), and the region (urban or rural). All of the literature in this study is written by or about girls who grew up in principally urban areas, therefore the last factor will not be considered.

The story of nineteenth-century French educational reform actually began in the late eighteenth-century, as the *ancien régime* fell. During that time, religion, specifically the Catholic Church, was responsible for all schooling in the country. As the republican movement began to gain currency in France, the government, headed by Napoleon Bonaparte, began laying a foundation for a public educational system, all the while trying to wrest control of it from the Catholic Church. This dispute would continue throughout the nineteenth century, as would the struggle for education for girls.

Moses writes that in the nineteenth century, "Women's access to institutions that encouraged intellectual growth...was severely limited. For most of the century, few women had access to schooling." (38). Several laws and reforms pertaining to education, however, were passed in the nineteenth century, making it the most exciting time for education in French history. The year and age factors integrally intertwined, since laws allowing and requiring education for girls of varying ages were passed throughout the nineteenth century. The range of educational possibilities for each girl varied considerably, depending upon the year.

While religious schools for girls had previously existed, if only scarcely, the first government-funded school for girls, *l'Institution Nationale d'Education des Jeunes Filles* opened in 1807 (Moses 32). During this time, Napoleon Bonaparte continued to try to reform public education, but he ignored girls' education, choosing instead to focus on boys. It was not until 1833, however, that a formal law affecting primary education was passed, the Guizot Law. This law required every commune to provide a primary school for boys, although attendance was not compulsory, and it was only free for poor people (Anderson 30). In 1836, the Guizot Law was amended to include girls. Unfortunately, because most education at the time was single-sex classes only, the fact that the Guizot Law did not obligate the communes to maintain a second school for females and the fact that many communes could not afford to open a second school left girls with two educational options. The first option was to combine boys and girls, making the school a mixed-gender one. This was only a theoretical option, as it was not considered suitable to teach boys and girls in the same classes. This fact made the other option the reality: girls simply did not attend public school. In this event, wealthy girls living in a town could choose between a convent or a lay *pensionnat*, and poor girls could choose between a Catholic charity school or a *petite école* run by a widow or spinster.

A female counterpart to the Guizot Law, the Falloux Law, was not passed until 1850. While the Guizot Law required a primary school for boys in every commune, the Falloux Law required a primary school for girls only in communes with 800 or more inhabitants. While some communes offered boys-only schools and girls-only schools, many were too poor or had too few people, so mixed-gender schools were offered. Unfortunately, according to Gildea, the “fatal reservation [in the Falloux Law] [was] that lack of resources was an acceptable excuse” (46). An extremely poor commune could opt not to offer a girls' school, with no

repercussions, thus girls' education remained privatized. Nevertheless, "people now wanted to support girls' education" (Struminger 18), which was demonstrated by offering education to girls, even when not required. According to one school inspector in 1856, "the law was being followed even in communes of 700 people" (Struminger 18), although they were not required by law to do so. In 1867, the progressive minister of education, Victor Duruy, amended the Falloux Law to include communes with at least 500 people, down from the original 800 legally required to create a school for girls.

In October 1867, Victor Duruy encouraged villages to offer secondary education courses for girls. The teachers would be professors from local colleges and *lycées*. Because all of the teachers in those schools were male, the teachers in the secondary courses would, of course, be male, and "fees would be charged since they [the courses] were aimed at 'well-off or rich families'" (Anderson 189). The courses "thrived," but they were unfortunately short-lived (Moses 32). By 1878, only ten schools were left in France (Moses 32). In 1880, *lycées* replaced the secondary program started by Duruy. These were more satisfactory in part because they employed female faculty.

In 1850, the highest diploma for a girl was the *brevet supérieure*, which she could receive at the age of thirteen. In the 1860s, the "first women, all privately-educated, entered the university" (Moses 175). They were all privately-educated because no public secondary schools were offered to them to continue their education. In 1880, the Camille Sée Law finally authorized *lycées* and colleges for young women; they were still not required. This law, championed in part by minister of education Jules Ferry, also made primary schools "free, obligatory, and secular" (Moses 209). The new schools being offered to women still

differed from those offered to young men in that they did not prepare young women to take the *baccalauréat*, a requirement to enter a university.

Social class was also an instrument of educational discrimination. The most significant form was the offering of the secondary courses in the late 1860s, before the Camille Sée Law. The courses were aimed at “well-off or rich families” (Anderson 189), therefore, fees would be charged. This was a form of discrimination because poor young women were unable to attend these courses. As a result, upward mobility was not possible for poor young women, aside from marriage, and they remained under the control of men, who were generally more educated as a result of their gender. While the government launched the secondary courses, privately run boarding schools were also available. Because of the cost, these schools were only available to upper-middle class and upper-class young women. They entered at the age of eight, stayed five or six years, and then left school to finish their education with their mother or grandmother, who taught them how to be good wives and mothers. Regardless of whether the education offered was public or private, lack of money was a severe handicap to women seeking secondary education in nineteenth-century France.

Because laws requiring public schools for girls were not passed until late in the century, many girls were educated in the Catholic schools, a trend that continued even beyond the Falloux and Camille Sée Laws. Overall, “the general opinion was that education should be more religion-oriented” (Struminger 14), especially for girls. Catholic nuns had more educational resources at their disposal, and religion was considered “peculiarly suitable” for girls (Anderson 16). School was advocated for religious purposes, with math and reading as peripheral subjects (Struminger 40). Even after the passage of the Falloux Law, religious

schools remained popular: “By the 1860s, two-thirds of girls in French primary schools were being taught by nuns” (Struminger 14).

The development of girls’ education was sluggish, in part, due to societal beliefs about a woman’s role in society – solely that of wife and mother. Any sort of schooling she received was, for the most part, expected to carry over into a practical area in the home. Indeed, “the creation of girls’ schools always lagged behind the creation of boys’ schools... partly because of the continued belief that, ideally, girls should be taught at home by their mothers” (Moses 32). By requiring girls to attend only primary school, they were subliminally encouraged to return to the domestic sphere following completion of their formal studies. At home, they would be taught how to be a good wife and mother by their own mother or grandmother. Goldin writes, “La mère devrait être la première institutrice de ses enfants” (188); so any other education they received outside of the domestic sphere was considered secondary as “bourgeois women were being prepared for marriage” (Moses 33).

Unfortunately, the differing educational requirements and societal system for women made them quite dependent on men: “Elevée pour l’homme, préparée au seul rôle d’épouse, la fille voit son esprit et son instruction rétrécis à ce qu’on croit être l’utilité de l’époux” (Goldin 200): she became dependent on the man. Overall, the family was more important for a woman, whose educational ambitions were severely discouraged by the government, whereas a man was able to go as far as he wanted, educationally.

In general, females were considered too frail and delicate (Anderson 191) to attend secondary schools. This is directly shown in the lack of a truly rigorous curriculum for women, which was contrary to the boys’ curriculum. Educational writer Suzanne Necker advocated a curriculum that included natural science, history, geography, and “des arts

agréables, au piano surtout” (Goldin 201), which was important in polite society and, therefore, in finding a husband. Surprisingly, she also included in her list “des langues vivantes et mêmes du latin (pour mieux comprendre le Code civil!)” (Goldin 201). This is surprising, considering that the French government did not include Latin or Greek in girls’ curriculum, nor did society at large consider it appropriate for girls, in contrast to the boys’ curriculum.

The language requirement was a striking difference between boys’ and girls’ education at this time. After the French Revolution, in an effort to modernize the curriculum, “ancient languages” were removed from the syllabus for boys (Gildea 32); the idea of offering them to girls was never considered. As the government went through successive regimes after the Revolution, it reverted back, and once again began offering ancient languages, but only to boys. Following the Camille Sée Law, “a rigorous curriculum was adopted, [although] the course of studies did not go so far as to include Latin and Greek, which were required for the *baccalauréat*” (Moses 209). Due to this lack of a language other than French, the majority of young women were unable to take the *baccalauréat*. A few privately- or self-taught young women did, but they were anomalies during this period. Latin was considered “unsuitable” for girls (Anderson 189); in fact, when Duruy sent a team of commissioners to view Scottish schools, they were shocked to find girls learning Latin alongside the boys. Sadly, this inequality persisted for many years. The curricula for the two genders were not “assimilated” (Anderson 192) until the 1920s, and “co-education was not accepted in France until much later” (Anderson 192).

Feminists saw school as a way to allow women to be more independent and progress in their own right. According to wedding registers in 1864, as many as 48% of all French

women were illiterate (Anderson 136). This led to a lack of power for women, as they were unable to read anything the government produced, therefore they could not argue for or against it. As we know in our modern era, literacy is a virtual requirement for going anywhere in life. For most of the nineteenth century, many French women were unable to do much beyond domestic work and manual labor, because of a lack of literacy.

As Napoleon III said in 1865, “In the country of universal suffrage, every citizen should be able to read and write” (Anderson 137). In the nineteenth century, a variety of factors influenced whether or not a girl would receive an education and if so, what type and how rigorous it would be. Reforms in this area enabled many more girls to attend school and receive the education that their mothers had been unable to receive, due to the constraints placed on the academic institutions by the government and society at large. This education provided young girls with the opportunity to step out of the domestic sphere and into the men’s world, to become more independent than their mothers had ever dreamed of being. Despite these reforms, girls were still at an educational disadvantage at the end of the nineteenth century. While it was a time of remarkable progress in the area of education for girls in France, the dawn of the twentieth century still revealed significant shortcomings; however, many reforms had been made for the benefit of girls.

## GEORGE SAND: A DAUGHTER'S PERSPECTIVE

In George Sand's autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie*, she describes the events that lead to her education and, ultimately, to the creation of an identity that is uniquely hers. The catalyst for this event is Sand's physical separation from both her mother and grandmother, who each serve as maternal figures in her narrative. These maternal figures, while coming from very different backgrounds, pushed Sand away from them and towards an education, which they each believed would be best for her. I will argue that because the maternal figures pushed her away from them and towards an education, George Sand was obliged to create her own distinct identity. Her education began with a private tutor and continued at an English convent in Paris. As each stage was a different exercise in separation, each one caused Sand to distinguish herself differently. Creating her own identity through her unique situation caused her to become more independent of other people and ideas than most girls of her generation.

George Sand's book *Histoire de ma vie* was printed in 1855, by which time she was already a published author of several novels and plays. Her purpose in writing this book was to show how far she had come in her life, at the time of the printing of the book. She had begun her life in a traditional family. She went on to achieve great success as a captivating, non-traditional writer, and she was educated and independent, both anomalies for women of her era.

In analyzing the relationships involved, one finds numerous instances of the psychoanalytical dynamic of the mother-daughter mirror. According to this dynamic, mothers mold their daughters into their own images. Hence, the daughters mirror the mothers. In her book *Performing Motherhood*, Michèle Farrell writes that "the mirror... [signifies] the

mother's societally endorsed position of influence over the daughter" (202-03). Because the mother initiates the mirroring phenomenon, she is also the one who wishes for it to continue. Traditionally, the daughter is the one to initially break the mirror, or initiate a separation between the mother and daughter.

George Sand was born in 1804 to essentially two different classes. Her mother, Victoire, was a poor woman. Being a poor person in nineteenth-century France, she never received a formal education. Nevertheless, she was apparently literate, because Sand writes that her mother eventually taught her to read and write. Sand's father, Maurice, did receive an education. This was due in large part to the fact that he was male, but also to his high social class. One should note that despite his social class, if Maurice had been female, he would have remained uneducated, just as Victoire was. Maurice's schooling was interrupted twice, first by "une maladie de langueur" (Sand 111) and secondly by "la Terreur révolutionnaire" (112). While he never completed his education, he was, nevertheless, more educated than his wife, Victoire.

While Victoire had other children, Sand was the only child of Victoire and Maurice's union. As a young girl, George Sand lived with both of her parents until her father died in 1809. After his death, Sand was the only product that remained from their relationship. For this reason, her mother especially prized her. The year after Maurice's death, Victoire consented to let Sand live with her paternal grandmother, Mme Dupin, at Nohant. Her grandmother was of a higher social class, so Sand would have more opportunities than she would if she stayed with her mother, particularly in education. These opportunities would be presented to Sand as she assimilated herself into the upper class world of her father and

grandmother. They would make her different from her mother, thus completely distinguishing the two.

Sand recalls the early years of her life with her mother with fond memories. She writes, “Dans la première période de ma vie, je ne connus d’elle que son amour pour moi, amour immense...” (636). She continues, “...elle disait toujours qu’il n’y avait pas au monde une personne plus douce et plus aimable que moi” (636). Reading these lines, one can tell that Sand felt loved and valued by her mother. Victoire was fond of her daughter, as Sand remembers her mother commenting on her good qualities. The bond between mother and daughter was tightly knit, and Sand remembers that time as a time of love and appreciation from her mother.

The bond between mother and daughter is so tightly knit, for Sand, that she wishes to mirror her mother. She writes, “J’ai toujours été d’une déférence extrême avec [ma mère]” (636). Deferring refers to giving Victoire the authority to make decisions for and about her own life. As her daughter, she trusted her mother enough to do this, and saw her mother as someone who had the wisdom to make decisions. Sand writes, “Elle [sa mère] était alors pour moi un oracle” (636). The fact that Sand uses the word *oracle* to refer to her mother indicates that she considered her mother to be wise and all-knowing. She respected these qualities in her, which is why she would yield to her mother. She viewed her mother as an immensely intelligent woman and an unwavering source of wisdom for her. This is significant since Victoire had no formal education and was not what society would call an educated woman. Sand deferred onto Victoire an identity that Sand had created for her, that of a wise woman.

For Sand, deference also meant allowing her mother to shape her identity. While Farrell writes that “social identity of both the mother and daughter, ... is reciprocally deferred

onto the other” (97), for Victoire and Sand, this is only half true. Victoire does not depend on and for her identity. Sand is the only one in this relationship who relies on the other for her identity. The identity she receives from her mother is that of daughter. Thus, Sand defined herself as a daughter, in relation to her mother.

Sand’s mother, Victoire, and paternal grandmother, Mme Dupin, were two distinct people who each cared immensely for Sand, albeit in different ways. Together, however, the mother and grandmother had a strange relationship. Each would alternately demonize and idealize the other (639-40). Sand quotes her grandmother calling her mother “charmante,” “généreuse,” and “folle” and accusing her of dominating Sand’s father while he was alive, saying “[Victoire] n’a jamais été aimée de mon fils, elle le dominait...” (639). By the same token, Sand writes that her mother called Mme Dupin everything from “supérieure” and “belle” to “une hypocrite,” “sèche,” and “encroûtée dans ses idées de l’Ancien Régime” (639-640). Sand portrays them as insulting each other equally. They behaved this way because they were both vying for control of Sand. While both loved her, they did not hide from Sand the fact that they insulted each other. Perhaps they did this deliberately, in hopes that Sand would choose one over the other. Ultimately, it did not matter whom she chose, since she would not end up with either of them. As an adult, she would lead her own life sans Mme Dupin and Victoire. She would live with others of her choosing, not maternal figures, and she would not mirror either woman. She would grow to be a woman with a distinct identity unto herself.

As part of the distinguishing process, Sand would have to receive an education. Because of their differences in education, Sand was ultimately separated from her mother. She writes, “ma mère signa l’engagement de me laisser à ma grand-mère, qui voulait

absolument se charger de mon éducation” (659). Thus, Sand was handed over to her paternal grandmother so that the wealthy and class-privileged Mme Dupin could be in charge of her granddaughter’s education. In a later passage, we learn that Mme Dupin sends money to Victoire so that she will stay away from Sand. In this case, Mme Dupin and Victoire have power over the life of Sand and where she lives, but Mme Dupin also has power over Victoire. Victoire needs that money; without it, she can barely subsist. Mme Dupin essentially buys Sand from Victoire so that she can take control of Sand’s education. By handing her daughter over to her mother-in-law, Victoire Dupin was also handing her daughter over to another class and, essentially, another way of life. Whether or not she liked the idea of giving up her daughter, Victoire agreed to this, in signing “l’engagement” (659). Therefore, Victoire agreed to be separated from Sand for her own financial reasons as well as for the good of her daughter. This is also significant because Victoire did not seem to resist or bemoan the circumstances of the separation between mother and daughter like the poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, as one will see. For Victoire, the arrangement almost appears to be a business transaction. Sand does not describe her mother as upset over the incident, although she does write that her mother regretted her behavior some years later (636).

Victoire actually played an active role in creating the separation, along with Mme Dupin. George writes, “On s’entendit pour me détacher peu à peu de [ma] mère, sans que je pusse m’en apercevoir; et, pour commencer, [ma mère] partit seule pour Paris, *impatiente qu’elle était de revoir Caroline* [son autre fille]” (Sand 659; emphasis mine). Here, two women, Mme Dupin and Victoire, are conspiring to help make the break easier for Sand. To do this, Victoire left for Paris for a few days, so it would appear that she was going on a trip. Victoire knew that social class difference between her and Sand would eventually cause Sand

to distinguish herself from Victoire. Victoire decided to leave first, thus hastening the separation. This was supposed to make it easier for her daughter to distinguish herself from her mother. In this case, the mother is causing the break in the bond instead of the daughter. Vivien Nice writes that, according to psychoanalytic theory, the daughter makes “attempts... to separate from the powerful and possessive mother” (49). Thus, we expect the daughter to take the first step. When Victoire takes the first step in the separation, she signifies that her relationship with her daughter is not and will not be a customary one.

A further complication in this situation is Caroline, Victoire’s daughter from another relationship. Caroline, who is older than Sand, lives in Paris, and Victoire is anxious to return home so that she can see her other daughter again. While Victoire wants to hasten the separation so as to make it easier for Sand, she also wants to see Caroline. It is unknown which feeling was stronger for Victoire; nonetheless, it is possible that Sand feels rejected not only because her mother leaves her, but also because of where her mother will go when she leaves her, that is, to see Caroline.

Sand was unhappy with the new arrangement, separated from her mother for the purpose of receiving an education. She writes, “J’avais montré une si vive répugnance pour cette convention qu’on ne m’en parla plus...” (Sand 659). It is unclear whether her reaction was to receiving an education or to being separated from her mother. Both topics are discussed in this paragraph equally, and both topics are repeatedly revisited. Sand is without her mother on a daily basis, and she receives instruction on a regular basis as well. Thus, writing “on ne m’en parla plus” about either topic is inaccurate. Regardless of which “convention” she was referring to, she exhibits signs of not liking either. She did not agree to being separated from her mother. By extension, she did not agree to receive an education

either, as receiving an education meant leaving her mother and forming a distinct self apart from Victoire.

Sand does not believe that Victoire wanted to leave her. Sand writes, “plus tard elle [ma mère] avoua avoir combattu en elle pour se résigner à notre séparation” (636). Of course, in allowing the separation to proceed, Victoire knew that she and Sand would become distinguished from each other, but it is still clear that she loved and missed her daughter. This statement lets the reader know that it was not an easy choice for Victoire to make, even though she made it appear easy when she left Sand for the first time.

Sand did not want to be physically separated from her mother and found the world quite a different and scary place without her. She writes, “... je me trouvai sans elle dans cette maison, qui commença à me paraître grande” (659). A place that had seemed fine with her mother there suddenly seemed very large. She needed her mother to fill the space. To further exacerbate her feelings of abandonment, she writes, “Il me fallut aussi me séparer de ma bonne, que j’aimais tendrement...” (659). As her mother, her primary maternal figure, had left her, now her servant, Catherine, was doing the same, shortly after Victoire left. Catherine was leaving her to get married, albeit to “un mari excellent” (660). Being separated simultaneously from two maternal figures who were important in her life was difficult for Sand. It is at this point that Sand appears to begin to shut herself away from others. This is partly due to the stoicism and rigidity that her grandmother exhibits and encourages in Sand, but also surely due in part to the abrupt leaving of Victoire and Catherine.

Sand was scarred by the fact that her mother left her, and it haunted her for years. She writes, “je commençai à me tourmenter de l’absence de ma mère » (660). As she grew up,

making sporadic visits with her mother, she would try to find ways that they could permanently be together once again.

After Victoire and Catherine abandoned her, Sand began to feel things much more acutely than she had previously. Sand writes, “Je ne fus alors que quinze jours séparée d’elle, mais ces quinze jours sont plus distincts dans ma mémoire que les trois années qui venaient de s’écouler” (660). It is significant that she uses the word “distinct,” as this is exactly what she will become: distinct from her mother. These particular days were distinguished from previous ones in that her mother was not included in them. For Sand, her mother will not be involved in her distinct identity, either.

Because Mme Dupin wanted Sand to begin the process of growing up and distinguish herself from her working-class mother, Mme Dupin began to teach Sand immediately after Victoire abandoned her. Sand writes, “Elle me donnait mes leçons...” (660), making Mme Dupin her second teacher, as her mother had taught her to read and write.

Sand did not enjoy learning all subjects, although she did have her favorites. She writes, “Ce fut donc par pure affection pour ma grand-mère que j’étudiai de mon mieux les choses qui m’ennuyaient...” (807). While studying was not her favorite activity, she did love her grandmother, who was also her intermediate maternal figure, so Sand studied to please her. By pleasing Mme Dupin, Sand gained trust from her. Mme Dupin’s trust in her granddaughter made her feel comfortable with giving Sand the freedom she needed to distinguish herself.

As a teacher, Mme Dupin grew to trust her granddaughter to complete her studies well. Sand writes, “[Elle]... ne consultait plus le livre pour voir si ma version était bien fidèle” (807-808). As a result, Sand writes that she stopped taking her books to her lessons,

and became “plus philosophe que mes historiens profanes, plus enthousiaste que mes historiens sacrés” (808). Because her grandmother trusted her, she began to learn what she wished or, perhaps, she began to create what she wished to learn. In this way, Sand was literally creating a distinct identity for herself. It was an independent and rebellious identity based on creating what she thought she should learn, regardless of whether or not it was in the books. At the same time, her grandmother encouraged this identity creation.

After being taught by her grandmother for a while, Sand begins taking lessons from the tutor Deschartres. She does not particularly like learning, and one incident that she relays illustrates this well. Deschartres decides that Sand will learn Latin. Considering the era, this shows that Deschartres was quite liberal in his educational views, as girls did not, as a rule, study foreign languages in nineteenth-century France. Sand writes, “... j’étais si distraite qu’il lui arriva enfin de me jeter à la tête un gros dictionnaire latin” (831). While most girls did not study foreign language, Deschartres was literally throwing one at her. She writes that the next day, she tells him, “... je sais assez de latin comme cela, je n’en veux plus!” (831). Sand, a young girl, has decided what she will learn and that she has learned enough Latin. By having to become independent of her mother, Sand has also learned to think independently on a broader scale, with this vignette as a prime example. One should also consider that Sand may still be trying to mirror her mother. Victoire is not learned, so she certainly does not speak a foreign language.

To further distance herself from Victoire, Sand begins to mirror Mme Dupin’s rigidity and stoicism after moving in with her. Mme Dupin encourages her granddaughter to speak and act more quietly than she had with Victoire. Sand writes that at this time, “Il ne fallait plus se rouler par terre, rire bruyamment, parler berrichon. Il fallait se tenir droite, porter des

gants, faire silence ou chuchoter bien bas... A chaque élan de mon organisation on opposait une petite répression bien douce, mais assidue.” (661). For her grandmother to ask her to be quieter and more proper was asking George to control herself more and to distinguish herself from her mother by becoming a miniature version of Mme Dupin. Sand’s behavior was controlled by Mme Dupin as she ensured that Sand was quieter. In addition to controlling her granddaughter’s behavior, Mme Dupin also controlled the nature of their relationship. Mme Dupin and Sand’s relationship is more subdued than the relationship between Sand and her mother. There is a feeling of respect and love between them, but it is never uninhibited, as it was between Sand and Victoire. Sand writes of her time with Mme Dupin: “...elle me donnait plus d’éloges, d’encouragements et de bonbons que de coutume. ... Il fallait du respect, et cela me semblait glacial” (660). While Mme Dupin tried to buy the love of her granddaughter with words and candy, this excess was balanced by the frigidity of her personality. Thus, her grandmother’s brand of aloof love was quite different than the love Sand and Victoire had experienced together.

The aloofness of her grandmother even extended to the language that was used in the relationship. Sand writes that, while with her mother, “je la tutoyais” (660); on the contrary, when with her grandmother, she writes, “on me disait *vous*” (661; emphasis in original). In consistently using *vous* with her granddaughter, yet another separation is created for Sand. It is a mental separation between Sand and Mme Dupin. Sand continues quoting her grandmother: “...ma fille, vous marchez comme une paysanne; ma fille, vous avez perdu vos gants! ma fille, vous êtes trop grande pour faire de pareilles choses” (661). This is evidence that Mme Dupin is trying to mold Sand into a young lady of Mme Dupin’s higher social class, with more dignified behavior than that of Victoire’s social class. Mme Dupin also expected

Sand to be more like an adult than the child that Victoire allowed her to be. Sand writes that her grandmother called her “trop grande” (661), and Sand writes that her reaction was “Trop grande! j’avais sept ans, et on ne m’avait jamais dit que j’étais grande. Cela me faisait une peur affreuse, d’être devenue tout à coup si grande depuis le départ de ma mère” (661). This passage is significant for two reasons. It indicates that her grandmother felt it was time for Sand to grow up, now that her mother was gone. Second, by telling Sand that she is too big and too old, Mme Dupin indicates that Sand is too old to have a relationship with her like the one Sand had with Victoire. Therefore, Mme Dupin does not want to have a relationship with her granddaughter based on being comfortable with each other, as the kind that Sand and Victoire had had together. As Sand is growing up, it is time for her to start taking care of herself and relying less on other people. This goal was two-fold, because it was a tenet of the upper-class behavior that Mme Dupin was trying to teach Sand, and it also further distinguished Sand from Victoire.

Sand writes of a visit she and her grandmother make to Victoire and Caroline in Paris. She writes that her mother, “[l]’embrassa passionnément et salua [sa] grand-mère avec un regard sec et enflammée” (681). Victoire, while happy to see her daughter, keeps distant from Mme Dupin. This is because of the fact that Mme Dupin is now controlling Sand by keeping her away from her mother. Victoire is aware that this social class provided more prestige and opportunities to her daughter. Sand writes, “...ma mère avait été forcée de s’engager à ne me point amener chez elle dans nos promenades” (681), indicating a condition set forth by Mme Dupin. It was likely linked to the amount of money that Victoire received in exchange for Sand. Mme Dupin used this money to control Victoire’s relationship with Sand, including how much they saw each other.

Some time after Sand begins living with Mme Dupin, Victoire comes to visit her. During this time, Sand seems to prefer her mother to her grandmother, and writes “je ne savais pas feindre, quoique cela eût été dans l’intérêt de tout le monde” (766). For Sand to prefer Victoire provokes her grandmother’s jealousy. Mme Dupin now considers herself to be Sand’s primary caretaker and role model, while Sand continues to prefer Victoire. With Victoire present, Mme Dupin cannot control which person Sand prefers and imitates.

When it is time for Victoire to return to Paris, Sand vigorously tries to persuade her mother to stay, or at least let Sand go to Paris with her. She writes, “quand je vis ma mère faire ses paquets, je fus saisie de terreur... je crus que ma mère s’en allait pour ne plus revenir” (767). While she was creating her own identity, she still believed it necessary to be with her mother. For Sand, no one could replace Victoire as the primary maternal figure. Sand writes that she vowed to go to Paris “à pied” (767) from Nohant to be rejoined with her mother. It is at this point that her mother explains to her the magnitude of the power that Mme Dupin has over their relationship. Sand writes that her mother told her, “Ta grand-mère... peut me réduire à quinze cents francs si je t’emmène” (767). Victoire also uses the allowance to pay for room and board for herself and her older daughter, Caroline. In addition, Victoire uses some of the money to send Caroline to school, indicating her commitment to her daughters’ education. The ‘sale’ of Sand to her grandmother enables not only her own education but her sister’s education as well. It also enables all three of them to live reasonably well, though apart. Thus, it is Victoire’s choice that Sand should stay with Mme Dupin for not only her own sake but the sake of her mother and sister, as well. Because Victoire agreed to leave Sand in the custody of Mme Dupin, she receives a greater sum than she would otherwise. Therefore, Mme Dupin has essentially purchased Sand from her

mother. Mme Dupin is able to control how often they are together through money. By controlling how much time Sand spends with Victoire, she can also control how much Sand learns from Victoire, thus controlling how and to what extent her identity changes during this time. Mme Dupin's usage of money as power weakens the original mother-daughter bond.

Victoire admits that "l'argent ne fait pas le bonheur" (767) but goes on to say that she has chosen to live this way for the good of her daughter. Victoire continues, "je crains que tu ne me reproches un jour de t'avoir privée d'une belle education, d'un beau mariage et d'une belle fortune" (767).

While Sand prefers her mother to her grandmother, her budding writing talent does not appear to be able to coexist with Victoire. After her mother leaves, Sand continues to write to her, in an effort to keep their relationship intact. Sand writes that after sending her letters to her mother, Victoire wrote back, "Tes belles phrases m'ont bien fait rire; j'espère que tu ne vas pas te mettre à parler comme ça" (812). Sand was "mortified" by this. At this point, it becomes clear that Sand no longer shares a commonality with her mother. Sand has transcended classes and joined the upper class. She and her learning, which distinguish her from Victoire, can no longer coexist with Victoire's lower-class lifestyle. Even though Sand wishes to reunite with her mother and be a part of her lifestyle, Sand has now distinguished herself.

Although Sand and her mother were separated, Sand missed her greatly, writing that she had "une sorte de passion malheureuse pour ma mère absente" (848). She goes on to write, "J'aspirais à revoir ma mère... à être ignorante, laborieuse et pauvre avec elle" (848). She would prefer to be poor and uneducated like her mother than wealthy like Mme Dupin, with all of the opportunities that Mme Dupin's social class offered to her.

As Sand distinguishes herself from Victoire, she strives to stay bonded to her mother and to identify with her. She writes, “Je n’étudie pas parce que je ne veux pas” (848). The continual act of not studying would allow Sand to remain like her mother. She is chastised by one of the servants, Julie, and an angry exchange follows. Julie tells Sand that she will not see Mme Dupin anymore. She also tells Sand that she is “une mauvaise enfant,” “paresseuse,” and that she should be sent back to her mother (848). Sand writes that she surprised Julie by agreeing: “Ma mère! ... me renvoyer chez ma mère! mais c’est tout ce que je désire...” (848). She cannot have her mother and an education simultaneously. Her mother originally abandoned her so that Mme Dupin could manage her education.

Her reply continues: “... j’aime [ma grand-mère], mais j’aime mieux ma mère, et si l’on me rend à elle, je remercie le bon Dieu, ma grand-mère et même vous” (850). She continues, “Pourquoi croirait-elle [sa grand-mère] que je suis ingrate, parce que je ne veux pas être élevée à sa manière et vivre de sa vie?” (851). The point of this exchange is to show that, while she loves her grandmother, she would rather be like her mother than her grandmother, and she sees her mother as someone who could plausibly be mirrored. At the same time, she expresses the thought that Mme Dupin would like for Sand to mirror her and that she believes her grandmother scorns her because Sand does not mirror her. Sand is expressing her own feeling of whose life she would prefer to live. At this point, despite having lived with Mme Dupin for a while, she continues to choose a life with Victoire, even though her chosen life cannot be a reality.

Shortly before Sand entered the convent in 1817, Victoire came to visit her at the home of Mme Dupin. Sand tries to enlist her mother’s assistance in persuading Mme Dupin that she did not need to go to the convent to continue her education, initiated by the tutor

Deschartres. Sand writes that she hoped her mother would find the convent “inutile et ridicule” (859). Unfortunately, her mother did not agree. She writes that her mother “[lui] prêcha l’avantage des richesses et des talents” (859). At the same time, “elle raillait le couvent, elle critiquait fort à propos ma grand-mère... mais, tout en blâmant, ma mère fit comme ma grand-mère. Elle me dit que le couvent me serait utile...” (859). As Victoire had been full of contradictions in describing Mme Dupin, she is the same way in describing the convent. Ultimately, however, Victoire and Mme Dupin are in agreement that the convent will be good and useful for Sand. At the same time, she is agreeing to two more separations: a further separation from Victoire, because she will be joining an institution of her grandmother’s class. Joining this institution will continue to distinguish and separate her from her mother. The other separation consists of Sand’s separation from her intermediate maternal figure, Mme Dupin.

Sand also believes that an education would be good for her, writing her assumptions for her life upon completion of her studies at the convent: “je ne [m’amuserais] pas du tout de la vie que je mène, je pourrai gagner au change” (859). Despite the path that her life has taken thus far, she believes that the convent will provide her with a chance to change it. While going to the convent was a scary and even dreadful concept, she also saw it as something that would enrich her life and make it possible for her to improve her future. There is also some irony in that she refers to the life that she is currently living. She will not have any fun with the life that she will lead in the convent. Despite her loss of pleasure, she hopes eventually to be able to build a good life for herself, thus profiting from temporary discomfort and displeasure.

Sand writes that the convent that Mme Dupin had selected was “[le] même couvent où [Mme Dupin] était prisonnière pendant la Révolution” (860). One should note that while the convent was a prison during the Revolution, it was a school during Sand’s childhood. A prisoner during the French Revolution had all of his or her rights taken away and lived a very bleak existence in a cold, drab prison cell. He or she was fortunate not to die, either from the guillotine or from the conditions in the prison. In the same way, by using the word “prisonnière” Sand expects the convent experience to be a dreadful one. She expects to have no rights or freedom. She expects it to be a place where she would not thrive and would be guarded at all times, with her creativity snuffed out.

Before beginning her formal education at the Parisian convent, Sand’s grandmother interviews Mme de Pontcarré, whose daughter had attended the convent so that she could learn more about it. From Mme de Pontcarré, Mme Dupin learns that her daughter “y avait été fort bien soignée,” “élevée avec distinction,” and had received “bonnes études” (860). In choosing the convent for Sand to attend, Mme Dupin took an active role in her education as she had from the beginning of the contract. On the one hand, this ensures her continued role in the person that Sand is to become. On the other hand, the physical separation between granddaughter and grandmother that the convent entails, along with Sand’s formation in new female hands, will mean that the granddaughter distinguishes herself from her grandmother. In fact, Sand’s usage of the phrase “élevée avec *distinction*” indicates that both Mme de Pontcarré’s daughter and Sand are raised by the nuns to have distinct identities, separate from those of their mothers.

When Sand first begins attending the convent, Mme Dupin escorts her to see the Mother Superior, to place her into one of two classes, *la petite classe* or *la grande classe*.

Sand writes that her grandmother reported to the nun that Sand was “fort instruite pour [son] âge” (861) and that she should be placed in the *grande classe*. First, Mme Dupin compliments herself and the tutor that she had chosen, Deschartres, in reporting that Sand was exceptionally well instructed for her age. Second, Mme Dupin tries to control the distinct identity that Sand creates for herself by telling the Mother Superior in which class to place her granddaughter, not to mention trying to control the school itself by the same action.

After the meeting with the Mother Superior, Sand is sent out to play with the girls at recess, and a game is begun. The grandmother then walks outside with the nun, and Sand writes that Mme Dupin “parut prendre plaisir à me voir déjà si dégourdie et si à l’aise” (862). Her granddaughter is assimilating with the other girls, and Mme Dupin appears pleased about that.

When it is time for Mme Dupin to leave, Sand writes that she “fondit en larmes en m’embrassant. Je fus un peu émue, mais ... je ne pleurai pas. Alors, ma grand-mère me regardant en face, me repoussa en s’écriant: ‘Ah! insensible cœur, vous me quittez sans regret, je le vois bien!’ Et elle sortit, la figure cachée dans ses mains” (863). This is the second time that a maternal figure has left Sand, and Mme Dupin is visibly dismayed about leaving her granddaughter. Sand displays no emotion. The lack of emotion is a painful rejection for Mme Dupin.

Each time that Sand is abandoned by Victoire, she cries. Crying at the departure of Mme Dupin would indicate that she has completely replaced Victoire as Sand’s maternal figure, which is Mme Dupin’s desire. Sand’s lack of emotion indicates that this replacement has not taken place, yet. Mme Dupin, in her desire for Sand to mirror her, wishes to see Sand display the spontaneous emotion that she displays. Mme Dupin is angry at the lack of

emotion. Sand believes that her grandmother was angry and hurt because Sand did not react to the separation like her grandmother did. In the following paragraph, Sand reframes this situation from one to which she reacts, to one that requires her “pénitence” (863). She writes, “Il *semblait* que [ma grand-mère] fût blessée de me voir endurer la punition sans révolte ou sans crainte” (863), indicating that Sand believes her convent education is punishment because of her preconceived idea that she will be a *prisonnière* there. By reframing the situation in this way, Sand shows herself as rebelling against the identity that her grandmother wanted her to exhibit. She does not mirror her grandmother by sharing her overtly expressed emotion.

Mme Dupin’s sadness towards Sand’s rejection is ironic because she is the one leaving Sand. She is the one who chose the school and chose to leave Sand there, yet she is also the one who is upset about the separation. Sand is “stupéfaite” (863) by her grandmother’s emotional reaction. As Mme Dupin had selected the school, she is expected to be glad to leave Sand there to receive an education. Sand believes that she reacted well, “montrant aucune faiblesse” (863), considering that she was being abandoned by a maternal figure for a second time. And yet, as she reveals in a conversation with Sister Alippe, “... je me sens triste et seule au milieu de gens que je ne connais pas. ... je ne suis plus avec mes parents qui m’aiment beaucoup” (863). Sand does feel sad and abandoned by her grandmother, despite her earlier stoicism. She is alone in a crowd, because no one knows her. With “parents” referring to her relatives, and her grandmother specifically, she indicates that she does love and miss her grandmother. Sand and Mme Dupin each feel sad and rejected by each other, leading to an unpleasant farewell for both.

Sand immediately follows this vignette with another that was relayed to her by her mother when she comes to see Sand at the convent. It is unclear how Victoire knew the story that she relayed to her daughter. After leaving Sand at the convent, Mme Dupin dines that evening with her brother and Sand's great-uncle, Beaumont, who tells Mme Dupin, "... la tendresse maternelle est souvent fort égoïste" (864). Beaumont verbalizes exactly what motivated and upset Mme Dupin when she left Sand at the convent – that mothering is egotistical. The reason that it is egotistical is that mothers want their daughters to become just like them. Beaumont is right in implying that the reason Mme Dupin was upset was that Sand did not feed into this egoism; Sand reacted as she wanted to and not as Mme Dupin wanted her to react. Beaumont goes on to say: "... nous eussions été bien malheureux si notre mère eût aimé ses enfants comme vous aimez les vôtres" (864). This statement provides a glimpse into the type of childhood that Beaumont and Mme Dupin shared. Their mother did not approach mothering in an egotistical way, thus they lead a happier childhood. Mme Dupin, however, does have an egotistical mothering style, thus Beaumont implies that Mme Dupin's now-deceased son, Maurice, and granddaughter, Sand, led unhappy lives because of her egotistical style of mothering. Thus, he criticizes Mme Dupin's mothering style. Because Mme Dupin is raising Sand in the same way that she raised Maurice, there is a lack of a boundary between Maurice and Sand as distinct people. This includes Maurice and Sand having the same tutor, Deschartres. This lack of boundary possibly creates a confusion of identities for Mme Dupin, in regards to Sand and Maurice. Because of this lack of a boundary between her son and granddaughter, she desires to be the primary maternal figure, not just a secondary figure, for Sand, just as she was for Maurice.

While at the convent, Sand begins to mold her own identity. She does this in part by meeting new people and having new experiences. Sand had begun writing short stories and sending her “manuscripts” (890) to her grandmother. While the convent’s policy was to open letters and read them, they never did this to letters addressed to parents. Sand writes, “[la supérieure] avait dit devant moi à ma grand-mère qu’elle n’ouvrait jamais les lettres adressées aux parents” (890). While her letters were going to her grandmother, she assumed that they would not be opened because her grandmother played the role of her parent. For Sand, the grandmother has now replaced Victoire as the primary maternal figure.

When Sand discovers that her letters are being opened and destroyed, she tells the Mother Superior that she would ask to “changer de couvent” (891), as a result of the situation. She is angry that her trust had been violated. Mme Dupin comes to the convent, and the letters are presented by the superior “comme un tissu de mensonges” (892). The administration believed that writing fiction was wrong. Of her grandmother’s response, Sand writes that “... elle prit ma défense... Ma grand-mère m’embrassa comme à l’ordinaire, et pas un mot de reproche ne me fut adressée...” (892). This incident shows two things that were rare in the early nineteenth century. The first is that Sand, a young girl, stands up for herself when she feels she is being treated dishonestly. She has decided that no one else will take care of her, so she must do it herself. She no longer defers to anyone. Even more important, however, it shows the grandmother coming to the defense of her granddaughter in support of the identity that Sand is forming for herself. This is in contrast to Mme Dupin’s previous reactions, when she hoped for mirroring acts from her granddaughter and tried to control her, however it also reveals that Mme Dupin trusts Sand to create an identity that is right for her. As Mme Dupin herself is not a writer like Sand, she is not supporting a mirror of herself; she

is supporting her granddaughter's separate identity. This goes against the theory of the mirror, where the mother encourages the daughter to mirror herself, not create another identity. Alternatively, Mme Dupin may be living vicariously through her granddaughter. Mme Dupin is encouraging Sand's writing both through her behavior in this situation and through providing her with an educational base that Sand can use to expand her creativity. In either case, Sand's behavior reflects the grandmother in some way, thus she continues to mirror the grandmother indirectly.

Mme Dupin and Victoire both wanted only the best for Sand, who writes, "Ma grand-mère a voulu, par pure bonté, me rendre instruite et riche: moi je lui en suis très reconnaissante, mais *je ne peux pas m'habituer à me passer de ma mère*" (851; emphasis mine). As one will note, Sand has written the majority of her memoir in past tense, but she has written the last two clauses of this sentence in the present tense, indicating a lack of comfort with the separation from her mother. Even as an adult, Sand has not grown accustomed to being without her mother, despite the fact that their separation occurred more than forty years before the book's publication.

## **MARCELINE DESBORDES-VALMORE: A MOTHER'S PERSPECTIVE**

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's poem "Ondine à l'Ecole" depicts Desbordes-Valmore's point of view as her daughter, Ondine, goes to school in early nineteenth-century France. To understand this poem fully, one will need some background information regarding both Desbordes-Valmore and Ondine.

One of the most important things to note is the quality of education that Desbordes-Valmore received while she was growing up. Marceline Desbordes-Valmore "received no formal schooling... Education was not available to her as a child" (Danahy 123), mainly due to the fact that she was female but also because she was not of the upper class. Biographer Jacques Boulenger writes of Desbordes-Valmore, "Dans son enfance, Marceline avait... appris à lire et écrire ..." (243). This is clear by virtue of the fact that she made her living as a poet, someone who depended on the written word for her livelihood. Desbordes-Valmore also spoke both Flemish and French (Mallet-Joris 155), despite the fact that she had no formal schooling. Her lack of education would later cause anxiety as her eldest daughter, the precocious Ondine, began school.

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore was born in Douai, France in 1786. When Desbordes-Valmore was young, her mother, an actress, took her away from Douai, as well as from her father and siblings, and the two became traveling actresses around France (Danahy 121), living a meager, "hand-to-mouth" existence (Danahy 122). In 1801, they journeyed to Guadeloupe, where her mother died of yellow fever, and Desbordes-Valmore eventually made her way back to France, where she became an actress. After Desbordes-Valmore married actor Prosper Valmore, they moved on a regular basis. When he was able to find employment, it was usually as a traveling actor, leaving her essentially to raise their three

children, Hippolyte, Ondine, and Inès, alone. Instability in all relationships, including familial ones, was a problem for Desbordes-Valmore throughout her life, and her children probably provided the stability that she had never really experienced before them. When her oldest daughter, Ondine, left her to pursue an education, it jeopardized the security that Desbordes-Valmore had managed to create in her life.

Desbordes-Valmore worked as an actress until 1823, when she became a free-lance writer. She had been selling her writings for years, but it is at this juncture that she chose to devote all of her time to writing. Therefore, writes Danahy, “Her transition to the world of letters was gradual and due to many factors,” including “maternity” (131). Ondine had been born in 1821, and Desbordes-Valmore and Valmore also had an older son, Hippolyte. The life of a traveling actress was not ideal for raising a family, whereas the more stationary life of a writer was.

Much of Desbordes-Valmore’s *œuvre* consists of poems about motherhood. For this reason, she has been both shunned and embraced by feminist critics. Boutin writes, “the maternal figure seems always to be double-edged” (181), in that some critics see this as a theme that is uniquely feminist and others see it as a traditional theme that cannot be incorporated into the feminist canon. Boutin writes, “Any description of motherhood in a feminist context risks raising objections about essentialism and prescriptive gender roles” (181). The concern expressed in this context is that, by writing about motherhood, women will define themselves solely as mothers; hence, women who are not mothers will be unable to define themselves. Some critics do not embrace motherhood as a feminist theme for this very reason, but the discussion over whether motherhood is a valid feminist theme continues. For example, a so-called feminist poetry collection compiled by Jeanine Moulin in the 1960s,

*La Poésie féminine*, includes Desbordes-Valmore's œuvre on account of its treatment of "spousal and family relations" (Boutin 182). In contrast, Domna Stanton's 1986 collection *The Defiant Muse* excluded Desbordes-Valmore, based on a "similar conservative definition of femininity" (Boutin 182). For this reason, it is difficult to state whether or not Marceline Desbordes-Valmore is a feminist writer. While she wrote about feminine topics, she has been alternately embraced and shunned by the modern feminist community. I believe that Desbordes-Valmore should be classified as a feminist writer because she writes about subjects that are unique in women's lives. While men may also experience parenting, they will experience it differently. Because men do not give birth, they cannot experience parenting as caring for an extension of themselves as women can, neither do they experience the mirroring aspect with their daughters, that is, molding a daughter to be just like the maternal self, as many women do. Desbordes-Valmore writes of parenting and other "family relations" (Boutin 182) from a woman's point of view. In her poem "Ondine à l'Ecole," part of her anxiety is caused by the fact that an extension of herself, her daughter Ondine, has left her, and will become different from her mother, from whom she received her original identity.

Ondine is clearly exceptional for her era because she attends school and becomes educated. Her mother, too, is exceptional because she has a career besides that of a mother at a time when few women did. In reading this poem, however, one may forget that fact. Desbordes-Valmore's entire life seems wrapped up in her daughter, Ondine. The fact that Ondine has left her mother to attend school consumes all of her mother's thoughts. The situation appears to cause Desbordes-Valmore to forget her other two children and her career. One may question Desbordes-Valmore's own professionalism as a writer, since she ceases to consider her roles beyond that of a mother in this poem. Mallet-Joris succinctly asks "... est-

ce que tu es plus mère que femme?” (150). Looking at Desbordes-Valmore’s oeuvre, it is clear that she was very much a professional writer, based on the fact that she wrote “letters, ... three novels, ... more than fifty stories, and several volumes of poetry” (Danahy 121). In addition, during her lifetime, she was much-lauded for her work, however her writings tend to center on relationships, with subjects such as children, families, and love, all of which she experienced and was able to incorporate into her writings, thus her personal and professional lives met.

As Desbordes-Valmore portrays it, Ondine, her precocious daughter, began going to school, and mother and daughter were not only physically separated but also emotionally and intellectually separated. Because Ondine leaves for school, she creates her own identity. As I will argue, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore becomes very protective of her daughter and is threatened by the distinct identity that Ondine is creating away from her mother. Ondine went out into the world to create her own identity through a “porte étroite” (1), distinct from that of her mother. This “porte étroite” refers to two things. It refers to the fact that the bond between the mother and daughter is growing weaker as Ondine becomes educated, as an opening in a door becomes narrower when the door begins to close. The two have less in common than they once did, and so it is more difficult for them to relate to each other. On a broader scale, it refers to the narrow educational opportunities afforded to females in the early nineteenth century. Being able to get through the narrow door into school was a privilege.

Up until the time that Ondine began school, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore had provided her with an identity, even down to her name. When Ondine was born on November 1, 1821, her mother named her Marceline Junie Hyacinthe Valmore, although the girl was called “Ondine” (Ambrière, Vol 1., 287-288). *Marceline*, of course, was the name of

Ondine's mother. This provides some strong evidence for mirroring, as Desbordes-Valmore wanted her daughter to be like her, so much that she decided they would share the same name. *Junie*, was a "souvenir de la petite morte de Bruxelles" (Ambrière, Vol. 1, 287). Desbordes-Valmore had miscarried three children before giving birth to a son, Hippolyte, Ondine, and Ondine's younger sister, Inès. There seems to be some ambiguity as to the origin of *Hyacinthe*. Apparently this was the name of a close cousin to Desbordes-Valmore, but it was also the "véritable prénom" of Latouche, a close friend and lover of Desbordes-Valmore for many years (Ambrière, Vol. 1, 288). While Desbordes-Valmore was married to the actor Prosper Valmore during her pregnancy and delivery of Ondine, Danahy writes that Latouche "probably fathered... Ondine" (123). The true origin of this part of Ondine's name was never resolved, but the point is that the mother was able to control the daughter's identity in a literal way by naming her. Surely Desbordes-Valmore knew the origin of all the components of her daughter's name. Lastly, *Ondine* was a nickname given to her. The name *Ondine* is soft and endearing and recalls "une onde," which can be thought of as softly hitting the shore. Thus, Ondine was a child that Desbordes-Valmore wished to endear to herself, in addition to the fact that a wave leaves the shore but eventually returns. Perhaps Desbordes-Valmore wished that her daughter would keep the same pattern as a wave, as an adult.

As a baby, Ondine had a wet nurse. While this required Ondine to be away from home, she was not creating a separate identity for herself. Her mother had chosen the nurse, and Ondine was not learning anything beyond what her mother knew; therefore, it was not making her different from her mother. Any behaviors that she learned while with the wet nurse were behaviors that any child at the same place would have learned. In contrast, Ondine's going to school was a separating experience for the mother and daughter.

Desbordes-Valmore had less control over the instructors at the school than she did over the wet nurse (although she was able to choose the school herself, since education was not yet compulsory). In selecting a wet nurse, she chose only one person; selecting a school meant selecting a group of people, all of which she may not have agreed with or liked. So while Ondine had been away from her mother before, school was the first opportunity for both mother and daughter to be truly separated, in both a literal and emotional sense.

When Ondine went to school, it was difficult for Desbordes-Valmore to make the emotional break with her daughter and allow Ondine to create an identity for herself, distinct from her mother's. She writes, "Quel effroi de sentir s'éloigner une flamme / Que j'avais mise au monde, et qui venait de moi" (26-27). Seeing her daughter as the flame, it was terrible for Desbordes-Valmore to watch as her daughter, who was a part of her and her own creation, drifted farther and farther away from her, in part because Desbordes-Valmore could no longer control her daughter's identity, and she was forced to separate hers from her daughter's.

Another factor that may have added to Desbordes-Valmore's apprehension in regards to her daughter going to school was her daughter's health. Mallet-Joris writes that Ondine, "comme Inès," was "frêle et pâle" (Mallet-Joris 226), both signs of ill health. Sending a child off to school who is not in good health can be anxiety-inducing for a parent, as the very experience of being in a public place may exacerbate the problem. An added factor to this in the early nineteenth century was the belief that too much education was bad for women, and that females were too frail and delicate to attend secondary schools (Anderson 191). Thus, a girl already in poor health was being sent to school, where learning could worsen her

situation. Poor health combined with societal conceptions about females' collective ability to learn made sending Ondine to school that much more difficult for Desbordes-Valmore.

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore shared the worries of many parents: that of her daughter going out into the world alone, without her mother to help her. She writes, "vos maîtres étaient fières, et moi j'étais tremblante" (37). While Ondine's teachers were proud of her, Desbordes-Valmore was anxious. She knew that her daughter's creation of her own identity would alter the mother-daughter relationship, but she was not sure of the nature of the change. For Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, as with many mothers in the early nineteenth-century, this fear was compounded by the fact that her daughter was entering a world unknown to her: the academic world. This factor only served to increase Desbordes-Valmore's anxiety. She was concerned that the knowledge Ondine received would alienate her from her "simple" and "tender" parents (Boutin 144; Desbordes-Valmore 44). This would be because they no longer shared an identity – Ondine had created one for herself, where she had more formal knowledge than both of her parents. Desbordes-Valmore no longer knew everything that her daughter knew, and she had to let go and let her daughter become her own person.

Desbordes-Valmore makes clear within the poem that the relationship she has with her daughter is already changing, even as her daughter has just gone to school. She writes, "...je vous embrassais par la porte fermée" (18). This line, like the first line of the poem, refers to a door, however this is a "porte fermée" not a "porte étroite" (1). This "porte fermée" refers to the past, which is gone. The door has closed on the past, and the relationship between Ondine and her mother has changed forever; they cannot go back to the way things were. She

indicates that she still loves her daughter, despite the fact that their relationship has changed, in embracing Ondine (18).

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore spends a sizable portion of the poem hoping that her daughter will return to her, not just literally, but emotionally, as well. She writes, “Moi, penchée au balcon qui surmontait la rue / Comme une sentinelle à son heure” (13-14). Desbordes-Valmore awaits her daughter’s return by watching for her “comme une sentinelle.” A sentinel guards a place closely and must be ready to react at a moment’s notice. Using this word Desbordes-Valmore portrays herself as intently watching where and when her daughter will appear, so she can immediately react to Ondine’s return. “Sentinelle” refers to how close she is to Ondine. Desbordes-Valmore closely guards her daughter, even when Ondine is at home. This word is also associated with the military or with a warlike situation, indicating some danger to which her daughter may be subjected. Sending a daughter out into the world alone, without her mother, is indeed a scary and sometimes dangerous thing for a mother to imagine, but it also is an indication of Desbordes-Valmore’s feelings about the process of her daughter becoming educated. Being an educated woman in early nineteenth-century France was a dangerous choice, as it meant that she could not lead a typical life, that is, the life of a woman who had been raised by her mother to become a mother.

In the next line, Desbordes-Valmore refers to Ondine as her “mobile trésor” (15), indicating the importance of Ondine to her mother. A “trésor” refers to something highly valuable and quite possibly unique. The fact that she considers her daughter a treasure reveals how much she loves and values her daughter. As a “sentinelle,” Marceline Desbordes-Valmore looks after her “mobile trésor,” indicating a strong mother-daughter bond but also demonstrating the daughter’s mobility. A sentinel normally guards something stationary; it is

more difficult to guard something that is moving. Desbordes-Valmore is trying to guard and protect something that is not physically with her, as Ondine is at school. This would be a failing mission, as it is impossible to guard something that is separate from the sentinel. What one must understand of this passage is that Desbordes-Valmore wants to protect both Ondine and the relationship that they have together. A sentinel normally guards something that is stationary and inside; Desbordes-Valmore, a stationary being, is trying to guard something that is mobile and outside. While she wishes for their relationship to be impermeable, the mother-daughter bond is not an impenetrable fortress. Ondine's leaving has changed the relationship, while Desbordes-Valmore wishes to keep it as it had been.

This warrior-like vocabulary extends to another line, as Desbordes-Valmore writes, "Oui, proclamé vainqueur parmi les jeunes filles" (29). While she is uneasy about her daughter's intelligence because it will make her exceptional and different from the other girls, Desbordes-Valmore also believes that her daughter is the best among the girls. Remembering that this poem was written retrospectively, one can note that Desbordes-Valmore is proud that her daughter, Ondine, was the victor. One should also note that a "victor" usually refers to a man. Here, Ondine is essentially entering a man's world, as she seeks an education that most females did not pursue at the time. "Vainqueur" was deliberately chosen to emphasize that Ondine had entered something akin to a foreign land and had come out the victor.

The daughter as mirror of the mother is another concept that causes problems in Desbordes-Valmore's struggle to understand and accept the separation between the two and the new identity that Ondine is forging for herself. Desbordes-Valmore writes, "Vos lauriers m'alarmaient à l'ardeur des flambeaux: / Ils cachaient vos cheveux que j'avais faits si beaux!" (31-32). Desbordes-Valmore expresses concern that her daughter's accolades ("lauriers") will

hide all that she has done for Ondine (“cheveux”). She is afraid that the identity that Ondine creates for herself will hide any work that Desbordes-Valmore had helped to create. As her daughter is an extension of herself, she does not wish to have her part eclipsed by her daughter’s academic prowess. Additionally, Desbordes-Valmore and Ondine looked similar physically, primarily in that they both had blonde hair (Boulenger 13, 242). Besides changing their relationship on an emotional level, Desbordes-Valmore also did not want Ondine or anyone else to forget that Ondine was Desbordes-Valmore’s daughter. If Ondine’s looks were to change, she would lose her resemblance to her mother. In the same way, if her academic prowess overtook her personality and everything she had learned before starting school, she would lose her resemblance, and thus her connection, to her mother.

Desbordes-Valmore writes, “Le poids d’une couronne oppressait mon amour” (36). Here, she continues with the discussion of the laurels, this time as a crown that oppresses her daughter. She believes that the weight of the “crown,” that is, the amount of knowledge that Ondine has, oppresses her, and keeps her from being as happy as the other children.

Desbordes-Valmore continues this theme with “troublée aux parfums de si précoces fleurs, / Vois-tu! j’en ai payé l’éclat par bien des pleurs” (39-40). In this line, “fleurs” refers to Ondine and her intelligence. Desbordes-Valmore seems to have an allergy to “fleurs,” manifested in “des pleurs.” Flowers are used to symbolize the intelligence that Ondine has because she loves to learn. For this reason, it is beautiful. Like a plant, however, it can also cause unpleasant effects. Unfortunately, her mother is allergic to these flowers. Her allergy is manifested in tears, which she cries for her daughter. As a mother, she is worried about her daughter’s future, if Ondine chooses to pursue an academic career instead of a more traditional female path, such as that of a mother. Desbordes-Valmore is also sad that the bond

between her daughter and her seems to be weakening, as Ondine goes to create her own identity in school, apart from her mother. Desbordes-Valmore is happy that her daughter is enjoying life, but sad for the way the enjoyment has come. She is “troublée” by a variety of things, one being that she cannot know what her daughter’s future will hold. She also can see that their bond is changing and weakening, and that troubles her, also.

Following the discussion of Ondine’s intelligence as “les fleurs” (39), she writes, “J’avais vu tant de fleurs consumées!” (41). These “fleurs,” or intelligent women, have been “consumées” by their intelligence, meaning they have lost their happiness or otherwise been hurt by the mere fact that they were intelligent. Perhaps they were unable to find husbands because they proved too intelligent in academics and not learned enough in *les arts d’agrément*.

Desbordes-Valmore is familiar with the quality of life her daughter would have if she chose to follow in her mother’s footsteps but is unsure of the life her daughter has chosen by going to school. She writes, “L’âme sort-elle heureuse, ô ma douce lettrée?” (22). Ondine, of course, is the “douce lettrée,” and Desbordes-Valmore is concerned that, in the end, her daughter will be unhappy. She goes on to write, “Dites si quelque femme avec votre candeur / En passant par la gloire est allée au bonheur” (23-24). In this line, combined with the previous one, Desbordes-Valmore questions whether a learned woman can truly be happy. Desbordes-Valmore, as a poet, is somewhat of a professional and a learned woman; however, she has not experienced formal education, and she is able to practice her craft within the home, combining both traditional and non-traditional female roles. She does not consider herself a *lettrée*. Ondine is not able to receive formal education in the home, and the career she ultimately chooses, that of a professional educator, cannot be practiced in the home,

either. Thus, Ondine will be unable to fill a traditional female role with the life that she has chosen. Desbordes-Valmore wants her daughter to be happy and is concerned that the path Ondine has chosen is not the way to become happy in life.

Ondine's studious behavior contributed not only to a separate identity from her mother but also from her schoolmates, as they teased her, "Opposant votre calme aux rires triomphants, / Vous montrait pour exemple à son peuple d'enfants" (7-8). While others laugh at her, she is calm. She shows herself as an example in two ways: how she reacts to teasing and how she studies and reacts to schooling.

Desbordes-Valmore recognizes that her daughter has always been intelligent, and she writes, "[...] du nid studieux l'harmonie argentine / Poussait à votre vue: 'Ondine! Ondine! Ondine!' / Car vous teniez déjà votre palme à la main, / Et l'ange du savoir hantait votre chemin" (9-12). As Ondine approached school, in literal and figurative ways, the "l'harmonie argentine," or beauty, of studies came into view for her. It is in harmony with what Ondine is capable of doing and what she is ready to do at school. Indeed, Desbordes-Valmore depicts the pleasure of studying as calling her name. This "nid studieux" is not necessarily a physical location such as school or a designated place at home but a state of mind for Ondine, for which she is ready to learn. Studying and school were not activities in which Desbordes-Valmore could participate with Ondine. The studies that figuratively call her name actually call her away from her mother, as well. Historically, the mother had been important to the education of girls, so Ondine leaving home for her education was a break with the past. Because Ondine was ready to learn, she "[tenait] déjà [sa] palme à la main" (11), indicating that she held her hand out to the angel of knowledge and did not resist going to school. She also did not resist the education that she received but rather was eager to receive it and

welcomed learning. Going to school permanently changed Ondine, and at the age of 18, Boulenger writes, “elle préférait les livres aux robes” (Boulenger 242). This is atypical behavior for a female of this era and demonstrates a permanent break with her mother.

In the last line of the first stanza, Desbordes-Valmore writes, “[...] l’ange du savoir hantait votre chemin” (12). This literally means, “The angel of knowledge has haunted your way,” indicating that Ondine has always been smart and subliminally indicating Desbordes-Valmore’s uncertainty, fear, and unhappiness for her daughter’s life and well-being. Desbordes-Valmore could have used other words besides “hantait,” such as *guider* or *aider*, but she chose a word with a more ghostly feel to it. I propose that she chose this word because, to her, knowledge is something that is somewhat phantom. Desbordes-Valmore did not have much formal education, and this knowledge that was with Ondine was a sort of intruder into the relationship that the mother and daughter had. Like a ghost intruding on a peaceful family, knowledge was an intruder to a close bond between Desbordes-Valmore and Ondine. Like Sand’s use of the word *prisonnière* (Sand 860), Desbordes-Valmore does not see knowledge as a positive thing, promising a bright future for her daughter; she sees it as something that will always intrude upon their relationship and change her daughter’s life.

Unlike Sand, Ondine attended a private but secular school; however, it is clear in the reading of this poem that religion played a major role in her mother’s acceptance of her chosen path. In the last six lines of the last stanza, Desbordes-Valmore discusses praying to God about Ondine’s situation. She writes, “... je priais Dieu pour vous, / Pour qu’il te gardât simple et tendre comme nous” (43-44). Here, Desbordes-Valmore prays that God will keep her daughter “simple” and “tendre” like her parents, “nous.” This is the only reference to a parent besides the mother in the entire poem. Desbordes-Valmore is referring to her husband,

Prosper Valmore. This is probably because Prosper Valmore was something of an absent father. For this reason, Desbordes-Valmore functioned as a single parent for most of her married life. Because of this, she functions as a complete entity by herself for most of the poem. It is only at the end of the poem when she aligns herself with both her husband and God in urging Ondine not to become too much unlike her mother. Keeping Ondine in a static state would keep their bond from changing, but it would also prevent Ondine from pursuing the separate identity further, the identity that she has created for herself in the academic world. Desbordes-Valmore then writes, “Et toi tu souriais intrépide à m’apprendre / Ce que Dieu t’ordonnait, ce qu’il fallait comprendre” (45-46). Ondine, through her smile, is trying to show her mother that what her life consists of is something that she feels has been ordained to her by God, and she wants her mother to understand that. Her mother, however, is not so sure.

Desbordes-Valmore writes, “Muse, aujourd’hui, dis-nous dans ta pure candeur / Si Dieu te l’ordonnait du moins pour ton bonheur!” (47-48). These lines finish the poem, as Desbordes-Valmore speaks with Ondine, her muse. Ondine will be happy, even if her mother will not be. Ondine’s identity as a muse is a way for her mother to continue to keep her close, despite what Ondine is doing with her new identity. Desbordes-Valmore also tries to rival Ondine with her accomplishments: Ondine has her educational accomplishments, and Desbordes-Valmore has her literary accomplishment, with this poem. Furthermore, the muse is not only the inspiration for this poem; it is also the topic. In being both, Desbordes-Valmore has required the muse to penetrate the poem fully, thus continuing to control a component of Ondine’s identity. Possibly, Desbordes-Valmore is concerned that she will have less to write about, once Ondine, her muse, has left her. This is a legitimate fear in that

one of Desbordes-Valmore's primary subjects was children, but it is never validated, as she continues to create even after Ondine has started school and goes on to have a fairly prolific career for herself. In the same line, Desbordes-Valmore asks Ondine to be honest about her happiness in the life she has. Writing "du moins pour *ton* bonheur" [emphasis mine], it is clear that Desbordes-Valmore is not happy about the situation, but implies that Ondine apparently is. The tone of this line is somewhat sarcastic, as Desbordes-Valmore questions and challenges her daughter's happiness one last time. She is never completely convinced of her daughter's happiness in acquiring knowledge.

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore uses *vous/votre/vos* throughout the poem. It is only in the last five lines that she uses *tu/te/ton*. It is in these last five lines that God is entered into the discussion, which is also where she appears to begin the journey towards understanding what is essentially her daughter's new and separate life, away from her mother. Because one uses "tu" with God, by bringing him into the discussion, she was made more intimate with her daughter. This does not mean that she was better able to understand her daughter, although she did express contentment that her daughter was happy. At this point in the poem, she is approaching more understanding of her daughter, the separation, and the new identity she is forging for herself, but she has not yet reached a stage of complete realization of these ideas. Her ending line of "*ton* bonheur" (48) indicates continuing skepticism towards whether or not her daughter will be happy in her new life.

## **SAND AND DESBORDES-VALMORE: TWO PERSPECTIVES TOGETHER**

Together, these two texts make significant points about mothers and daughters in nineteenth century France. Specifically, they show how the mothers and daughters coped with their separation as the daughters went off to school. One should note that while these daughters were separating, or physically removing themselves from their mother, they were also distinguishing themselves as unique individuals. As such, the daughters succeeded in creating for themselves distinct identities from those their maternal figures had created and molded for them. As a result, tension and loss were felt by both the mother and the daughter.

In comparing these works, we find the mother's view of the separation contrasted with the daughter's view. In learning about each perspective, it becomes clear that the cost of being an exceptional, that is, educated, woman in the nineteenth century was high. It should also be clarified that a conscious decision had to be made to send a girl to school; however, whether or not the mother or daughter would enjoy school or the separation it entailed was another matter entirely.

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's poem "Ondine à l'Ecole" showcases the mother's perspective as her daughter, Ondine, goes to school, which creates a chasm between the mother's and daughter's identities. In contrast, George Sand's autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie*, primarily highlights the daughter's perspective, while it also includes some of her perceptions of her mother's and her grandmother's feelings.

For Desbordes-Valmore, the decision to send her daughter to school was clearly a difficult, wrenching decision. She felt that she was losing a part of herself and that all she had done for her daughter would be erased. Her feelings of loss are intense because she defines herself, in part, as a mother. Losing her daughter means losing part of her identity.

As one will recall, Desbordes-Valmore writes that “[les lauriers] cachaient les cheveux [d’Ondine] que [Desbordes-Valmore avait] faits si beaux” (32). Though she had arranged her daughter’s hair, the laurels, or accolades for her intelligence, cover up her hair. Hence, all that Ondine has done hides what her mother previously did for her, whether it was fixing her hair or giving her foundations for life. On a metaphoric level, the hair represents qualities that the mother has instilled in her daughter during her young life. As Desbordes-Valmore and her daughter shared the same color hair, this line also represents the fact that Ondine is a part of Desbordes-Valmore. When Ondine goes to school, Desbordes-Valmore is unhappy because she is losing a part of herself. Ondine, who once identified with her mother, is now creating her own identity. For Desbordes-Valmore, this meant losing a part of herself.

Like Desbordes-Valmore, Sand feels that she is losing her mother when they separate. Having her mother leave her was extremely painful. The separation haunted her for years, and she writes numerous times of wanting to return to live with her mother. At one point, she expresses fear that she will never see her mother again, and she would rather live in poverty with her mother than be materially wealthy without her.

Sand is similar to Desbordes-Valmore in that she never expresses a desire to be distinct from her mother, as Desbordes-Valmore longs to keep Ondine identified with her. In fact, she says she would prefer to be like her mother and not like her grandmother. Her mother, although conflicted about class privilege, wants Sand to distinguish herself from her. By identifying herself more closely with Mme Dupin, Sand will have more opportunities in life. In contrast, in Desbordes-Valmore’s poem, it is never clear whether Ondine has chosen to leave, but it is clear that she enjoys learning. This is a catalyst for Ondine to create a new identity for herself.

In pushing her daughter to distinguish herself, Victoire's motives were love, power and money. Mme Dupin offered money to Victoire so that she would stay away from Sand, thus making Mme Dupin the most powerful of the three women. Desbordes-Valmore never pushed her daughter away. The only emotions she shows are love and pain: love for her daughter and pain at her separation and distinction from her daughter.

For Sand, creating a new identity distinct from her mother was painful because it had to occur while Sand adjusted to no longer having her mother with her. Ondine, in contrast, returned home to her mother every day after school. Then again, we can only speculate about Ondine's feelings as she began her metamorphosis. It may have been painful for her to distinguish herself as well. She may have initially wanted to remain with her mother, like Sand. Ondine's perspective is not known.

Like Victoire and Mme Dupin, as Sand portrays them, Desbordes-Valmore is concerned about her daughter's future. Unlike them, however, she sees learning more negatively, and she is not convinced that a learned woman could be happy. One will recall that in the nineteenth century, it was difficult to be a woman and have both a family and a career, like a woman of the twenty-first century can. For women in the nineteenth century, it was usually necessary to choose family or career, but not both. Desbordes-Valmore was rare in that she was able to have both, but the career she chose, that of a poet, was one that she could practice in the home, combining her talent of writing about domestic subjects that she dealt with on a daily basis. She recognizes that Ondine will pursue work based outside of the home, a fact that worries her. Two lines in particular underscore her incredulity: "L'âme sort-elle heureuse, ô ma douce lettrée?" (22) and "[...] du moins pour *ton* bonheur!" (48, emphasis mine), emphasizing that Ondine may be happy, even if her mother is not. Like any mother,

she wants the best for her daughter, but at the end of the poem, she is still unconvinced that the academic path is the best one for her daughter to take.

Desbordes-Valmore spends the entire poem watching and waiting for her daughter to return home. She worries about her and hopes to bring her home. Indeed, by making Ondine her muse and writing the poem about her, she gives Ondine one identity that she cannot refute. Her mother, Desbordes-Valmore, is in charge of Ondine's muse identity and can continue to control it, regardless of what Ondine does.

Compared with Desbordes-Valmore, Victoire also has her daughter's best interest at heart. However, instead of keeping her daughter close to her, Victoire feels that it would be better if she left her daughter with her mother-in-law. The lifestyle and social class provided by Mme Dupin would ultimately lead to a better life for her daughter, including a "belle éducation," "beau mariage," and "belle fortune" (767). Through these things, Victoire believes Sand could attain power and material wealth. Victoire believes that through a better life, Sand will be happier than she could be with her poor mother. Viewed from Sand's perspective, at least as she recalls it during the events in question, all of these things are inconsequential when compared to the love of her mother.

By focusing on her own perspective and imagining her daughter's, Desbordes-Valmore can continue to control her daughter's identity. Yet in the one line where Desbordes-Valmore conveys her daughter's point of view, the mother seems sarcastic. In this line, Ondine is portrayed as "[souriant] intrépide" (44), as Desbordes-Valmore learns that God ordained for Ondine the path that she has chosen. This intrepid smile characterizes Ondine as being fearless, with no care as to how her mother feels. While Desbordes-Valmore spends the majority of the poem expressing concern and worry for her daughter's present and future, in

the portion of the poem where this line is presented, the tone is sarcastic, ironic, and somewhat oppositional, as Desbordes-Valmore dares her daughter to be happy and intelligent at the same time. Desbordes-Valmore may have needed to portray Ondine as smiling intrepidly in order to make the end of the poem function best because she wanted the reader to believe that she was the only one who mourned the separation. Although Ondine's smile may have been hiding fear or pain, caused by the changes in their relationship, the reader views Ondine as someone who is fearless and unconcerned about hurting her mother. At the same time, fearlessness was necessary for a girl being educated during this era. Girls could not be followers if they wished to become learned.

For George Sand, on the other hand, the daughter's point of view is the most predominant. For Sand, including perspectives of other characters in the book makes them seem more dynamic. It gives some humanity and dimension to them.

As Sand is the author and main character, one must consider the nature of the perspectives of other people presented in the text. When writing about her grandmother's anger when she left Sand at the convent, the motive that Sand imposed on her grandmother was influenced by the fact that Sand felt punished; she was not necessarily being forced to serve "pénitence" (863). In this way, their attitudes toward the convent were similar, as opposed to one of them being depressed and one of them being euphoric about the same situation. Sand portrays Victoire as loving and as having her daughter's best interests at heart, even when she abandoned Sand to Mme Dupin. Sand balances this scene, however, by writing that Victoire was also interested in the money from Mme Dupin, which she used to live and to send Caroline to school.

To include Sand's understandings of Victoire's and Mme Dupin's perspectives, however minor these perspectives are, shows that the daughter's separation and self-distinction was painful for them as well as for Sand. Based on Sand's self-representations as daughter, one could hypothesize that Ondine's separation and distinction from her mother was just as painful as it was for Desbordes-Valmore.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the historical information of the nineteenth century, one would surmise that being an exceptional woman during this era was an isolating experience. An intelligent woman in the early nineteenth century would have few, if any, other women at her intellectual level with which to have discussions, and educated men were probably educated beyond her level. Besides the intellectual isolation, there was also the possibility of a physical isolation. For a woman who had not been raised in the home to be domestic, it was more difficult to find a husband; hence, a family was more difficult to come by. Sand was able to beat these odds, marrying, divorcing, and taking lovers, in addition to having children and a thriving writing career. In contrast to Sand, Ondine's life was made more difficult by her ill health, and she died young.

From reading Sand and Desbordes-Valmore, we can learn more about the dynamics of the mother/grandmother-daughter relationship, and the changes that it underwent as the daughter went to school and changed. Many factors influenced the change, including love and protection of the child. Desbordes-Valmore felt threatened by the new identity, while Victoire encouraged the inevitable. During the creation of these new identities, tension was created, and both mother and daughter felt a loss, as their relationships changed.

Writing late in the twentieth century, Vivien Nice poses the question: "Do mothers keep daughters close, while daughters strive to move away? Or do they push their daughters away whilst the daughter attempts to remain close?" (58). In these two works, we see one of each of these scenarios. On one hand, Desbordes-Valmore tries to maintain the mirror and keep her daughter close. On the other hand, Sand's mother tries to push her away, while Sand tries to stay close to her. Looking at these two works, it is impossible to say which scenario

was more common in the nineteenth century. Even today, Nice writes that “observation of the mother-daughter interaction gives us few answers” (Nice 58). Sociologically, this is an issue that is still studied today, with conflicting results, including the fact that mothers and daughters “will feel alike in fundamental ways” (Nice quoting Chodorow, 52) and that mothers who try to hold their daughters too closely unwittingly drive their daughters away.

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## APPENDIX: *ONDINE A L'ECOLE* – COMPLETE POEM

- 1 Vous entriez, Ondine, à cette porte étroite  
Quand vous étiez petite, et vous vous teniez droite  
Et quelque long carton sous votre bras passé  
Vous donnait on ne sait quel air grave et sensé,  
5 Qui vous rendait charmante! Aussi, votre maîtresse  
Vous regardait venir, et fière avec tendresse,  
Opposant votre calme aux rires triomphants,  
Vous montrait pour exemple à son peuple d'enfants  
9 Et du nid studieux l'harmonie argentine  
Poussait à votre vue: "Ondine! Ondine! Ondine!"  
Car vous teniez déjà votre palme à la main,  
Et l'ange du savoir hantait votre chemin.
- 13 Moi, penchée au balcon qui surmontait la rue,  
Comme une sentinelle à son heure accourue,  
Je poursuivais des yeux mon mobile trésor,  
Et disparue enfin je vous voyais encore.
- 17 Vous entraîniez mon âme avec vous, fille aimée,  
Et je vous embrassais par la porte fermée.
- 19 Quel temps! De tous ces jours d'école et de soleil  
Qui hâtaient la pensée à votre front vermeil,  
De ces flots de peinture et de grâce inspirée,  
L'âme sort-elle heureuse, ô ma douce lettrée?  
23 Dites si quelque femme avec votre candeur  
En passant par la gloire est allée au bonheur.
- 25 Oh! que vous me manquiez, jeune âme de mon âme!  
Quel effroi de sentir s'éloigner une flamme  
Que j'avais mise au monde, et qui venait de moi,  
Et qui s'en allait seule! Ondine! Quel effroi!
- 29 Oui, proclamé vainqueur parmi les jeunes filles,  
Quand votre nom montait dans toutes les familles  
Vos lauriers m'alarmaient à l'ardeur des flambeaux:  
Ils cachaient vos cheveux que j'avais faits si beaux!

33 Non! voile plus divin, non! plus riche parure  
N'a jamais d'un enfant ombragé la figure.  
Sur ce flot ruisselant qui vous gardait du jour  
Le poids d'une couronne oppressait mon amour.  
37 Vos maîtres étaient fiers; et moi j'étais tremblante;  
J'avais peur d'attiser l'aureole brûlante,  
Et, troublée aux parfums de si précoces fleurs,  
Vois-tu! j'en ai payé l'éclat par bien des pleurs.  
41 Comprends tout... J'avais vu tant de fleurs consumées!  
Tant de mères mourir, de leur amour blâmées!  
Ne sachant bien qu'aimer je priais Dieu pour vous,  
Pour qu'il te gardât simple et tendre comme nous;  
45 Et toi tu souriais intrépide à m'apprendre  
Ce que Dieu t'ordonnait, ce qu'il fallait comprendre.  
Muse, aujourd'hui, dis-nous dans ta pure candeur  
Si Dieu te l'ordonnait du moins pour ton bonheur!

*Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1839)*

## VITA

Christina Thomas was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on September 9, 1980, the daughter of David and Mary Thomas. In 1984, she moved with her family to Tyler, Texas, where she grew up. She graduated from Chapel Hill High School in Tyler, Texas, in 1999. She attended Stephen F. Austin State University, where she majored in French and English with a minor in music. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree, *magna cum laude*, in 2004. In August 2004, she entered Louisiana State University's Master of Arts program in the Department of French Studies. She will receive the Master of Arts degree in French in May 2006. Upon graduation, she plans to begin a career as a middle school or high school educator.