

## Do You Know Me?

I, Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin, was born on July 1, 1804 in Paris, the daughter of a retired army lieutenant and a lower-class woman who got married a month before. Through my father's lineage I inherited royal blood; if you are interested, I described my interesting ancestors and life in a book, the Story of My Life. As I wrote, "if my readers wish to know me, they must know my father." When I was a child, my Dad took me to Spain where he served under a famous French general. A regiment adopted me as a mascot and I had a uniform. In a sense the rough sergeants raised me and maybe that's where I got the habit I later exhibited of dressing like a man and smoking cigars. Also, I felt, going around dressed like a man gave me great freedom, which women did not enjoy during the nineteenth century.

But I get ahead of my story. My grandmother raised me at Nohant (France, not Nahant, Massachusetts) after my father fell from his horse and died, because she thought my mother was too low-born to educate me. Grandma was a conservative, but she allowed a tutor to teach me who was a disciple of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher who is the father of modern educational theory and my favorite author. At the age of 13, I was sent to a



convent, where I had an intense religious conversion. My worried grandmother took me out of it.

On December 11, 1822, I married Casimir Dudevant; my friends found him for me to because I was about to enter the convent again and thought that a husband would de me good. Casimir was a nice guy and we got along for a while. We had two children, Maurice and Solange, but I found him intellectually boring and started a friendship with a man who stimulated me intellectually (I know what you are all thinking, but it wasn't so, at least I'm not going to admit it). My husband couldn't stand an intellectually-free woman and we drifted apart until we separated in 1833. In order to be free I had to give him all my property and had to settle for a yearly allowance, such was the condition of women during my time. I had to live in a garret and made a few francs painting fans and the like but then took up writing. My first writing teacher was the editor of a famous newspaper whose name at least still exists, Figaro, and I published novels written with a lawyer on the staff, Jules Sandeau. You can guess what happened next: "I resisted him for three months, but then I yielded...." In 1832, I wrote a blockbuster novel by myself, Indiana, which I signed with a pen name partly taken from Jules. That was the beginning of my literary career. By the time it was over I had gone down in history as the most productive woman author, writing many famous novels, plays, travel books, etc. I used to sit at my desk at 10:00 P.M. and write continuously and furiously until 5:00 A.M., without a plan.



This activity got some of my lovers angry, but as you can see how prolific I was if you look at a list of my works.

I broke up with Jules when I came home unexpectedly one day and found him with another woman, but my other lovers were the most famous cultural icons of 19<sup>th</sup> century France and Europe. I was proud of that, even though I was hard to please. I had a brief fling with playwright and historian Prosper Merimee (Bizet turned one of his stories Carmen, into a famous opera). Sculptor Francois Jouffroy was another lover, but he was too virtuous for my taste (his father was a baker—I don't know if that had anything to do with it).

One of my most famous lovers was the great poet and playwright Alfred de Musset. We were lovers from 1833 to 1835, and I inspired some of his most famous verses. We went on a trip to Venice, but he got sick and got mad at my continual writing. I nursed him back to health, but in the process fell in love with his doctor. I guess I understand why he got so upset when I left him and went off with his doctor to Paris. Later I tried to make up by cutting off my hair and sending it to him in atonement, but he wouldn't take me back. Even though our love affair ended badly, it was a great period for our literary production; I published a number of dynamite works inspired by this time together, and he did as well. However, I resent Charles Swinburne's remark that I "did not behave as a perfect gentleman" towards Alfred. What do Englishmen know?

I had a lot more lovers, but the ones you would recognize now include two famous musicians, Franz Liszt and Frederic Chopin. Liszt was mean. Do you



know what he wrote about me after our affair cooled down? "George Sand catches her butterfly and tames it in her cage by feeding it on flowers and nectar -- this is the love period. Then she sticks her pin into it when it struggles -- that is the congé [dismissal] and it always comes from her. Afterwards she vivisects it, stuffs it, and adds it to her collection of heroes for novels." What a horrible thing to say! I liked Chopin much better. He was a refugee from the Polish Revolution of 1830 and carried a small sack of Polish earth around his neck. He was already sick when I met him (being sick was an essential element for the Romantic of this period, although it never appealed to me). I took him off to an rough island in the South and nursed him; later I wrote a book about this experience which is pretty famous.

Don't think that I was only absorbed in my love affairs. I got caught up in the revolutions of 1848, socialism, and other important movements of the era, but I liked romanticism the most and that style defines me. My books influenced writers as far away as Russia.

Not surprisingly, I calmed down as I got older, perhaps too much. My daughter Solange was wild like me. She ran away with a sculptor on the eve of her marriage to another man. I managed to suppress the scandal, but later had a falling out with her over him. Guess what—she told Chopin, who took her side and cause our breakup. I got tired of all this action and spent my later years in Nohant seeking calm. In fact, a saying is attributed to me: "Calm, always more



calm.” My last words were, “Don’t destroy the greenery” (June 8, 1876). I always liked nature and perhaps qualify as an early environmentalist.

I told you about my life because it shows the fame and influence a Frenchwoman could achieve in the turbulent cultural center of Europe in the nineteenth century. There were others as well—look up Daniel Stern (not the actor) on the internet, <http://www.cats.ohiou.edu/~Chastain/ac/agoult.htm> and George Eliot, <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/gelliot.htm>. I’ll bet most of you did not even dream it was possible for women to become as famous as I was in the nineteenth century.

Who am I?

**G-e-o-r-g-e S-a-n-d**

**Spencer DiScala, PH.D. Copyright 2007**