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***Socio-educational thought in the works of George Sand in the reception of Polish writers of the positivist era***

The nineteenth century in France was a period of formative ideological influences on schooling and education that determined their contemporary form. School policy under the Restoration (1814-1830) largely preserved the organization of the system as it had existed under the Napoleonic Empire. During the fifteen years of the reign of Louis XVIII and Charles X, conflicts in education mainly concerned the place of religion. From the point of view of social needs, given the rapid development of capitalism, the so-called mutual (*mutuel*) education played an important role. It was supported by the industrial owners, who were aware of the importance of universal education for the economy and society. After the July Revolution of 1830, the questions of universality, free education and secularism of schools were at the heart of the educational debate. These aspects dominated the debate in this field throughout the 19th century.

During this period, schooling was subject to fees payable by all students. In general, the school organization system "corresponded to the different levels of the social hierarchy"<sup>1</sup>. The Falloux laws adopted in 1850 gave religion and the church priority in the organization of the school system. The representatives of religious cults obtained free access to primary schools, where teaching, according to them, was supposed to have a profoundly religious character and "ensure the religious education of children"<sup>2</sup>. Victor Hugo opposed this law by speaking as a republican-democrat deputy in the National Assembly in 1850, and called for the introduction of free education and a vast programme of secularisation. Although postponed, the idea of the secularization of education and its universal character was not stopped. The laws of Jules Ferry, Minister of Education from 1879 to 1883, made it possible to establish secular, free and compulsory public education. This was a kind of synthesis of the pursuit of the republican ideal adhering to the mission of universal acculturation of the French nation.

The importance of the role of education in social development was rooted in George Sand's socio-political convictions, originating from the troubled times of the French Revolution. This momentous event could not fail to have repercussions in the history of political thought felt by

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<sup>1</sup> Antoine Léon, Pierre Roche, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France*, PUF, Que sais-je? Paris 2003, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Marie Gilig, *Histoire de l'école laïque en France*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2014, p. 22.

all subsequent generations, not only in France but also in the countries affected by the wars of the Revolution, the Consulate and the Empire. It is therefore not surprising that writers, jurists, publicists and philosophers could not help but reflect on the revolution...<sup>3</sup>.

In analyzing the political thought of the time in which G. Sand lived, Loïc Philippe<sup>4</sup> mentions three currents: traditionalism, liberalism and socialism, which proposed three different visions to solve social problems, a "pessimistic, pragmatic and optimistic vision"<sup>5</sup>. In the political field, traditionalism, associated with scepticism, was wary of upheavals and proposed fidelity to proven models, founded by time and experience of the vision of reality. "Upheavals are harmful. They only lead to disorder and regression"<sup>6</sup>. Liberal thinking, associated with a pragmatic approach focused on the present, focused on efficiency and immediate profitability. "Liberals, on the other hand, accepted the transformations brought by the Revolution, of which they were the initiators, but they quickly advocated for stabilization of what has been achieved in order to organize the present"<sup>7</sup>. The optimist, on the other hand, believed in progress and therefore thought that improvement was always possible in the future. This thinking, associated by Philippe with the ideas of socialism, was supposed to be characterized by the acceptance of change and the definition of oneself in terms of the changes to which one aspires. "Socialists not only accepted the change introduced by the Revolution, since it overthrew the old society, but they wished for new transformations in order to establish a better social organization"<sup>8</sup>.

It is this latter attitude that characterizes the life and work of G. Sand and her political and social convictions. "She was successively a pioneer of feminism (and *Indiana* (1832) debuting in literature with panache, was successful as a scandalous attack on the institution of marriage), a committed socialist activist, a "regionalist writer", and finally the "good lady of Nohant"...<sup>9</sup>.

It cannot be denied that G. Sand was keenly interested, in addition to moral issues, in social affairs and political transformations, in the way successive governments in France exercised power, which was elevating some writers to the top and banishing others. G. Sand was strongly interested in the influence that the actions of those in power had on the social fabric. Therefore, the reflections on how to prepare the society to build socially just systems and live in a desired

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Touchard, *Histoire des idées politiques*, PUF, Paris 1959, s. 477.

<sup>4</sup> Loïc Philip, *Histoire de la pensée politique en France : de 1789 à nos jours*, Economica; Aix-Marseille 2nd edition (1 January 1998)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Traditionalists reject this upheaval as harmful. They see that it has only led to disorder and regression.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Christophe Mercier, « Lire et redécouvrir G. Sand. Critique » ; in : *Commentaire*, n° 196, Spring 2020, s. 206.

balance, which should be ensured by the dynamics of the development of economy, politics and education, were important to the author. G. Sand, through her reflections on education, the place of women in the social system, and the social system that was socialism, even if it can be called utopian, tried to provide answers in this regard through her works. The so-called utopian socialism, which was formed in the nineteenth century and became a political doctrine in the twentieth century, was based on magnanimity, on altruism that led to immediate sacrifices for an uncertain, even utopian, future.

There are many reasons to associate Sand's name with the popular educational projects that were born and developed in the first half of the 19th century. As a social activist, she knew and collaborated with the most emblematic representatives of the spirit of humane democracy: Agricol Perdiguier, Martin Nadaud, and Pierre Leroux in particular, whom she met during demonstrations in Paris and Lyon in 1835. It was thanks to him, in fact, that the writer met Perdiguier in 1840 and whose advice she drew on in writing *Le Compagnon de Tour de France*, a novel touching, among other things, on the importance of education in social life. In analyzing this novel, Rebecca Powers also highlights Sand's interest in the theories of Joseph Jacotet, who, as an autodidact, wrote convincingly about the intellectual emancipation of individuals and societies through universal education, whose goal was not necessarily knowledge, but rather intellectual emancipation. As the researcher points out, the method proposed by Jacotet was based on three basic principles: a strong desire to learn, the sufficiency of the printed book and a belief in radical equality <sup>10</sup>. Although this theory is not explicitly invoked by the writer, its influence seems evident in the way the novel's protagonist, a carpenter by trade, acquires philosophical and political knowledge by devoting himself to reading books, and his motivation is underpinned by his feelings of love for his beloved who has an aristocratic background.

George Sand saw her work as a duty as a social activist, as a method of promoting education by emphasizing its importance for the development of each individual and of society. The writer approached education in a spirit of optimism and with the conviction that it is never too late to learn, to improve one's knowledge and to fill in the gaps in education. (Mauprat). Following the recommendations proposed by Jacotet, the ability to read and improve one's

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<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Powers, "From explication to emancipation: the radical pedagogy of George Sand's *Le Compagnon du tour de France*", *Nineteenth-century contexts*, 2019-03-15, Vol.41 (2), p.173-184. DOI: 10.1080/08905495.2019.1547586

knowledge of the world through reading plays a vital role, which was demonstrated by her characters. Learning to read, which opened all other doors, was of the utmost importance.

The educational proposals promoted by Sand were partly based on a criticism of the so-called traditional education, which filled the students' memory with a quantity of knowledge that they were not able to grasp in depth, and which completely neglected moral education. As a result, young men and women were not prepared to face the problems of life. (*Little Fadette*). In order to create an educational program of sorts, George Sand drew on her own experiences, analyzing the teaching methods used in her education, or lack thereof. The ideas on this subject, which the writer included in *Histoire de ma vie*, were collected in the volume *Extraites éducatifs* by Alphonse Ponroy and published in 1902. The observations made by G. Sand, also with regard to her own children, concerned the respect for the child's sphere of freedom, taking into account his or her interests, rhythm and capacity for work and the use of positive incentives and motivations. In the balanced development of the child and the student who undertakes his or her studies, the writer sees the best path to harmony and social peace. In her *Impressions and Recollections* she writes:

The first point at which the issue of social balance must be addressed is free and secular education [...]. Social equilibrium will consist in giving everyone the means to develop their personal value, whatever it may be, provided that it is a value and not an inertia. Ignorance is not the only obstacle, there is also misery, that is to say, the lack or excess of work, and a society that does not find the means to balance the expenditure of energy and the legitimate acquisition of healthy enjoyments would be a lost society<sup>11</sup>.

The educational project proposed by G. Sand was also political: a society of equality is a society that achieves a fair distribution of wealth among different social classes. Equality also concerns freedom of thought, expression and participation in political decisions: it must be understood as access to universal suffrage and the establishment of a democratic state<sup>12</sup>.

In her approach to educating society from childhood, Sand on the one hand came close to Rousseau's beliefs when she stated that children should be treated according to their nature, but on the other hand, she relied on pragmatism, emphasizing the importance of reading as necessary for a realistic view of reality. It was important to take into account the student's ability to concentrate on the work and their willingness to work. Each person had to be endowed with a strong will and a firmness that would enable him or her to free him or herself from alienation,

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<sup>11</sup> G. Sand. *Impressions et souvenirs*, p. 254. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5724436g/f250.texteImage>.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Vernioux, *G. Sand et l'éducation populaire*, Leroux, Nadaud, Perdiguier, Lambert-Lucas, Limoges, 2014, p. 107.

limitations and obstacles. In this spirit, the importance of the position and role of women in a democratic society is paramount, but a woman, in order to be truly free, must be prepared, educated and aware of her ability to make decisions, for example about her professional life. Hence the need for comparable education for girls and boys.

As G. Lubin reminds in her article<sup>13</sup> on the educational spirit of G. Sand, already in the partly autobiographical *Confessions of a Young Girl*, G. Sand writes that the “education of girls should not be directed only by women”<sup>14</sup>. The lack of a clear educational policy for girls, which G. Sand's noticed in social life and the organization of education was already evident in her early novels. The overview of the educational level of the heroines in her novels was decidedly negative. Indiana is ignorant "*ignorante comme une vraie créole*", the education received by Valentine in an English convent is not of the best quality either:

The education we receive is miserable; we are given elements of everything, and are not allowed to go into anything in depth. They want us to be educated, but as soon as we become educated, we will be ridiculous. We are always raised to be rich, never to be poor. I know of only one state that is suitable for us, and that is to be maids<sup>15</sup>.

In an article devoted to the issue of women's writing, George Sand<sup>16</sup> defines the state of affairs by writing that societies do not see the benefits of women's emancipation in education. However, women must strive to open access to knowledge, to schools for both sexes equally. The lack of spectacular achievements of women in the field of intellectual values was the best proof "of the imbalance between the education of men and women, between the enormous progress of the former and the insufficient progress of the latter"<sup>17</sup>. Keeping the female mind in a state of ignorance did not only have fatal consequences for her, depriving her of access to the light of knowledge, to professions defined as masculine in the 19th century, such as a doctor, scientist or accountant. The state of ignorance is a state of enslavement of the mind that affects the upbringing of children in the family, the reproduction of stereotypes about girls' education and their role in society. However, in her vision of women's intellectual liberation, G. Sand

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<sup>13</sup> George Lubin. "GEORGE SAND ET L'ÉDUCATION." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, University of Nebraska Press, 1976, pp. 450–68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44627395>.

<sup>14</sup> George Sand, *Confession d'une jeune fille*. T. I, Lévy, Paris 1865, p. 148. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57505335/f149.item.texteImage>

<sup>15</sup> G. Sand Valentine, Chapter VI., cité par G. Lubin.

<sup>16</sup> Revue de Paris, 17 avril 1836, recueilli dans *Question d'art et de littérature* (Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 1877, pp. 53-60, cité par G. Lubin.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

didn't pursue the other extreme of the organization of social life, where women must replace men.

It has never seemed possible to me that man and woman were two absolutely distinct beings. There is diversity of organization, not difference. There is therefore equality and not similarity. I admit physiologically that character has a sex like the body, but not intelligence. I believe that women are as capable of all the arts and even of all the functions as men. [...] <sup>18</sup>.

The role which G. Sand appreciated was that of teacher of children, who saw to their education, developed deep interests in a spirit of recognition of equal rights and respect for their position (*les soins de l'inérieur de la famille*). It is their dedication of time to the family and to the education of their children that will prepare them for the work of the State. " Reflecting on this, one would find many other functions to which women are called by nature and Providence" <sup>19</sup>.

Equality of rights, true freedom based on knowledge, can only be assured by a good organization of education, free and guaranteeing the construction of society in the spirit of the socialist reforms of which G. Sand was a follower. In this perspective, education is an issue not only for women, but also for men, since it concerns the entire proletarian community which, thanks to education, can, in a truly democratic spirit, gain access to the professions, to working-class functions and to positions reserved for the higher classes in the social hierarchy.

The first point at which the question of social equilibrium must be tackled is a secular and free education, that is to say a liberal education" [...] ignorance is not the only obstacle, there is also poverty <sup>20</sup>.

Education and the eradication of ignorance had a liberating and emancipating meaning for man himself, be it male or female, it was also supposed to bring peace and social equilibrium, because revolutions bathed in the blood of combatants did not bring positive solutions for the development of French society, which was exposed to the loss of prosperity built in the past, created over generations. After the Revolution of 1848, G. Sand developed her pacifist attitude, while maintaining her belief in the possibility of social progress through education, working in a positivist spirit, at the grassroots level, without pursuit of wars and violence destroying nations. Education was the instrument that conditions the proper understanding of the very notion of freedom, whether female or male, as the right to self-determination, the right to improve one's abilities, the right to preserve one's individuality on the basis of appreciation rather than depreciation. G. Lubin rightly recalls the famous Amherst

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> G . Sand, *Souvenirs et les Idées,.....op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem. pp. 253-254.

College answer to the question "What is education? What we choose to make for the survival of all" <sup>21</sup>.

It must be admitted that the idea of teaching and educating the people as a necessary lever for their social and political emancipation developed systematically in France until the Second Empire. The idea of a universal primary education no longer met with opposition, even in conservative circles. Indeed, the general rise in the standard of living in society, the development of the economy, the urgent need for France to regain its rank among the nations after the defeat of 1871 and to become a "modern" country made the education of the people a necessity - all the more so as it also represented, under the control of the Church, a powerful lever for controlling consciences. The republican state sought consensus: to gather the people around moral (honesty, loyalty, etc.), scientific (against beliefs and superstitions) and patriotic values (to regain Alsace and Lorraine, lost in 1871). It was a method of encouraging solidarity between generations and social strata, as illustrated by the solidarist theses of Léon Bourgeois:

The teaching of ultimately acquired truths, whether scientific or moral, must be given to all men without distinction [...]. It is not only during childhood that one learns, one is educated and elevated throughout one's life, and it is necessary that at any age the individual should have sufficient leisure to be able to easily complete this education of oneself without which one cannot achieve the full development of one's faculties. <sup>22</sup>

In the Polish lands, although deprived of their own state, as in France, the intensive development of science contributed to the spread of a positivist and anticlerical view of the world. The bourgeoisie was growing stronger, but under Central European conditions it was not yet strong enough to trigger a revolution. On the other hand, the collapse of faith in the possibility of winning the revolution in Western Europe meant that the cult of science began to dominate and was conceived as a means by which the world could be conquered. In the face of the collapse of noble political slogans in social life, as well as in science and literature, realism and positivism took hold in Europe, which, in accordance with Comte's idea, was based solely on facts, rejecting metaphysical and transcendental assumptions.

After 1848, the romantic approach to the people and the desire to understand "the spirit of the people" could no longer be sustained, because the people supported the bourgeoisie in the struggle for change, and therefore "it was necessary to extend a scientific view of the nation

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<sup>21</sup> Amherst College, université privée de renom, fondée en 1821 aux États-Unis dans l'état du Massachusetts.

<sup>22</sup> A. Vernioux, *G. Sand...*, op. cit. p. 113.

also to the masses of the people and at the same time to pay more attention to the social processes taking place around it". Polish positivists created a program for the overall economic and cultural development of society (with the slogans of organic work, grassroots work, scientism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, religious and gender equality, as well as education for the people), replacing the patriotism of military action with the patriotism of peaceful work for the Fatherland. As Kulczycka-Saloni points out, this did not mean the renunciation of independence aspirations, but only a postponement of the liberation issue because of the enormous toll of losses suffered by the Poles as a result of the January Uprising<sup>23</sup>.

Not only writers of the post-insurgency period, but also pedagogues and educators engaged in an extensive discourse on the subject of social education. They expressed their views in the pages of the periodical *Opiekun Domowy* (1865-1878) and *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* (1882-1876). The programme of *Opiekun Domowy* expressed the ideas of the worldview and social trends of the so-called youth press, which propagated the cult of science, education, physical and intellectual work for the common good. The magazine was intended to help parents raising children at home. In addition to educational treatises, the weekly published many literary works. Its contributors included, among others: Michał Bałucki, Piotr Chmielowski, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Bolesław Prus<sup>24</sup>.

Among the pedagogical views presented by Polish writers, it is worth highlighting those that coincide with the views of George Sand. For example, Bolesław Prus, with regard to the need to allow children freedom of movement and to not use coercion, recommended that parents should provide children with toys suitable for the child's age and intellectual level (cut-outs, model workshops, tools for simple woodworking), because "with their help the child becomes familiar with shapes, colours and geometric figures, thus learning to observe and awakening the seeds of aesthetic taste in him"<sup>25</sup>. That is why the writer promoted the idea of creating kindergartens, which, thanks to the children's physical games (ball games, running, gymnastics) in the open air, create favourable conditions for physical and mental development. Positivists

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<sup>23</sup> J. Kulczycka-Saloni (ed.), *Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu pozytywizmu*. Wrocław, 1985 p. XXV.

<sup>24</sup> Danuta Mucha, „Poglądy pedagogiczne pozytywistów na wychowanie młodego pokolenia”, *Kultura i wychowanie*, Nr 3 (1) 2012.

[https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Kultura\\_i\\_Wychowanie/Kultura\\_i\\_Wychowanie-r2012-t3/Kultura\\_i\\_Wychowanie-r2012-t3-s30-47/Kultura\\_i\\_Wychowanie-r2012-t3-s30-47.pdf](https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Kultura_i_Wychowanie/Kultura_i_Wychowanie-r2012-t3/Kultura_i_Wychowanie-r2012-t3-s30-47/Kultura_i_Wychowanie-r2012-t3-s30-47.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> B. Prus, *Kroniki*. Vol. 7. Warszawa, 1958, p. 277. In: B. Prus, *Sprawy dziecinne*. „Opiekun Domowy”, nr 28, 1872, p. 217-218.



demanded that the child should become the centre of conscious educational efforts, taking into account the principles of physiology, psychology and pedagogy.

Aleksander Świętochowski (1849-1936), a widely-known publicist, playwright, prose writer, cultural and social activist, historian and philosopher, whose program statements served as manifestos of the positivist camp, sought educational methods corresponding to the new social and economic relations in the Kingdom of Poland<sup>26</sup>. Speaking in the pages of *Tygodnik Powszechny* in an article entitled "O średnim wykształceniu dziewcząt" ("On the Secondary Education of Girls"), he criticized the program that the Committee of Enlightenment established in 1826 for the education of women as compulsory in boarding schools and girls' schools<sup>27</sup>. This curriculum, which recommended the study of languages, religion, history and calligraphy and rejected the sciences, could not be sufficient. This critical view of the education of female youth led the author to formulate the following reformist conclusions: "1. to grant women, in theory, on an equal footing with men, the right to a full secondary education 2. to give her such an education in practice, 3. to put it on a real basis. This is the shortest expression of the reform demanded by three powers: general civilization, our nation and its conditions"<sup>28</sup>.

Among the female literary personalities whose names are mentioned by Prof. Regina Bochenek-Franczakowa, Prof. Corinne Fournier Kiss, and others in their works devoted to the reception of G. Sand's works in Poland, the name of Eliza Orzeszkowa attracts attention, whose legacy is equal to that of George Sand. In 1896, the writer estimated the number of her works at about one hundred fifty.<sup>29</sup> They include novels, short stories and journalistic articles produced during fifty years of hard work. Titles such as *Marta*, *Dziurdziewie*, *Nad Niemnem*, *Kilka słów o kobietach* deserve a mention. Orzeszkowa led her ideological struggle for the role of women in the family, to free women from the aura of the "earthly angel" and to grant them the rights and freedoms to which all family members were entitled. Her interest in life of the people is evident in *Dziurdziowie*, a novel which is an example of an analysis of life of social groups deprived of the light of knowledge, living in the superstitions of backwardness, with catastrophic consequences.

In conclusion, the literature and journalism of Polish positivism were sensitive to ideological slogans close to George Sand and her concept of world perception, systems of social

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<sup>26</sup> Danuta Mucha, *Poglądy...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ryszard Wroczyński (ed.), *Pedagogika pozytywizmu.*, Wrocław PIW, 1958, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> Maria Żmigrodzka, opracowanie i wstęp. *Eliza Orzeszkowa. Wybór pism*, Książka i wiedza, Warszawa 1952, s. XXVII.

justice and social equality. Sand was concerned with the education of the people and asserted that the right to education was the fundamental and necessary path to the emancipation of the working classes. The cardinal principles that guided her pedagogical thinking: equality of the sexes, freedom, trust in the nature and initiative of children, "active" pedagogy, solid but flexible intellectual training, education of the body, openness to the world..., offer a wealth of thought to today's reader, including the Polish reader, thanks to the work of Polish positivists<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> A. Vernioux, *G. Sand, ...op.cit.*, p. 116.