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Gender Convergence in Sand’s *La Mare au diable*, a Contrasexual Reading

A contrasexual reading of Sand’s *La Mare au diable* (1846) offers a new, “queer” reading by converging the roles of Germain and Marie as co-equals in a joint venture. Instead of viewing Germain as an ego-hero according to the prevailing model in Western culture (as if he were the projection of a male author), Marie replaces his centrality as an ego-heroine; Germain functions then as an Animus-hero (a kind of male muse) who serves her voyage to completion, while undergoing a transformation of his own. This model, more in line with the psyche of its woman author, lends a new interpretation to the novel’s title, sheds new light on the roles of secondary women characters, and reveals greater psychological depth in the struggle of two male suitors. The concluding scene of Germain alone in nature presents a challenge to this contrasexual reading, unless viewed in its broad archetypal context of the Great Mother.

Contrasexual theory, based on the premise of a psychic bisexuality in all human beings, provides a more complex understanding of the creative process in *La Mare au diable* (1846). My thesis of gender convergence in Sand’s novel places the archetypal Feminine on an equal footing with the Masculine and generates a “queer” interpretation in its challenge to conventional objectivity. The latter assumes that Sand’s hero, Germain, represents literally a man on a heroic journey, as if his story had been written by a male author projecting his ego onto the hero of the same sex. This standard approach conforms to
Joseph Campbell’s model of “the composite hero of the monomyth,” which incorporates the Western experience of ego development, a breaking out of unconsciousness in opposition to Terrible Mother figures in the form of dragons, witches, devils, etc. (37). One speaks then of “the ego as hero” or the ego-hero (my preference) on a cultural mission (Henderson 110), and the antihero is defined as the one who has failed to complete the hero’s journey (Clift 127). From this gendered perspective, little parity appears between Germain and his young traveling companion, Marie, whose role becomes limited to that of Anima guide or inspiratrice/muse.

Contrasexual theory makes a more balanced reading possible by positing a gender convergence on a bias corresponding to the psyche of its female novelist. Following this logic, Marie replaces Germain as an ego-heroine, and he functions as an Animus-hero (a kind of male muse) who serves her voyage to completion through the secondary masculine in women, while undergoing a transformation of his own. My model points to an adventure of coequals but with Marie as the center of initiative. This shift of viewpoint helps to explain the title to La Mare au diable.

The first part of the title, “la mare,” identifies the element of water, the precondition of life and the evolutionary origin of humanity, which is reenacted with every fetus. So too, the element of water points mythically to the Great Mother archetype, representation of the original state of collective unconsciousness and source of dream and fantasy. From this female-centered view of the world, the second part of the title, “au diable,” points in the context of Sand’s rustic tale to the Animus-hero who awakens feminine consciousness, whether as a lover-knight, a rapist-intruder, or bandit-devil.

Implicit support for a contrasexual reading of La Mare au diable as a tale centered on an ego-heroine paired with an Animus-hero can be found in Maria von Franz — “grande dame” of Jungian theorists and specialist in fairy-tale analysis. She exhorts her fellow psychologists to remain true to their understanding of contrasexual theory when writing interpretative studies and to shun the “sheer cowardice” of...