Foreword

George Sand was no man but quite an exceptional woman. Amantine-Aurore-Lucile Dupin, who would take the name George Sand some thirty years later, was born in 1804 to an aristocratic officer in Napoleon's army and a working-class woman who had made her way to this union in shady ways. When writing her autobiography, Sand would proudly declare that in her veins there commingled the blood of both kings and humble folks. After her father unexpectedly died in 1808, her mother and her paternal grandmother had very different ideas about how Aurore should be reared and fought over the little girl's upbringing. Finally buying off her daughter-in-law, Aurore's grandmother gained custody of the girl and raised her on the country estate at Nohant where Aurore's father had grown up. Aurore spent a good part of her childhood romping with peasant children in nearby fields and woods when she could, receiving lessons from her father's eccentric preceptor, and grudgingly complying with her grandmother's rules for ladylike decorum. When Aurore was twelve or thirteen, she began rebelling against her grandmother's expectations and saying that she wanted to go live with her mother in Paris. Seeing no alternative, her grandmother detailed her suspicions about Aurore's mother's promiscuous past and present. These revelations precipitated a crisis for Aurore. Coming to hate herself as well as her mother, the traumatized girl became quite unmanageable. Aurore was subsequently packed off to the convent of English Augustinian Sisters in Paris, where she spent the next two years dreaming up pranks with other boarders and finally feeling herself called to the religious life. Aurore was not yet sixteen when her elderly and ailing grandmother took her back home to the country. Her grandmother died when Aurore was seventeen, at which point she suddenly found herself the proprietor of Nohant and the vast

property surrounding it. Within another year Aurore, now the wife of Baron Casimir Dudevant and soon to be a mother, was following the domestic path that most women of her station and wealth took in early nineteenth-century France.

The marriage was not a happy one. Casimir drank, hunted, and sought the company of women less complicated than his moody wife. Irritated by the suffocating constraints of her life, Aurore took great interest in books as well as in men who read and wrote them. She began writing a bit herself and met Jules Sandeau, a young man who dreamed of a literary career. After heated quarrels with her husband, Aurore in 1831 worked out an arrangement with him so that she could go off to Paris with Jules Sandeau. There they published under the pen name “J. Sand” a few short stories and a novel written mainly by her. Her first big novel, *Indiana*, published in 1832, was signed “G. Sand.” By the mid-1830s the literary career of the author henceforth known as George Sand—who would become as famous for wearing men’s suits, smoking cigars, and collecting famous lovers, such as Alfred de Musset and Frédéric Chopin, as for her novels and plays—was well under way. An outspoken feminist, socialist, anticlericalist, and idealist, she would continue writing and publishing until her death in 1876. During her lifetime she enjoyed a reputation as one of the great authors of the nineteenth century and earned the praise of writers such as Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Henry James, Ivan Turgenev, and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

This biography takes into account the numerous biographies, in French and English, that have already been devoted to the most famous woman writer in nineteenth-century France. Drawing on these sources, as well as Sand’s novels, plays, autobiographical texts, and correspondence, some of which have been published only in the last few years, this biography stands apart from the previous biographies in several notable ways: it gives a central place to literature, without which there would not have been the phenomenon known as George Sand; it closely examines the meaning and importance of the name George Sand (how the choice of this pen name resulted from the particularly complex

personal experiences of the budding author, and how this name ultimately came to designate a public image with which she came to identify); it reveals multiple facets of the life of George Sand, not just her husband, lovers, and children or the books and plays that she wrote, but also the various expressions of her political commitment, in addition to her wide-ranging artistic and scientific interests and the ways she organized her days and nights in a busy household. Incorporating texts by and about Sand that have been published only recently, Martine Reid endeavors to draw the most complete portrait possible of George Sand. She also strives to put forth a candid, even-handed, and analytical representation of a remarkable woman in remarkable times. Her overall aim has been to put Sand in the place that she deserves in history, as one of the great authors of nineteenth-century France, standing alongside Victor Hugo, as well as Balzac and Flaubert, who were her friends and correspondents. With its clear, flowing language and impeccable scholarship, this biography will be of great interest to specialists on Sand. At the same time it will sustain the interest of general readers curious to know more about the celebrated and vilified woman who wrote and lived so abundantly.

—GRETCHEN VAN SLYKE