

Stendhal (Henri Marie Beyle)

Le Rouge et le Noir
Chronique du XIX^e siècle
Chronique de 1830

*The Red and the Black/
The Scarlet and the Black*





CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE

LORRAINE

ALSACE

Territoire-De-Belfort

Belfort

Vesoul

Haute-Saone

Montbéliard

Doubs

Besancon

Doubs

BOURGOGNE

Dole

Arc-et-Senon

Lake Neuchatel

Pontarlier

Jura

Cirque de Baume

Lons-le-Saunier

Switzerland

St-Claude

Lake Geneva

RHONE-ALPES

Some themes

- ✓ Narrative 'truth'
- ✓ The role of reading within the novel
- ✓ Rural-urban movements
- ✓ Class tension
- ✓ The position of the Church
- ✓ The novel and the bourgeoisie
- ✓ The psychology of the individual
- ✓ The flawed protagonist, the impetuous youth (like Werther, Frankenstein)
- ✓ Hypocrisy, within and without

From Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”

Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply *that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.*

Narrative perspective and the distance
between the author, protagonist, and reader

«La vérité, l'âpre vérité»

‘Truth, the harsh truth’

Opening epigraph to the novel,
attributed to Danton

Narrative perspective and the distance between the author, protagonist, and reader

- Opening of novel from point of view of the stranger, presumably representing the cosmopolitan from Paris:

This places the reader in the position of the outsider, the spectator, rather than implicating the reader as a direct participant. I.e. the reader's allegiances are presumed not to be PROVINCIAL.

'Une petite ville'

'To tell the truth, these same worthy people exercise here the most irritatingly despotic control. And that is why, for one who has lived in the great republic men call Paris, life in these little towns is insupportable. The tyranny of public opinion—and what sort of opinion!—governs in these out-of-the-way corners of France every whit as foolishly as in the backwaters of a small American town.' (26; Chapter 1)

- Invocation of the idea of hypocrisy as a way of encouraging doubt in the mind of the reader about Julien's character—and the degree of self-knowledge that he has.

“Does the term *hypocrisy* surprise you? Julien had a long, long way to travel before he happened on so horrible a word.” (42; Chapter 5)

- **QUESTION: Do the unlikeable aspects of Julien's character force readers into an uncomfortable agreement with the opinion that many of the relatively odious characters have of him? Are we forced to inhabit and/or endorse the prejudices of the aristocracy towards the commoners? If so, what might be Stendhal's purpose?**

Narrative perspective and the distance
between the author, protagonist, and reader

- What breach does the frequently ironic tone of the narration open up between the narrator and the characters?
- What is the significance of the authorial interventions in parentheses, often commenting on how the author or the text itself will be treated outside the diegesis/diegetic world of the novel?

Narrative perspective and the distance between the author, protagonist, and reader

- What about Julien as a decidedly unmasculine hero from the start of the novel?
 - ‘trim, slender frame’ (37); ‘Despised by everyone as a weakling’ (38)
 - ‘it might be some woman in disguise who had come to ask a favour of the Mayor’ (46)
 - ‘His bashful manner and the almost feminine contour of his features did not appear in any way ridiculous to a woman who was herself extremely shy. The virile strength that is commonly considered essential to manly beauty would only have made her feel frightened.’ (48)
 - ‘so much foppishness was unbecoming in a priest’ (54)

Diagesis

Diagesis =
the (fictional) world of the text

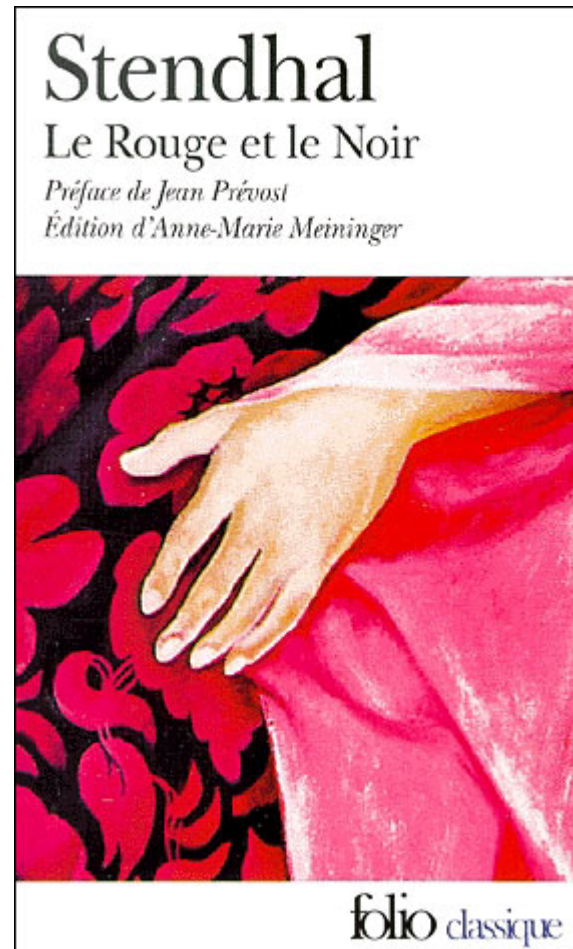
“(Here the author would have liked to introduce a page of asterisks. ‘That would not look elegant, says the publisher, ‘and for **such a frivolous book** a want of elegance means death.’

‘Politics,’ the author retorts, ‘are like a stone tied to the neck of literature which, in less than six months will drown it. Politics in the middle of things that concern the imagination are like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert. The noise is ear-splitting and yet lacks point. It does not harmonize with the sound of any instrument. This talk of politics will mortally offend half of my readers, and bore the other half, who have already come across far more vigorous and detailed politics in their morning paper.’

‘If your characters don’t talk politics,’ my publisher replies, ‘then they’re no longer Frenchmen of 1830, and your book is no longer a mirror, as you claim...’”

(384-5; Chapter 22)

The Role of Reading



Metatextual commentary on the form of the novel

‘Why, my good sir, a novel is a mirror journeying down the high road. Sometimes it reflects to your view the azure blue of heaven, sometimes the mire in the puddles on the road below. And the man who carries the mirror in his pack will be accused by you of being immoral! His mirror reflects the mire, and you blame the mirror! Blame rather the high road on which the puddle lies, and still more the inspector of roads and highways who lets the water stand there and the puddle form.

(365-6; Chapter 19, ‘The Italian Opera’)

Sorel went on towards the shed, and as he entered looked in vain for Julien at the place where he should have been beside the saw. He caught sight of him five or six feet higher up, astride one of the beams in the roof. Instead of keeping a watchful eye on the general movement of the machine, Julien was busy reading. Nothing could have seemed more objectionable to old Sorel. He could have forgiven Julien his slender frame, so little adapted to heavy labour and so unlike the build of his elder brothers; but this mad craze for reading was hateful to him. He himself could not read.

...

‘So, you lazy scamp! You’ll always be reading those damn books, will you, when you’re set to watch the saw? Read them, if you will, in the evening, when you go and waste your time at the curé’s.’

Although stunned by the violence of the blow and streaming with blood, Julien took up his post of duty beside the saw. There were tears in his eyes, but these came less from physical pain than from the loss of his beloved book.

(36-7; Chapter 4: Father and Son)

In Paris, the nature of Madame de Rênal's attitude towards Julien would quickly have become plain—but in Paris, love is an offspring of the novels. In three or four such novels, or even in a couple or two of the kind of song they sing at the *Gymnase*, the young tutor and his shy mistress would have found a clear explanation of their relations with each other. Novels would have traced out a part for them to play, given them a model to imitate. And sooner or later, though without any pleasure and possibly with reluctance, Julien's vanity would have compelled him to follow this model.

In some little town in the department of Aveyron or the Pyrenees the fiery heat of the climate might have rendered the smallest incident decisive. Under our more gloomy skies, a young man without money, ambitious only because his sensitive heart creates a need for some of those pleasures money can supply, finds himself every day in the company of a genuinely virtuous woman of thirty, absorbed in her children and in no way concerned to model her conduct on novels. Everything moves slowly; everything happens gradually in the provinces—everything is more natural there.

(56-7; Chapter 7)

Velocity

In these tales, time is an intense preoccupation: everything in them seems to press toward Paris in a headlong craving for acceleration—of property accumulation, of erotic intensity, of personal power. The longing for velocity inscribes and describes a construction of time that characterizes the post-Revolutionary period. (53)

“Country to city” then appears a primal diegetic structure, a foundational progress narrative whose objective is the production of the modern (urban) subject. (54)

Richard Terdiman, “From City to Country: An Outline of *Fluvio-Critique*,” *Novel* 41.1 (2007): 53-72.

But in the larger context of *Le Rouge et le Noir* as a whole, is this opposition between city and countryside actually endorsed, or is it unsettled?

Terdiman:

Thus the countryside these novels seek to flee is itself always already citified... Except in ideologized fantasy projection, there is no untouched rural nature to discover, nor any rural purity that the inhabitants of the city can enjoy...Whenever and wherever we look, we find city-dwellers pining for pastoral and country people lamenting urban contagion and corrosion. Both positions are consequently—and diagnostically—reductive. The empirical is always already overwritten with the phantasmatic and the consecrated; country and city both risk disappearing beneath this burden of the cultural imaginary. Yet the relationship between the urban and the rural is worth revisiting because, in nineteenth-century France, this relationship was being remade rapidly, more profoundly, and more brutally than had ever been the case in any prior period. (55-6)

The little town of Verrières is one of the prettiest in Franche-Comté. Its white houses, with their red-tiled, pointed roofs, stretch out along the side of a hill where clumps of chestnut-trees thrust sturdily upwards at each little bend. Down in the valley, the river Doubs flows by, some hundreds of feet below the fortifications which were built centuries ago by the Spaniards, but have long since fallen into decay. High above the town, and protecting it on its northern side, rise the jagged peaks of Verra, a branch of the Jura mountains, whose crest is covered with snow from the moment the October cold sets in.

‘... Gentleman, I have not the honour to belong to the same class as yourselves, you see in me a peasant urged to revolt against the lowliness of his lot... But even were I less guilty, I see before me men who, without pausing to consider what pity my youth may deserve, will wish to punish in my person and forever discourage that body of young men who, born in an inferior station, and in some degree oppressed by poverty, have the good fortune to secure for themselves a sound education, and the audacity to mingle with what the pride of rich men calls society.

‘That is my crime, Gentlemen, and it will be punished with all the more severity in that, in point of fact, I am not being tried by my peers. In the jury box I see not a single peasant who has grown rich, but simply and solely men of the middle class enraged against me...

(484; Chapter 41)

LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR (1954)

DIR. CLAUDE AUTANT-LARA

GÉRARD PHILLIPE AS JULIEN SOREL