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THE HEROINES
IN THE
NOVELS OF STENDHAL

by
JOAN MARIE DAVIDSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the
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Abstract

THE HEROINES IN THE NOVELS OF STENDHAL

by

Joan Marie Davidson

Adviser: Professor Henri Peyre

This dissertation is an examination of the depiction of major and minor heroines in the novels of Stendhal. Stendhal shows women not merely in terms of their physical appearance or as others see them, but also as they view themselves. The reader is invited to share their pensées intimes, to partake in their interior discourses, and to witness them in action or passivity. And one learns about their hidden, latent potentialities and qualities through the pleasantly diverting intrusions of an omniscient author.

Attention has been paid to Stendhal's personal notions about women and love which appear in De l'Amour and other nonfictional writings and often point directly to the heroines of his novels. Stendhal's private obsessions, his prejudices, his predilections, and his dreams or yearnings are discussed in respect to the women he portrays. Characteristic themes and recurrent images have also been explored, as has Stendhal's attitude toward le roman, as written by his predecessors.

There are five chapters in this study; a chapter for each novel, and the heroines therein are treated separately. The novels have been dealt with in the order that they were written to bring out similarities between Stendhal's first and succeeding heroines as well as tendencies in methods of portrayal, and to discover changes in the ways

Stendhal introduces and portrays his heroines.

In Chapter I (Armance) consideration has been given to the way Armance is first presented, sight unseen as it were, with nary a word about her character or background beforehand. Stendhal's physical description is impressionistic, his concentration upon her eyes and her revealing regard. The author's limited use of physical descriptions along with his unwillingness to give his heroine a dense, significant past are noted. And such aspects of Stendhal's characterizations, which make his portrayals quite unlike those of his contemporaries Balzac and Sand, also suggest that his heroines are not fixed once and for all. Stendhal's women seem to evolve as the novel progresses. Capable of change, whether they are under the impact of love or otherwise, they often surprise the reader by unexpected words and actions.

In Le Rouge et le Noir Stendhal's use of contrast and comparison is a feature of interest. Mme de Rênal and Mathilde de la Mole retain some of the traits of Stendhal's first heroine. Yet each is distinctive and they are sharply opposed to one another. In Chapter II there is discussion both of the inveterate modesty of the femme douce whom the Stendhalian hero always prefers (in this case Mme de Rênal) and of Stendhal's own pudeur as a novelist. His admiration of force, imprévu, imprudence, and energy find expression in the audacious Mathilde de la Mole, who incarnates Stendhal's ideal Renaissance being, and, in addition, symbolizes amour-vanité--as opposed to Mme de Rênal, who is amour-passion.

In the incompleting Lucien Leuwen Stendhal's heroines continue to be compared to one another, albeit less effectively than in the preceding novel. The relationships between Mme de Chasteller and Stendhal's

beloved Méthilde and between the caricatured Mme Grandet and the writer Mme de Staël are explored. In this novel a minor character, Mme d'Hocquincourt, emerges as a spirited and appealing woman. It is she who is traced with ease and enthusiasm and, like Mme d'Aumale who is discussed in Chapter I of this study, announces the Duchess of Sanseverina.

Increasingly Stendhal's focus is upon the energetic heroine of unconventional even immoral ways. In La Chartreuse de Parme the hero seems pale compared to his aunt, Gina, who from the beginning of the novel is a forceful, prominent character. While Clélia Conti, like Mme de Chasteller, tends to exist more vividly in the mind of her lover than in her own right, and bears much resemblance to earlier docile, modest, retiring women, she nevertheless becomes quite active on her lover's behalf and, at the end, surprisingly self-assertive. Stendhal's physical descriptions remain sketchy, with attention directed toward the eyes and the regard of all the women whom he would have the reader appreciate. His intrusions in the Chartreuse are generally those of a pseudo-moralist and they justify the immoral, imprudent, unprincipled behavior of his Italian heroines--at the expense of the conventional and tiresome French.

In Stendhal's last novel, Lamiel, the heroine is clearly the central figure of the novel. Her youthful growth and development are lightly traced and she is the only heroine who has been given anything resembling a meaningful past. In Lamiel feminine modesty is all but forgotten. Neither love nor jealousy are motivating forces here, for it is curiosity that moves Lamiel. She soon becomes a willful, enterprising young woman who breaks away from her repressive, stultifying milieu to chart her own destiny. If Lamiel, by virtue of her independence, spirit, imprudence, and energy, is akin to Mathilde, Gina,

Mme d'Aumale, and Mme d'Hocquincourt, she is also a heroine who closely resembles the youthful Henri Beyle, whom Stendhal recalls in La vie de Henri Brulard.

To my children Denise and Kevin,

and to my husband Don,

with appreciation for their love,
their infinite patience, and their
understanding.

I would like to express my gratitude to my adviser,
Professor Henri Peyre, for his inspiration and
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FOREWORD

A central theme in Stendhal's diverse writings is love, and the critics of his work have often focused upon it. For Henri Beyle, the author of De l'Amour, had throughout his lifetime loved many women-- French women, Italians, actresses, countesses, young girls, and married women; some coy and modest, others histrionic, bold, even loose. And with many if not most of them he was an unsuccessful lover. Approaching the age of fifty, still in search of himself, he wrote revealingly in La Vie de Henri Brulard, "Je vois que j'ai été constamment occupé par des amours malheureux." (I) Figuring prominently among the women whose initials he traced carefully in the sand and whom he could not forget were those he had never possessed. The fact that he was not a successful lover colors his conception of love as well as his thoughts about women. Interestingly, then, if in Stendhal's novels the act of love is conspicuous, that is because it is rare and generally fails to unite the Stendhalian lovers. Furthermore, his fictional women captivate the souls of men more than they themselves are possessed. Stendhal preferred, or made himself believe that he preferred, "natural" women who were a bit moody and mysterious, spontaneous women of modest ways. And if such women rejected him it was to protect themselves.

Paradoxically, although Stendhal's love life has received much attention and although the author himself has been recognized as a "deeply romantic" yet "decidedly feministic writer,"¹ his heroines have

¹Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 248.

not been closely examined at length or in depth.

My own interest in Stendhal was first stimulated by Le Rouge et le Noir. The heroines seemed vital, remaining fixed in my mind long after the book had been put down, the plot forgotten. I wondered why this was so, especially since I had little idea of what these women looked like, and what--if anything--had molded them. My interest led me to read through the works of Stendhal, and thereafter to seek answers in the critical literature.

Though there are many Stendhalists who have shed light upon Stendhal's life and art, and who have helped both to shape my intentions and to set my direction, nowhere did I find answers to the questions that had formed in my mind. For example, F. W. J. Hemmings' Stendhal: A Study of His Novels is a thoroughly documented, informative, and insightful study of Stendhalian themes and preoccupations. His primary interest, however, is the relationship between Stendhal and his heroes. In the illuminating La Création chez Stendhal, Jean Prévost has studied Stendhal's style, literary technique, and improvisation. Impassioned by Stendhal as a very personal author revealing himself through his literary figures, Prévost postulates similarities between Stendhal and his female characters, then fails to investigate further and turns instead to the male characters.

Maurice Bardèche, in Stendhal romancier, examines Stendhal's literary formation and talent as a novelist. He tries to show that Stendhal's heroines are not only inspired by previous fictional characters, but also, initially and always, by a real woman--no matter that that woman may have been merely glimpsed in passing; furthermore, it is inevitably the heroes who concern him most. On the other hand, Simone de Beauvoir--who has devoted a generous chapter to Stendhal,

man and author, in The Second Sex--directs attention to Stendhal's women; heroines and mistresses alike. She believes that the Stendhalian heroine is (admirably) lacking in feminine mystery, an opinion which we do not share. For often implicit in the ways that Stendhal presents his heroines is a sense of mystery, which I intend to investigate.

The sensitive, perceptive studies of Victor Brombert, La Voie oblique and Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom, provide insight into Stendhal's evasions and use of irony. Nor can the provocative Mensonge littéraire et vérité romanesque go unmentioned. Fixing upon the phenomenon of triangular desire, René Girard provides some unusual insights into vanity and emulation in the novels of Stendhal. But while he does discuss one of Stendhal's heroines, Girard, too, is more concerned with Stendhal's heroes as beings of passion.

Most recently there has appeared Stendhal, Balzac et le féminisme romantique by Richard Bolster, whose approach is that of a social and literary historian. (Understandably, given the differences in corpora, he concentrates more upon the fiction of Balzac than on Stendhal.) Believing that De l'Amour is a "plaidoyer" for social liberty and feminine emancipation, Bolster chooses carefully among Stendhal's heroines in defense of the thesis that Stendhal's work is the vindication of a kind of total individualism. The subject is indeed relevant and contemporary. However, Bolster neglects the unemancipated heroines; I will not.

In The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir makes the fundamental point that Stendhal does not "limit himself to describing his heroines as functions of his heroes: he gives them a destiny of their own." With this in mind I have studied the women in Stendhal's novels, not to prove the author's inherent feminism but rather to discover how they are depicted in and of themselves--what they are, how they live, how they af-

fect and are affected by others. To this end I have found it useful to refer to other writings of Stendhal--the journals, the letters, and, in particular, the quasi-autobiographical De l'Amour. This diverse and uneven treatise on love, replete with maxims, notations, personal references, and preoccupations--not to mention the famous theory of "cristallisation" which demonstrates that falling in love has much to do with the workings of the imagination--also contains succinctly presented ideas about different kinds of women, their traits and behavior. Yet if Stendhal's heroines tend to conform to the generalizations and idealized images of De l'Amour, I have found that sometimes they depart radically from the Stendhalian norms.

Stendhal came to feel that he was writing for a select few; the "happy few" was his term for the readers whom he hoped to please. Hence I have attempted to show how Stendhal captures the reader's attention, sometimes even demanding it in his own unpretentious manner.

The procedure has been chronological, beginning with Armance. The heroines (apart from Mme d'Hocquincourt) have been treated in the order of their appearance in the novel itself. I have investigated the various ways Stendhal introduces his heroine to the reader; his diverse methods of portrayal; his physical descriptions, and how he uses them to get at the souls of his heroines; his own role in the novel as well as his ideas about the "roman" per se. Naturally attention has been paid to Stendhal's personal intrusions, his use of irony or sarcasm, his expression of enthusiasm, and, at times, of distaste.

I have discovered changes not only in Stendhal's methods of introduction and portrayal but also in the individual heroines. Thus their actions (or lack of actions) as well as their relations with

others have been explored to see how their behavior is altered under the impact of love or otherwise.

The matter of Stendhal's use of models will not go unmentioned. Nor will I overlook Stendhalian themes and recurrent images when pertinent to the heroines. Among the questions studied, then: How are Stendhal's heroines revealed? How do they reveal themselves? What is it about them that Stendhal would have us appreciate and how does he convey to the reader the traits, the characteristics and qualities that he himself values or belittles. I write with an eye to discerning how Stendhal lends sympathetic understanding or projects himself into these women, thereby making them vivid, memorable creatures.

CHAPTER I

ARMANCE

Stendhal named two of his novels after heroines: his first, Armance (1827), and his last, Lamiel (1841). But whereas the heroines of both novels are certainly indispensable, it is undeniable that in Armance he focuses less upon the heroine than upon the hero, Octave de Malivert, and in Lamiel concentrates primarily upon the development and adventure of the youthful heroine. Moreover, the scope of the two novels is different, as are Stendhal's intentions.

Armance is an apprentice novel; Lamiel, if not a more "mature work," is at least quite different in subject and perspective. And in Armance we shall see that the heroine comes to us "full-blown," as it were. Her past is later depicted in a sketchy and incomplete manner. Then, too, Stendhal more often treats Armance herself in relation to the hero and the theme of love. By contrast, Stendhal's last novel is uninfluenced by romanticism--which was dominant when Armance was written. As he grew older, Stendhal became less fond of sentiment, more inclined to attack--with irony and sarcasm--the manners, mores, and morality of contemporary France.

Written toward the end of 1826 and published in August of 1827, Armance brought Stendhal neither the fame nor the fortune he so ardently desired. It was not a popular novel; nor was it greeted with acclaim by Stendhal's critics and peers.

A slow-moving if not turgid work, Armance lacks the dramatic action, the thematic grandeur, and the scope of works that follow it. Geographically, the novel is restricted to Paris and Andilly and, socially, to the upper-class salon society. Its great interest to us lies less in the plot than in the depiction of love--virtually absent in Lamiel, where, from the heroine's point of view, love is replaced by curiosity--and the involvements of the heart.

Uninformed readers will be puzzled by Armance, for the hero suffers from a malheur stemming from a never-to-be-disclosed secret. And his behavior, like that of the heroine, is strange. Both protagonists are romantic figures--Octave by his antisocial attitudes, and his despondence; Armance by her elusiveness, her excessive despair. Both are subject to fainting fits and prone to exaggeration. In short, the novel "languishes under the spell of romanticism."¹ Nevertheless, Armance carries within it the themes and characteristics of Stendhal's later novels.

The author intends to show us the characters and manners of the nobility under the Restoration, as the subtitle Quelques scènes d'un salon de 1827 suggests. The salon is the location in which much of the action takes place--action being, for the most part, conversation and gesture. And here in the salon setting Stendhal displays his gift for comical and satirical portrayal.

We encounter in Armance what will be recognizable as dominant Stendhalian themes: the quest for le bonheur; love, with various fluctuations accompanied by the imaginings of the lovers; love as a

¹Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 113.

form of warfare; jealousy; the need for self-esteem. Furthermore, we find an emphasis upon avarice and self-interest, which Stendhal habitually juxtaposes with the noblesse d'âme of his heroines and heroes alike. For his protagonists are superior beings, and, when not outsiders, they are at least somewhat estranged from society. The author's inclination to play his protagonists off against their boring or ignoble contemporaries is displayed in all later novels.

In the preface Stendhal claims that Armance was written by a woman and corrected by his hand. But of course, he alone wrote it, attempting half-heartedly to imitate the manner of Mme de Duras, a well-known popular author of the day.² To this contemporary he owes the inflated style, the tone of some of the interior monologues, and the idea of the hero's impotence. On the other hand, it is Stendhal's voice that addresses us when he insinuates himself into the narrative flow--at whim. Whether to clarify or to intensify an impression or to oblige us to re-evaluate our judgment of a person, Stendhal's comments show us--often with irony--that his main characters are, in a multitude of ways, atypical. Though often proud and obtuse, they are not vain, self-serving, or shallow beings.

Then there is the style that we have come to associate with a novel by Stendhal: the epigrammatic turns, the abrupt transitions and shifts in tempo, the frequent repetitions and the inconsistencies. For it is very well to say that Stendhal paints by insistence and repetition, but sometimes the frequent recurrence of a descriptive phrase

² Author of Ourika and Edouard, Mme de Duras had written an unpublished novel whose title--Olivier ou le secret--was well-known and inspirational to Henri de la Touche. He wrote an Olivier which was published anonymously in the format of Mme de Duras's novels. Stendhal decided to perpetuate the joke by introducing yet another Olivier with a secret.

seems caused by negligence. Certainly the inconsistencies--of age, dates, forgotten events--are the sign of a carelessness that accompanies the famous method of "improvisation."

The characters portrayed in Armance have counterparts in later novels. Biographers have postulated or observed resemblances between the hero and the author, and critics have not ceased to comment upon the similarities that exist among all of Stendhal's heroes. But while the subject of such resemblances has been fairly well exhausted, much remains to be said about the women in his novels.

The model for Armance was, by Stendhal's account, a young dame de compagnie (of M. de Stroganoff's mistress, said he)³ whom Stendhal had observed at the opera. Little is known about this woman; furthermore, it is difficult to place faith in Stendhal's assertion. Usually, Stendhal had more than one woman in mind as he created a heroine. We would not deny that the lady in mention caught Stendhal's eye. But, as we shall see, the physical image of the "model," however much it may have stimulated the author's imagination, has little place in the novel itself. Stendhal was not adept at graphic reproduction. Nor did it interest him. His first heroine is depicted sparingly and incompletely; at that, she is more "thoroughly" described than Mme de Rênal or Mlle de la Mole in the novel that follows. Her appearance, which may owe something to the inspiration of Byron, owes most to Stendhal's own fancy.

The character of Armance may, in certain respects, be traced back to literary works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

³"Il est vrai que j'ai copié Armance, d'après la dame de compagnie de la maîtresse de M. de Stroganoff qui, l'an passé, était toujours aux Bouffes." (Letter to Mérimée, December 23, 1826).

However, it, too, is fundamentally Stendhal's own invention. Somewhat stilted, obsessive, and compulsive, Armance does interest us nevertheless, if only because so much about her remains to be discovered when first she appears before us. Although almost everything about her is unknown to us then and there, in her initial tête-à-tête with the hero she is firmly established as the outstanding woman in the novel.

Moreover, she is the predecessor of many of Stendhal's heroines. She has traits and proclivities that will be found in Mme de Rênal, Mme de Chasteller, and Clélia Conti--all of them modest, gentle, and retiring women who are most at ease when removed from society's conviviality or méchanceté. Bold and active women such as Mathilde de la Mole or the Duchess of Sanseverina will not, at first glance, seem to have much in common with Armance. Yet they have been given a few of her more pronounced habits, and they have been endowed with pride--certainly a paler feature in Armance than in Mathilde but nonetheless discernible.

Twentieth-century critics writing about Armance tend to pay as little attention to the heroine as they do to the title of the novel. When discussing the characters and plot, they have more often chosen to concentrate upon examining the hero. Indeed, André Gide wrote a lengthy preface to Armance and nearly failed to recognize her existence. However, in light of the defensive lettre grivoise that was written by Stendhal to Mérimée, the critics' inclination is understandable. For Stendhal therein insisted that he wanted his reader to be interested in the hero above all else.⁴

⁴"Je veux intéresser pour Olivier, peindre Olivier." (Letter to Mérimée). Stendhal delights in discussing the hero's "Babilanisme," entering into some surprisingly explicit details relative to the way an "impuissant" might consummate a marriage. It was at Mérimée's suggestion that Stendhal changed the name of the hero from Olivier to Octave.

Then, too, the opening paragraph of the novel swiftly introduces us to Octave. The first chapter deals with his past life and present situation. And, in addition, Octave's many social advantages as well as his unusual character are rapidly sketched for the reader's benefit. The same may not be said for Armance. When her name is first mentioned, when she appears before us, information is totally lacking. And anything resembling a description of the heroine's background, character, physical appearance, and distinctive qualities does not appear until the fifth chapter, as the observant critic Jean Prévost has apparently noted, for he makes the point that we are made to wait until Chapter V for the "portrait" of the woman "who will give her name to the book."⁵ But what he fails to recognize in his study of Stendhal's style and literary technique is that delayed description of the heroine becomes standard procedure for Stendhal. In Armance and in many another novel the refusal to tell us all about the heroine lends a certain mystery to the woman and contributes to our impression that character--as created by Stendhal--is in no way permanent.

Of course, Armance is not all about Octave. And the role of the heroine is far from secondary. Armance is important both to the melancholy hero and to the plot of the novel--if "plot" is the word for the series of contrived and sometimes absurd "obstacles" and "barriers" to love and happiness that Stendhal has produced. The part this heroine plays in brightening up the existence of a despondent hero is far from negligible. Toward the end of the novel, for instance, Stendhal tells us:

C'était à elle qu'il devait le peu d'instantes heureux qu'il apercevait au milieu de cet océan de sensations amères et

⁵Prévost, La Creation chez Stendhal, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1951), p. 231.

de malheurs. Par ses conseils, au lieu de bouder le monde, il avait agi, et s'était guéri de beaucoup de faux jugements qui augmentaient sa misère. (XXIII)

And much earlier there came from Octave himself the admission that she alone influences him; he says to her:

Mon orgueil élève un mur de diamant entre moi et les autres hommes. Votre présence, chère cousine, fait disparaître ce mur de diamant. Devant vous je ne prendrais rien en mauvaise part; (XV)

Thus it is apparent that without Armance there would be no alterations in Octave's pessimistic outlook and no changes in his behavior. Still, it is undeniable that this heroine's portrait is established gradually and fragmentarily rather than clearly and firmly in one fell swoop. It is unlike the feminine portraits that we have come to expect in the fiction of Stendhal's contemporaries Balzac, Mérimée, and Sand.

In his portrayal of Armance Stendhal establishes several precedents: delayed and incomplete description; the use of contrast and comparison, both to assure us that the heroine is a superior being and to enable himself to paint in her the traits he would have us appreciate;⁶ the transcription of the heroine's pensées intimes. As for these intimate thoughts, they are often presented in the form of a two-way conversation with the self. And sometimes they take the shape of what we choose to call a semi-interior monologue: by this we mean that Stendhal, who is privileged to know what Armance thinks and feels, conveys her thoughts heedless of the transitions--his ideas and observations merging with hers so that the two are frequently indistinguishable. Naturally, when Stendhal discloses Armance's innermost secrets, when he bares her intimate feelings, he--in the process--succeeds in

⁶As Victor Brombert has pointed out, "la pensée de Stendhal procède par contrastes et comparaisons." Stendhal et la voie oblique, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), p. 55.

unveiling not only her interests but also her character.

It is in this first completed novel that Stendhal tentatively begins to experiment with little scenes and dialogues that he doubtless believed would serve as revelatory introductions to the unknown heroine. However, it is in Le Rouge et le Noir, where dialogue and intimate thoughts are more frequently interspersed with movement and narrative description, where there is more change of pace, that such introductory scenes prove most effective.

There is, in the novels of Stendhal, the sense that a woman is not just what the author asserts or suggests, not just what the hero or other characters think she is--all of which do not necessarily mesh together into one consistent whole. She is also, in a large measure, what she says and does. One comes to know her--in an existential way--by her actions, or lack of actions. And by her thoughts, dreams, desires, and fears as well.

To the discerning eye, Stendhal sets the stage for Armance's important role in Octave's existence as early as the first chapter. There he suggests that the alienated hero is a young man desperately in need of something and someone:

Dans les moments plus calmes, les yeux d'Octave semblaient songer à un bonheur absent; on eût dit une âme tendre séparée par un long absence d'un objet uniquement chéri. (I)

This passage prepares us for the entry of the heroine into the pages of the novel and into Octave's emotional life. Soon, in a flashback sequence (Chapter III) we witness Octave, who has no difficulty communicating verbally ("Il possédait naturellement l'art difficile de

communiquer sa pensée quelle qu'elle fût"), baring his soul to a most compassionate young woman. "C'était seulement en présence de sa cousine qu'Octave osait quelquefois penser tout haut" makes it clear that Armance is special. There is a bit of irony here, too, for even as Octave articulates the need for someone who might pull him out of his isolation--a friend "à qui je puisse librement confier ce que je pense"--right before him is the one person with whom he is entirely at ease, to whom he is obviously confiding "freely."⁷

This first conversation is quite important, for to this point we have heard nary a word about Armance. It is by means of the heroine's reactions to Octave's misery and through her words to him that we gain insight into her character. She does not find Octave blameless, and yet, when she offers him advice and even criticism, she is neither spiteful nor domineering but, instead, firm and rather gentle. Quite clearly, she sympathizes with his woes and is desirous of encouraging him as best she can. Their perfect friendship takes on consistency. And, of course, their discussion portends the strong influence that Armance will have upon Octave's behavior and attitudes.

It is in this chapter that the theme of love is delicately introduced--from the heroine's point of view. Octave, who does most of the talking--and it is about himself--reacts intellectually to Armance's carefully worded speech and helpful comments. It is Armance who reacts emotionally. Although she successfully hides her feelings, Armance is not merely touched by Octave's plaints; she is psychically, if not physically, responsive to his presence:

⁷His need for a compassionate friend is reiterated: "La seule ressource contre cet avilissement général, pensait-il, serait de trouver une belle âme..., de s'y attacher pour jamais, de ne voir qu'elle, de vivre avec elle et uniquement pour elle et pour son bonheur." And for the reader these thoughts are provocative indeed. (IV)

Ces plaintes, quoique égoïstes en apparence, intéressaient Armance; les yeux d'Octave exprimaient tant de possibilité d'aimer et quelquefois ils étaient si tendres! (III)⁸

An interesting feature of this conversation is the way Stendhal, perhaps unconsciously, picks up one of the small threads left dangling in De l'Amour, where he had suggested that a woman will respond to a man whom she can pity and respect at the same time,⁹ and weaves it into the interaction between Octave and Armance. Octave has discussed his "accès de malheur qui sont de la folie à tous les yeux" and which make of him an "être à part." Then, after pouring out his heart to Armance, he asks her, "Suis-je donc un méchant?" But while her reply is seemingly impersonal and disinterested--spoken with the "ton sévère de l'amitié"--her feelings are of a different order:

Elle, sans se le bien expliquer, sentait qu'Octave était la victime de cette sorte de sensibilité déraisonnable qui fait les hommes malheureux et dignes d'être aimés.¹⁰

There is, then, a direct link between Armance's pity for Octave and her admiration of him as a sensitive and worthy being. Her intuition follows from what Stendhal had implied in his treatise of love. And as we shall demonstrate, in other novels his femmes douces et tendres will, at one time or another, respond similarly to the hero; that is, with admiration and with great pity too.

Undoubtedly, one of the keys to Octave's strange character is his "secret affreux"--the unmentioned impotence. However, the cogent

⁸It is to refute Jean Prévost's contention that the "intrigue amoureuse" is secondary (op. cit., pp. 230-31) that we have carefully shown not only Armance's importance to Octave but also that the love interest is indicated in the earliest chapters of the novel--for the reader who is willing to recognize it.

⁹De l'Amour, XXI.

¹⁰Our emphases. Stendhal lets us know that she endeavors to hide "la pitié trop réelle" that Octave's "chagrins" inspire in her.

and well-verified factor that sets Octave apart from his peers is his utter disdain for materialism. Armance, of course, shares this attitude. In their circle a person's income is of utmost interest. It is money that earns the respect of "les âmes vulgaires" and money again that gives rise to the first series of misunderstandings between Stendhal's worthy protagonists. Stendhal makes a virtue of their distaste for money--a distaste that amounts to loathing and through which we are continually invited to appreciate their "noblesse d'âme." Almost everyone in Armance is noble by birth. Yet nobility, in Stendhal's mind, is not a quality that one acquires effortlessly. In his own way Stendhal is reiterating, a half-century later, Figaro's words, "Vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître et rien de plus," to let us know that la noblesse is fundamentally ignoble. This is but one of the ways our author has been influenced by the theater of Beaumarchais. That little maxim, which Stendhal had cited in De l'Amour, "La nature dit à la femme, sois belle si tu peux, sage si tu veux, mais sois considérée, il le faut,"¹¹ is echoed more than once in Stendhal's novels. And as he demonstrates in Armance, Stendhal firmly believed that a young woman's reputation was most precious.¹²

We first encounter Armance in the salon of her "aunt," Mme de Bonnavet. Octave, who is somberly analyzing the base motives of those

¹¹De l'Amour, VIII.

¹²In De l'Amour Stendhal observes, "En amour, les hommes courent le hasard du tourment secret de l'âme, les femmes s'exposent aux plaisanteries du public; elles sont plus timides, et d'ailleurs, l'opinion est beaucoup pour elles, car sois considérée, il le faut." VIII, our emphases.

who have eagerly greeted him there,¹³ finds himself seated opposite Armance.

Il remarqua qu'elle ne lui avait pas adressé la parole de toute la soirée. Armance était une nièce assez pauvre de Mmes de Bonnivet et de Malivert.... Depuis trois quarts d'heure le coeur d'Octave fut saisi de cette idée: Armance ne me fait pas compliment, elle seule ici est étrangère à ce redoublement d'intérêt que je dois à l'argent, elle seule ici a quelque noblesse d'âme. Et ce fut pour lui une consolation que de regarder Armance. "Voilà donc un être estimable," se dit-il, et comme la soirée s'avançait il vit avec un plaisir égal au chagrin qui d'abord avait inondé son coeur qu'elle continuait à ne point lui parler. (II)

In the salon, where people busily converse, Armance is an observer rather than a participant. The key words in the passage refer to her otherness. The repeated "elle seule" sets her apart from the crowd, and her distinctiveness is reinforced by the word étrangère-- "different," "foreign," "isolated," and even "unknown"; the word's multiple meanings will be elaborated in future chapters. In this passage "étrangère" refers more specifically to her indifference to Octave's newly acquired fortune. Armance's stubborn silence is the cause of the hero's admiration, for, like Octave, she possesses noblesse d'âme. But just how objective is Octave's evaluation? While not at odds with her true superiority--as it will emerge--Octave's judgment may well be a creation of his imagination. This, at any rate, is what Stendhal suggests in the following chapter.

Our first brief introduction to Stendhal's heroine tells us absolutely nothing about her physical appearance and gives us but a few unembellished facts about her position in society. Her nature is surrounded by an aura of mystery; her visage may be adorned as the reader desires. Armance herself neither moves nor speaks, and her silence prevails throughout the evening. If there is motion, it is in her eyes:

¹³ Octave stands to inherit a large fortune.

L'expression de ce regard était impossible à méconnaître; du moins la raison sévère d'Octave...en décida ainsi; ce regard était destiné à l'observer, et ce qui lui fit un plaisir sensible, ce regard s'attendait de être obligé à mépriser. (II)

To esteem and to be esteemed in return invariably preoccupy Stendhal's loving couples. And, not unlike the heroine, the hero examines himself and others relentlessly. But, of course, his lucidity is often self-deceiving, causing him to misinterpret his own feelings as well as those of Armance. Her raisonnements plunge her ever deeper into anguish, revealing her not simply as a highly imaginative young woman but also as a woman whose logic leads her to foolish and unwarranted conclusions--all for the sake of esteem, personal and public.

Armance était pauvre, elle n'avait que dix-huit ans, et Mme de Bonnavet avait trente ans passés; elle était fort belle encore mais Armance aussi était belle. (IV)

It is by comparison that Stendhal informs us dryly that Armance is beautiful, as if he dared not confront us directly with the statement "Armance était belle." And as we shall see, he does indeed have difficulty describing Armance's merits. Armance's beauty, which is integral to every Stendhalian heroine, has yet to be investigated. Beauty being "la promesse du bonheur,"¹⁴ not one of his women can be plain or undistinguished looking. Yet one would be hard put to recall precisely what it is that makes his heroines physically appealing.

The author and those persons who do not resent our heroine will readily acknowledge her attractiveness. But, interestingly, Armance herself seems oblivious to it. She spends little time on coiffing her

¹⁴ De l'Amour, XVII.

hair, which she wears short, in large curls around the head. "Mlle de Zohiloff trouve cet usage commode;" observes one of the critical women who envy her, "elle ne veut pas sacrifier trop de temps à sa toilette."

(V) In Octave's eyes, however, this is admirable: it proves that she is devoted to her aunt. Jealous mockery of her mode of dress again sets her apart from the crowd. And the reader senses that, unlike her peers, she is not frivolous or vain.

At one point we glimpse Armance's own unflattering view of herself as she compares herself to Mme d'Aumale, a lady Octave flirts with:

Et moi, je ne suis même pas jolie. Ce que je puis dire à Octave est d'un intérêt bien pâle. Je suis sûre que je l'ennuie ou que je l'intéresse comme une soeur. (XV)

This oddly self-deprecating way of seeing herself is additional proof that she is not the least bit vain. But it also suggests that Armance is incapable of seeing herself clearly--the mark of generous, tender women who are always made to seem indifferent or oblivious to the way they look. Wrapped in modesty, they are unable or unwilling to recognize their graces.

In Chapter V the focus is upon Armance. Stendhal discusses her physical appearance and touches lightly upon her past life, presenting a minimum of facts about her background that perhaps relate to the formation of her character. We become better acquainted with her position in society--with the ways she sees and is seen, viewed not only by Octave and not always in the same way.

In preceding chapters Stendhal was an "objective" narrator and generalizer. In this chapter he uses the first person form of address. To convey the idea that Armance is étrangère, different in every conceivable way from French women, seems to be his primary goal, and this

he accomplishes in several ways, through opposition, contrast, and comparison, direct or implied.

The epigraph in Chapter V was borrowed from the poet Byron, the great romantic hero of the day.

Her glossy hair was cluster'd o'er a brow
 Bright with intelligence, and fair and smooth;
 Her eyebrow's shape was like the aerial bow,
 Her cheek all purple with the beam of youth,
 Mounting at times, to a transparent glow,
 As if her veins ran lightening...

This fragment is certainly more suggestive than descriptive, which explains why Stendhal--with his own unwillingness to elaborate a detailed portrait of his heroine--has chosen it.

Armance, we learn, was born in Russia, of mixed extraction.¹⁵

Thus her outward aspect is as different from that of French women as is her inner nature. Foreign-born, she has--of course--exotic beauty. It is, the author timidly submits, "la beauté russe," and does not conform to the French conception of looks that are befitting a young woman. Now, assuming that one knows what a typical French woman looks like, how is Armance different?

There is something Asiatic about her features; her beauty is an unusual combination of Circassian beauty "la plus pure" and certain German forms "un peu trop prononcées." Like Byron's portrait of Julia, Stendhal's portrait of Armance tantalizes us. Is it her cheek-bones that are highly "pronounced"? Has she slanting eyes? And what does he mean by prominent German characteristics? All is left to the reader's imagination.

If we are told little about the features that combine to express "une simplicité et un dévouement que l'on ne trouve plus chez les peu-

¹⁵Her father was a Russian colonel of the nobility, her mother a close relative of Mme de Bonnivet.

ples trop civilisées" (read: the French, who are artificial, frivolous, etc., or, in a word unnatural¹⁶), it is because Stendhal is not concerned with the features that make up the whole. He strives to convey an over-all image which he will make less hazy by concentrating upon the physical feature that interests him most. An analogy here between his method and that of a painter is not farfetched. The highlights make the image distinct. Haziness, "shadow," is necessary "à faire valoir les clairs et à donner du relief," wrote Stendhal.¹⁷ The painter he had in mind was Corregio, but the manner of painting is Stendhal's.

In Armance's facial expression it is her gaze that is unusual. The one feature of the physiognomy that gives Stendhal pause in Armance is the eyes. Anything may be said, he maintained in De l'Amour, by a glance. And in his novels he invests le regard with a psychological essence as well as with physical value.

Armance has eyes that are large and deep blue. Yet they are not lovely limpid pools in which the romantic hero finds his image reflected or bathed in adoration. Octave must look to these eyes for an assessment of his worth. No ordinary eyes, these, they involuntarily signal to the beholder--male and female alike--Armance's inner feelings or attitude. They project her boredom, interest, dislike, or scorn. Therefore these eyes, which bestow "bewitching glances," win her the friendship of refined society women. But they earn her enmity also:

La seule prise réelle que pût donner à ses ennemies l'expression de la physionomie d'Armance, c'était un regard

¹⁶The French, one knows from De l'Amour, live by vanity: "les Françaises avec leurs petites grâces toutes aimables, séduisantes... toutes ces grâces étudiées d'avance et apprises par coeur sont éternellement les mêmes tous les jours et pour tous." (XLIV)

¹⁷De l'Amour, XXXI.

singulier qu'elle avait lorsqu'elle y songeait le moins. ... C'était en vain que sa tante avait cherché de la corriger de l'impossibilité où elle était de faire attention aux gens qu'elle n'aimait pas. On voyait trop qu'en leur parlant elle songeait à autre chose. (V)

"On voyait" embraces everyone in the salon. Armance's dislike and lack of interest cannot be disguised.

Reactions to Armance are not uniform. The use of multiple perspectives as a method of portrayal commences here. In this particular novel the opinions of others can be reduced to two attitudes or viewpoints--apart from Octave's, which fluctuates considerably. It is relevant to observe that multiplicity of viewpoints will become an interesting and effective technique in later novels. And by showing that a woman is different, depending upon the person who judges and the circumstances, Stendhal gives us--through this floating optic--a greater sense of reality.

Our author divides his salon society into two distinct groups. "Les âmes vulgaires," numerically well-represented and typical of the Faubourg Saint-Germain society as Stendhal saw it, are the boring, petty people. Jealous and ignoble, they are incapable of recognizing merit. And such are the women who are struck by the unusual quality of Armance's gaze but cannot appreciate it. Instead, they imitate it when gossiping about her--"mais ces âmes vulgaires en ôtaient ce qu'elles n'avaient garde d'y voir." The other group comprises sensitive people. Octave's mother, who is in this minority, values Armance's friendship and knows that her glance is as unusual as the character that it reflects. In the presence of the "méchantes langues" Mme de Malivert unhesitatingly comes to Armance's defense. Comparing the young woman to an exiled angel, she sees Armance as a woman apart from others, unique, and, by implication, pure and innocent.

What more do these eyes reveal?

Ce regard fixe et profond était celui de l'extrême attention. Il n'y avait rien, certes, qui pût choquer la délicatesse la plus sévère; on n'y voyait ni coquetterie ni assurance; mais on ne peut nier qu'il ne fût singulier, et à ce titre, déplacé chez une jeune personne. (V)

The route to the qualifying adjectives is seldom direct. When Stendhal is most intent upon complimenting his heroine for our benefit, when he wants to indicate her superior attributes, he avoids straightforward description. The particular traits and qualities that make Armance such an exceptional young woman cannot be plainly stated. And yet our author hesitates to resort to the irony or sarcasm with which he treats Octave's merits.¹⁸ Instead, Armance's positive qualities are couched in negative phraseology and must be uncovered by the reader; and therein lie both the slight effort and the pleasure of reading a novel by Stendhal. Unequivocally, Armance's gaze is deep and fixed, suggesting a stare that is lacking in boldness but is certainly unusual. Then, by putting the negative into the affirmative, the reader deems her gaze to be sincere and modest: it reveals her nature.

Feminine modesty, mentioned often and analyzed at length in De l'Amour, where Stendhal propounds the view that it is mainly "une chose apprise," taught to a young girl by her mother,¹⁹ is a quality that he held dear in women. In Armance, however, modesty is apparently innate. It is clearly not something she has picked up from other women in France! Although Stendhal was unwilling to acknowledge it by naming it, la pudeur implicitly characterizes his first heroine as above "ni

¹⁸Victor Brombert has observed that Stendhal presents qualities he obviously valued in Octave through mockeries or in the guise of blame. Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 59-60. We hasten to add that this is not so in Stendhal's treatment of Armance.

¹⁹XXVI.

coquetterie ni assurance...." Even more than by negative suggestion we know her to be excessively modest and unassuming through her behavior and her attitudes. Stendhal says:

On voyait qu'Armance ne se permettaient pas une foule de choses que l'usage autorise et que l'on trouve journallement dans la conduite des femmes les plus distinguées. (V)

Stendhal then hypothesizes that her enemies would accuse her of pruderie were she not so young and gentle. His first statement (quoted above), implying that Armance's manner is inordinately reserved, is clearly intended to enhance her in our eyes. On the other hand, his hypothetical comment, which accords with a remark made in De l'Amour--"Il est évident que toute femme tendre et fière...doit contracter des habitudes de froideur que les gens qu'elles déconcertent appellent de la pruderie" (XXVI)--is protective; it shields her from the (undesirable) conclusion that she is a prude! Anyone familiar with Stendhal's thoughts about prudishness knows that he found it exasperating and even hypocritical. And yet, despite Stendhal's well-meaning intrusion, it is undeniable that this heroine is, if not prudish, extremely austere and even puritanical, as we shall see.

Illustrative of the subtle way Stendhal imparts modesty to Armance is the following passage, which introduces yet another habitude and therefore another aspect of her character--lucidity.

Il y avait d'ailleurs bien des petites façons de dire et d'agir qu'Armance n'eût pas osé désapprouver chez les autres femmes; peut-être même ne songeait-elle pas à se les interdire; mais si elle se les fût permises, pendant longtemps elle eût rougi toutes les fois qu'elle s'en serait souvenue. Dès son enfance, ses sentiments pour les bagatelles de son âge avaient été si violents qu'elle se les était vivement reprochés. Elle avait pris l'habitude de se juger peu relativement à l'effet produit sur les autres, mais beaucoup relativement à ses sentiments d'aujourd'hui dont demain le souvenir pouvait empoisonner sa vie. (V)

This is Stendhal's prototype of the self-conscious, self-critical heroine. Armance, continually looking into her heart, is often found obsessed with trifles, needlessly tormenting herself.

Victor Brombert has made much of Stendhal's faith in the freedom-giving power of analysis and knowledge. However, in the case of Armance, lucidity does not truly liberate her from the convenances or free her to demonstrate warmth and affection when she is with the man she loves. She wants too much to remain respectable--a jeune fille bien élevée. It is not only Octave's esteem that is important to her. She is excessively concerned with protecting and maintaining an unblemished reputation:

"Je suis une fille perdue, se dit-elle; mon sentiment pour Octave est plus que soupçonné, et ce n'est pas même le plus grand des torts que l'on me suppose; je vis dans la même maison que lui, et il n'est pas possible qu'il m'épouse...." Dès cet instant, l'idée des calomnies, dont elle était l'objet, qui survivait à tous les raisonnements d'Armance, empoisonna sa vie.

Il y eut des moments où elle crut avoir oublié jusqu'à son amour pour Octave. "Le mariage n'est pas fait pour ma position, je ne l'épouserai pas, pensait-elle, et il faut vivre beaucoup plus séparée de lui. S'il m'oublie, comme il est fort possible, j'irai finir mes jours dans un couvent; ce sera un asile convenable et fort désiré pour le reste de mon existence. Je penserai à lui, j'apprendrai ses succès. Les souvenirs de la société offrent bien des existences semblable à celle que je mènerai." (XXV)

Here we see Armance virtually haunted by the phantom of public opinion. And this passage, which appears toward the end of the novel, is fairly typical of her interior monologues.

As early as Chapter VII we saw her, alone in her room, literally becoming ill at the thought that, by her tears, she had revealed to Octave her "fatal secret"--yes, Armance, too, has a secret, although it is not unspeakable--her "fatal love" for Octave. We are treated to a melodramatic scene in which she is overcome by "shame" and prey to

la plus vive douleur. Her tear-shedding in front of Octave is completely distorted in her imagination, and her emotional upheaval brings on a fever. (Octave, of course, suspects nothing. He is happy to have regained her "esteem.") Her reactions, extraordinary as they may be, are consistent with what Stendhal wrote in De l'Amour:

Pour une femme timide et tendre rien ne doit être au-dessus du supplice de s'être permis, en présence d'un homme, quelque chose dont elle croit devoir rougir; je suis convaincu qu'une femme, un peu fière, préférerait mille morts. (XXVI)

This is an interesting thought, however debatable. The citation tells us what Stendhal wants women to be, as evidenced by the frequency with which he thus depicts them in his novels.

Armance, in her room, engaged in self-recriminations, "suffocating" from her tears, first hits upon the fantastic idea of joining a convent--the purpose being to erect an "eternal barrier" between herself and Octave. Presumably, this aberration prepares us for the ending. After Octave's poetic suicide, "Armance et Mme de Malivert prirent le voile dans le même couvent." It is a tidy ending. Nevertheless, the heroine's imaginings are unconvincing. For at no time has Armance shown the slightest interest in the spiritual. Nowhere has she displayed devotion or expressed convictions that are religious in essence. Such little inconsistencies are troublesome. They make of Armance, if not a schematic personality, certainly a less stable, less sensible young woman than the author intends her to be when he insists upon her volonté ferme and her sérénité parfaite.

The eminent critic Maurice Bardèche finds that Stendhal has defined his hero by a combination of époque, milieu, and a certain number of habits and prejudices and that to these Stendhal adds the

temperament.²⁰ M. Bardèche is a critic keen upon seeing the Stendhalian hero as a produit social. If the above is true of Octave, does it apply to the heroine as well? Referring again to Chapter V, let us examine, no more briefly than does Stendhal, the facts that relate to Armance's history, background, and upbringing.

She was orphaned in infancy.²¹ Then, at some unspecified time, Mme de Bonnivet, learning that she had a relative who was alone and destitute, immediately sent for her. She called Armance her "niece" and hoped to marry her off, presumably to someone titled and affluent.

Stendhal made much of Montesquieu's "Théorie des climats" in De l'Amour, where he draws analogies between the climate and mores of a country and the temperament of a people. The lingering influence of this famous theory should not be overlooked, for in the novel Stendhal says:

Cette jeune fille avait un caractère singulier. Née sur les confins de l'empire russe vers les frontières du Caucase, à Sebastopol où son père commandait, Mlle de Zohiloff cachait sous l'apparence d'une douceur parfaite une volonté ferme, digne de l'âpre climat où elle avait passé son enfance. (V)

This clearly implies that Armance's firm will may be attributable to the harsh Russian climate. Let it be noted that nothing is said about the social environment or the mores of the cultural milieu in which Armance was raised.

L'éducation étrangère qu'elle avait reçue et l'époque tardive de son arrivée en France servaient encore d'ex-

²⁰ A rather large addition, one would say. Bardèche then proceeds to describe the temperament, after knowingly observing "c'est l'étude d'un cas médical." Stendhal romancier (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1947), p. 148.

²¹ In 1811. If she was eighteen in 1827 she was--by our calculations--two years old when her parents died. Stendhal does not bother to say so.

cuse à ce que la haine aurait pu découvrir de légèrement singulier dans sa manière d'être frappée des événements, et même dans sa conduite.

We have no idea when Armance came to France. It was "later." As for her education, it was "foreign." One wonders if she has any acquaintance with literature. Does she, like all French women, spend time reading novels? In Chapter V and elsewhere it is the "reasoning" aspects of Armance that Stendhal emphasizes. If there exist traces of the romanesque in her, they must be discerned by the reader--in her thoughts.

Only in passing--seven chapters later--do we learn that Armance has read novels: "Avec quelle amertume ne se reprocha-t-elle pas les romans dans lesquels elle laissait quelquefois son imagination s'égarer." (XII) And yet, although Stendhal does not develop this statement to tell us what she has read or to show that reading is a divertissement which has fired her imagination, causing her to eagerly anticipate the advent of love, we eventually perceive that reading has contributed to Armance's philosophical outlook. Let us observe here that the reading of novels--particularly novels about love and romance--will have interesting implications in Le Rouge et le Noir and Lucien Leuwen.

It is the moralists who have impressed Armance most. The poorly digested lessons of La Rochefoucauld leave a bitter aftertaste:

Ne dit-on pas que le mariage est le tombeau de l'amour, et qu'il peut y avoir des mariages agréables, mais qu'il n'en est aucun de délicieux" (XXII)

This is Armance's pensée intime, though one might say that Stendhal, too, held this opinion. We discover that--when it is not Armance's anxiety about social considerations, or the idea that she is neither attractive nor marriageable, or doubts about Octave's love--it is the lessons of literature that steel her against the marriage she fears.

Armance's propensity for self-examination goes hand in hand with her atypical way of viewing the trivialities of everyday life and seems to stem from unhappy childhood or adolescent experiences:

On voit qu'à peine âgée de dix-huit ans, Mlle de Zohiloff avait déjà éprouvé d'assez grands malheurs. C'est pour cela peut-être que les petits événements de la vie semblaient glisser sur son âme sans parvenir à l'émouvoir. (V)

"Seems to" because Stendhal does not bother to make the connections between past and present. When Stendhal uses the impersonal pronoun with the present tense, he intends us to see as he does. But there is subterfuge here. He jumps to conclusions without providing evidence. Nowhere do we learn what these "assez grands malheurs" that Armance has sustained might be--if, indeed, they did influence her outlook. The peut-être makes such a conclusion uncertain, conjectural. In reading Stendhal's novels one is particularly impressed by their speculative quality. The frequent use of such words as "perhaps" and of the conditional tense combine to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and impermanence that is inviting, if only because it permits us to participate fully in the process of creation.

To see Armance as a "social product," then, is to possess an active imagination. For it is impossible to ascertain the forces that have contributed to Armance's particular make-up. With less precision and detail than he has used in the composition of Armance's physical portrait Stendhal skims rapidly and easily over his heroine's past and upbringing. Facts are negligible. He does not deal with any portion of her childhood. Furthermore, there is no continuity in his

"presentation."²² And as if the haphazard manner were not confusing enough, the "facts" are interspersed with other topics and with Stendhal's personal observations as well. If this is a case history, it is not a coherent one.

An unwillingness to account for a heroine's early life becomes a refusal and something of a rule. In later novels we are not privileged to know about a heroine before she is fully grown; we learn next to nothing about her childhood. Even Clélia Conti, whom we encounter briefly when she is an adolescent, disappears, to reappear when she is old enough to enjoy the pleasures and sorrows of love. Stendhal's heroines, if not his heroes, are not determined by their pasts and are not social products. The author is free to improvise as he chooses, to add facts when and where it suits his fancy--whenever or wherever the development of the novel requires them. His women can become almost anything they desire, or so it seems. And thus Armance, with her inhibitions, constrained by feminine modesty that has been taught to her by no one but Stendhal, will be seen to change, in ways designed to please Octave, and to interest the reader, in ways Stendhal approves.

Elle s'appuyait sur le bras d'Octave et l'écoutait comme ravie en extase. Tout ce que sa prudence pouvait obtenir d'elle, c'était de ne pas parler; le son de sa voix eût fait connaître à son cousin toute la passion qu'il inspirait. Le bruissement léger des feuilles, agitées par le vent du soir, semblait prêter un nouveau charme à leur silence. Octave regardait les grands yeux d'Armance qui se fixaient sur les siens. (XVI)

This is le silence du bonheur. Such a moment--rare and precious in Stendhal's novels--gives us an insight into Stendhal's thoughts about

²²He jumps from where she was born to her parents' marriage and untimely death, to her arrival in France, then back to infancy and on to childhood--where she began to examine her day-to-day feelings; then to the subject of her foreign education (when?), and to the present (we are told that she stands in high favor with Mme de Bonnivet, which causes other women to resent her).

the sublime in love. The moment itself, though steeped in "ecstasy" if not in "passion," is far from sensual. And the physical intimacy that might evolve never does, for at this point they are interrupted by the sound of Mme d'Aumale's voice--calling Octave.

When, increasingly, Octave spends time with Mme d'Aumale we are apprised of Armance's jealousy:

Les moments de rêverie d'Armance devinrent plus fréquents. "De qui pourrais-je me plaindre, se disait-elle? De personne, et surtout d'Octave moins que personne. Ne lui ai-je pas dit que je préfère un autre homme? et il a trop de fierté dans le caractère pour se contenter de la seconde place dans un coeur. Il s'attache à Mme d'Aumale; c'est une beauté brillante, ...La vie de Mme d'Aumale est gaie, singulière; jamais rien ne languit dans les lieux où elle se trouve,...." Armance pleurait mais cette noble âme ne s'abaissa point jusqu'à avoir de la haine pour Mme d'Aumale. Elle observait chacune des actions de cette femme aimable avec une attention profonde et qui la conduisait souvent à des moments fort vifs d'admiration. Mais chaque acte d'admiration était un coup de poignard pour son coeur. Le bonheur tranquille disparut, Armance fut en proie à toutes les angoisses des passions. La présence de Mme d'Aumale en vint à la troubler plus que celle d'Octave lui-même. (XV)

Now it is quite obvious that Armance is extremely unhappy, but her malheur here seems minimal compared to her malheur when she thought she had revealed her "fatal secret." And her jealousy is short-lived. Stendhal, instead of exploring this sentiment which he believed to be so powerful, is more interested in commenting knowingly about it:

Le tourment de la jalousie est surtout affreux quand il déchire des coeurs à qui leur penchant comme leurs positions interdisent également tous les moyens de plaire un peu hasardés. (XV)

One supposes, then, that jealousy is something Armance will just have to endure. There is no follow-up, however, and for this neglect Stendhal might be faulted. On the other hand, the complicated, convoluted

generalization that appears above will not recur in later novels--in the Rouge, for example, where jealousy will be painted in both heroines, painted briefly, but more incisively and certainly more effectively. Which is to say that in Stendhal's first novel the theme of jealousy is introduced haphazardly. It is not even an "obstacle" to love. It is a theme that has, as yet, no direction.

One notes that Armance is noble; she has no "hatred" for Mme d'Aumale. When we get to the Chartreuse, we will find that Clélia Conti, who is also "une âme noble," and who is sweet and gentle like Armance, quickly comes to hate her rival Gina. This is but one of the ways that jealousy affects Stendhal's heroines. Thus, in succeeding novels, the theme of jealousy will be mined exhaustively. Jealousy will become an important stimulus of sudden or dramatic changes in women's behavior.

Mme d'Aumale

As for the woman whom Armance sees as a rival for Octave's heart, the reader cannot make that same mistake:

Octave calcula la quantité de temps et de soins que lui prendrait la société de Mme d'Aumale, et il espéra sans trop se gêner, pouvoir passer pour amoureux de cette femme brillante Octave suivait partout Mme d'Aumale et par exemple au Théâtre Italien.... Octave trouvait plaisant de faire répéter partout qu'il était amoureux fou de la comtesse, et de ne jamais rien dire à cette jeune et charmante femme, avec laquelle il passait sa vie, qui ressemblât le moins du monde à de l'amour. (XI)

Just why Octave pursues her is not made clear.

One cannot deny that Mme d'Aumale is a minor figure. Apart from a vague rivalry with Armance, her function in the novel is to inform Octave that he loves Armance. Nevertheless, she is a delightful character and an important one insofar as she announces future heroines. Moreover, it is revealing that Stendhal describes this

minor character without inhibition, and without irony or the slightest trace of scorn.

Armance has great "admiration" for this gay and spirited lady whose admirable "actions" are not denoted but who is apparently a very mobile and stimulating woman ("jamais rien ne languit dans les lieux où elle se trouve"). In essence, Armance's view reflects that of the author, who had sketched the vivacious lady earlier:

C'était la coquette la plus brillante et peut-être la plus spirituelle de l'époque. ...C'était le caractère de l'enfance qui brillait dans les manières de Mme d'Aumale. La naïveté de ses reparties et la folle gaieté de ses actions, toujours inspirées par la circonstance du moment, faisaient le désespoir de ses rivales. Elle avait des caprices d'un imprévu admirable,...

Let us mention in passing that the qualifying "folle" is a term of approbation. Similarly, a woman who is blessed with "imprévu" is always a subject for "admiration." Yet the Stendhalian hero cannot truly love such a woman. He courts her out of vanity--to make a name for himself or to test his powers of seduction or his charm.

Emphasizing Mme d'Aumale's spontaneity, Stendhal elsewhere describes her as "cette femme si légère que ni elle-même ni personne ne savait jamais ce qu'elle ferait le quart d'heure après." (XI) And Octave finds she is:

une femme qui remerciait le Ciel de sa haute naissance et de sa fortune à cause du privilège qu'elle en tirait, de faire à chaque moment de la journée ce que lui inspirait le caprice du moment. (XI)

If there is an ironical implication here, it is that other wealthy noble ladies fail to enjoy themselves. Avaricious, preoccupied with les convenances--as Stendhal has portrayed them--they lead a dull existence. And they themselves are boring, which is what Stendhal suggests when first he speaks of Mme d'Aumale--"Un étranger de mauvais

humeur,"--he quips--"a dit que les femmes de la haute société en France ont un peu le tour d'esprit d'un vieil ambassadeur," subtly contrasting her to her peers.

"Mme d'Aumale," Stendhal asserts in his letter to Mérimée, "c'est Mme de Castries que j'ai faite sage." But, oh, how different this heroine is from Balzac's version of Mme de Castries--la duchesse de Langeais. Nevertheless, it is true that Stendhal first describes Mme d'Aumale as "une coquette"; in this respect she would resemble Mme de Castries. Yet if Stendhal is careful to suggest that she is not libertine, he does so indirectly. From her former valet de pied,

Octave eut des renseignements les plus certains sur la conduite de Mme d'Aumale. Cette jeune femme qui s'était fort compromise par une étourderie sans bornes, méritait réellement toute l'estime que quelques personnes ne lui accordaient plus. (XI)

One knows full well from De l'Amour that an "étourderie sans bornes" and in the name of love is admissible, even desirable. It is interesting, then, that Stendhal sees fit to defend his heroine gingerly--so that the reader will not condemn her. This defense of heroines whose morality seems dubious will recur in the next two novels. However, toward the end of his career Stendhal was apparently no longer concerned about sexual morality, as evidenced by the fact that neither he nor his protagonists have anything to say about the promiscuity of the heroines in Lamiel and in La Chartreuse de Parme.

The matter of how and to what extent Mme de Castries inspired Stendhal cannot be resolved by us. Suffice it to say that Stendhal's former mistress, Menta (Clementine Curiel), who had left him shortly before he undertook the writing of Armance, bears--by many accounts--resemblance to Mme d'Aumale. Equally significant, as a source of inspiration, is the epigraph that Stendhal chose for the chapter in

which Mme d'Aumale is introduced--a passage from Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida. We cite it to show that Stendhal's models were many, and are not easily pinned down:

Somewhat light as air
There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirit looks out
At every joint and motive of her body.
O these encounters, so glib of tongue,
That give accosting welcome ere it comes. (Act IV)

It is, of course, a light but not a wanton spirit that Stendhal has painted in Mme d'Aumale. And we do not really see her in motion; instead, we find much allusion to her mobility, her actions, her activity. Although these lines serve as an introduction to Mme d'Aumale, what we find particularly striking here is that the passage from Shakespeare evokes Stendhal's image of the Duchess of Sanseverina--right down to the "foot" that "speaks"!²³

The spirited and easy-going, carefree and uncalculating Mme d'Aumale, who never knows what she will do from one moment to the next, who lives her life not according to society's dictates but according to her own impulses, is a subject Stendhal clearly enjoys painting. For he does so with undisguised zest and enthusiasm. She is Stendhal's first "femme du premier mouvement." There will be others like her.

Often in this novel we have the impression that Armance has stepped out of the pages of La Princesse de Clèves as Stendhal's nineteenth-century version of the chaste and retiring woman who was

²³The portrait of the Duchess is examined in Chapter IV.

"si différente de toutes celles de son sexe."²⁴ There is imitation in the nondescript adjectives that Stendhal applies to this heroine and in his unelaborate classical manner of description. Then, too, words recurrent in Mme de Lafayette's novel--estime, vertu, devoir--are common coin in Armance. Devoir is particularly promising, for we read in Armance's intimate thoughts this obsession: "Rien au monde... ne pouvait lui faire oublier ce qu'une femme se doit à elle-même." Elsewhere "tout ce qu'elle se devait" carries reverberations of Mme de Chartres' advice to her daughter: "Songez à ce que vous devez à vous-même, et pensez que vous allez perdre cette réputation que vous vous êtes acquise..."²⁵

Though not spelled out, Armance's preoccupation with what a woman owes unto herself is all bound up with self-esteem and the notion of reputation. Nor do the analogies end here. "A se défendre d'aimer" motivates la Princesse de Clèves. And Stendhal's heroine, who likewise has an overwhelming fear of love, erects obstacles to protect herself.

Not without good cause have critics described Armance as the novel of "perfect friendship."²⁶ The heroine herself is an ideal com-

²⁴The Princess, as seen by Monsieur de Nemours, Tome III.

We are not the first to call attention to this novel. According to Victor Brombert it was Stendhal's "touchstone" as he composed Armance. Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom, p. 58. See too Georges Blin's "Etude sur Armance," ix-lxxviii, Armance (Paris: Editions de la Revue Fontaine, 1946). As for Stendhal, he felt his novel was "delicate" like La Princesse de Clèves. And, for him, Mme de Lafayette's heroine was adorable in her modesty.

²⁵Mme de Lafayette, La Princesse de Clèves, Tome I.

²⁶Bardèche, op. cit., p. 144. And in the novel it is "une sorte d'écho qui semblait parler d'amitié parfaite et de sympathie sans bornes" (XXIV) to mention only one of many references to their "perfect friendship."

panion. Never is Armance happier than when her relations with Octave are maintained on a platonic level. "Elle était bien résolue de ne jamais accepter la main de son cousin.... Je pourrai l'aimer en secret, se disait-elle,... et je serai aussi heureuse et peut-être bien plus que si j'étais sa compagne." (XIII) Throughout the novel Armance shuns the idea of marriage. There are, after all, limits to "sa tendre amitié." And nowhere is this more evident than in the following passage:

Octave eut un moment d'égarement; il prit sa main comme le jour où elle s'était évanouie et ses lèvres osèrent effleurer sa joue. Armance se releva vivement et rougit beaucoup. Elle se reprocha vivement ce badinage. "Voulez-vous me déplaire? lui dit-elle. Voulez-vous me forcer à ne sortir qu'avec une femme de chambre?"

Une brouillerie de quelques jours fut la suite de l'indiscrétion d'Octave. (XXIV)

It will be interesting to see how Octave's "moment d'égarement" is reinterpreted in the pages of the Rouge. For in that novel both the hand and the cheek are focal points of the hero's desire. Here most readers will feel that Armance is overreacting to Octave's impulsive and innocent gesture. Nonetheless, her panic points to unspoken fear behind her unwillingness to wed the man she loves--a fear of physical intimacy. Perhaps Stendhal was too much under the influence of La Princesse de Clèves. For despite his desire to convince us of Armance's "douceur parfait" and her "angélique bonté," by mentioning these traits again and again, he brings into play both her "droiture impassible" and her restraint.

Severe and austere, such are the words that come to mind when we consider Armance's behavior. Octave, no doubt, would concur. For at the end of the novel he avows, "Armance m'a toujours fait peur. Je ne l'ai jamais approchée sans sentir que je paraissais devant le

maître de ma destinée." (XXX) This is the éternel féminin to whom a man looks for an assessment of his worth, a "Divinité," as had been earlier sketched out by Stendhal, a Divinity who inspires "à la fois l'extrême amour et le respect extrême."²⁷

No doubt Armance's worries about her reputation and her efforts to protect it relate to the vulnerability of her condition. As a penniless orphan living with her flighty aunt she lacks parental protection and guidance. More important, in her own eyes she is alone . . . and unmarried. It is certainly gratifying to see her changing her attitude, rejecting social structures:

Que me fait le monde et ses vains jugements? se disait-elle, je ne le ménageais que pour Octave : et d'ailleurs, si l'opinion est raisonnable, elle doit m'approuver. (XXII)

But the new attitude does not long endure.

The striking changes occur only when our heroine has been assured of Octave's adoration, a bit before their marriage, "depuis que la grande affaire de sa vie n'était plus de cacher son amour et de se le reprocher." Her rigid moral code no longer binds her as she begins to show the affection that she has, until now, carefully repressed. We are told, from Octave's perspective, of "les manières tendres d'Armance et si peu d'accord avec l'extrême retenue qui lui était si naturelle" and of "les manières caressantes de cette jeune fille ordinairement si réservée." (XXX)

True, she does not become wildly passionate; she commits no "folie." The picture she presents, strictly from Stendhal's point of view now, is "touching" and "noble." Nevertheless, she is finally beginning to behave like a woman in love, warmly and without forethought.

²⁷ De l'Amour, "Des Fiascos," #4.

Such are the changes she undergoes. In Stendhal's novels women are what they are more by choice than by chance. The one constant we have discerned is that the evolution of that passion we call love is capable of altering, if not their fundamental natures (generous, tender, proud, retiring, egotistical, selfish), then at least their behavior with, toward, and sometimes on behalf of the lover (more than one Stendhalian woman will be seen performing bravely, even boldly, for her lover) as well as some of their attitudes and prejudices. But, in the case of Armance, her tenderness and caresses are insufficient at this point. Poor Octave, willing to believe the worst, is determined to end his life. Armance, the woman to whom he has confided almost everything, is not particularly perceptive. She is unable to divine his misery. And despite her ability to encourage him, she never asks leading questions. Hence, she never extracts his secret from him.

Of course, if the author expects us to guess what that secret might be, he certainly throws us off course in the final chapter. For there Armance, it would appear, is blissfully happy: "Armance était si heureuse depuis son mariage," Stendhal informs us. Or is Stendhal suggesting that an unconsummated marriage suits her perfectly?

Stendhal's first novel is a tour de force. The author amuses himself by being enigmatic and by baffling the uninitiated reader. Armance retains something of L'Astrée and the artificial precious novel of the seventeenth century: letters placed neatly in the hollow of a tree, games of hide and seek. And there are traces of eighteenth-century fiction here, too: the vagueness of physical description

of characters; the highly social and mundane atmosphere; characters who have ample financial means; a keen awareness of class differences.

To all this Stendhal adds the element of romantic idealization of love. Sedulously eschewing physical love and libertinism, he goes to the other extreme. He delights in stressing pudeur, as had the novelists whom he no longer admired--Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, Chateaubriand. As a consequence, the heroine in Armance tends to lack reality, vividness, even personality. She does not prove very introspectively analytical. She is too unaware and a bit too innocent in not suspecting something strange in her lover. And she submits to conditions imagined or otherwise weirdly imposed upon her, as would have done an Ophelia.

Perhaps, after all, Armance is, as she feels herself to be, a little empty inwardly. Like so many other Stendhalian heroines she is afraid of the physical side of love, preferring the peculiar happiness of dreaming about it. Such a heroine has charm, especially in contrast to the libertine and highly calculating women of the eighteenth century. But Armance also represents, on the part of Stendhal, an abdication. He refuses to probe into her character, her dreams, her desires and passionate urges. The self-assertion which should put her into opposition to the man is not there--perhaps because Stendhal, as he himself declared, wanted primarily to "paint" the hero, to "interest" the reader in the hero.²⁸

In our opinion there was more psychological reality in Adolphe as there will be more in the novel that immediately follows Armance. There la pudeur and "ce qu'une femme se doit à elle-même" do not long constrain his heroines. And if it can be said that the author of

²⁸ See footnote 4 on page 5.

Armance, deliberately or not, appears somewhat detached in regard to his first heroine the same cannot be said about his attitude toward the two women he paints in Le Rouge et le Noir.

CHAPTER II

LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR

Several years passed between Stendhal's first and second novels, fruitful years during which he wrote Les Promenades dans Rome, a few short stories, and a number of articles. Then, inspired by contemporary events and two court cases, he turned once again to fiction, this time with experience in the medium and with a plot that was more congenial to his creative imagination, a plot based upon the Affaire Berthet.

The fruit of his labor, Le Rouge et le Noir, is a novel in which Stendhal effectively treats the subjects of contemporary mores, politics, and love, all earlier broached in Armance. What is more, it is a novel in which he vividly portrays two important heroines. "Car ce roman en a deux," he later proclaimed, "contre toutes les règles suivies jusqu'ici."¹ These are memorable women, women whose fascination has, if anything, increased with the passing of time. Just why he was more successful in the portrayals of the heroines of the Rouge, as compared to Armance, is worth investigation.

Stendhal borrowed the broad outline of his novel from the newspaper account of a fait divers and placed the protagonists en

¹Letter to Salvagnoli in Romans et Nouvelles de Stendhal, ed. by Henri Martineau, Vol. 1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 700-714.

situation on the authority of journalistic recordings of Antoine Berthet's life and court case.² Thus Mme de Rênal becomes Stendhal's version of Mme Michoud de la Tour, with whom Berthet had an affair. Mlle de la Mole substitutes for the upper-class Mlle de Cordon. As the story goes, after an interval in a seminary Berthet was employed as a tutor by the Comte de Cordon and had a brief flirtation with the daughter, for which he was dismissed. Some time later, in a fit of angry frustration and jealousy, he attempted to kill Mme de Michoud by shooting her in a church during mass. Although he failed to kill her, he was, like Julien, tried, found guilty, and executed. Here the resemblances between "real life" people and Stendhal's fictional creations end.

Whereas in Armance the society depicted was restricted to the world of the Parisian salon, the Rouge cuts through diverse strata of society, spanning a variety of social and political milieus. There emerges from the peasant class the hero, Julien Sorel; his first love, Mme de Rênal, is of the wealthy small nobility of the provinces; and his second mistress, Mlle de la Mole, traces her noble ancestry back to the Renaissance. We learn about the conflicts between the Liberals and the Ultras in France in the late eighteen-twenties. Censorship

²Apparently Berthet's story was not the only tale that touched responsive chords in our author. Adrian Laffargue's crime of passion and lower-class birth received a fair amount of attention in Promenades dans Rome. For in Laffargue Stendhal recognized a passionate young man who had received a good education but was obliged to work with his hands in order to survive. He symbolized young men who possessed strong will power because they felt with great force, energetic young men who were lacking financial resources. To his hero, then, Stendhal gave the "bonne éducation," the passions, the "énergie éffrayante," and the absence of fortune that he had commented upon in Promenades.

The situation of the precepteur and seminarian Berthet, the punishment meted out to this young man of humble origins for a murder he did not accomplish further inspired Stendhal to create a passionate and ambitious energetic young hero whose story would be patterned after that of Berthet.

and muzzling of the press is not ignored. The role of the Congrégation and the conspiracies that take place under the Restoration government are exposed with a touch of malevolence. Rejecting for the second time the current popular rage for the Middle Ages in fiction, Stendhal renewed the content of the novel by depicting contemporary society, customs, and mores in his unique manner.

Ostensibly a "Chronique de 1830" based on "la vérité, l'âpre vérité,"³ the novel is narrated by a voyageur parisien who finds himself in Franche-comté--a region bearing some resemblance to Stendhal's native province, the Dauphiné. The voyageur begins by introducing us to the little town of Verrières and its inhabitants. Although the account is detailed and moves forward at its inception, in the mode of the chronicle, it soon deviates from that traditional form which usually lacks analysis or interpretation. For the man who relates the events is an aesthete, prone to discuss and evaluate trees that are cropped too closely to suit his taste as well as the architecture of walls and contemporary buildings. Furthermore, he has a marvelous ability to penetrate the façade of people encountered en route. He knows them all and does not hesitate to judge them. He reveals their thoughts and speculates upon what they themselves are incapable of perceiving. And in this novel the reader learns to be alert and wary. For concealed within Stendhal's seemingly flat descriptions of character and circumstances is an ever-recurrent irony.

Stendhal begins the novel in an old-fashioned leisurely manner from the vantage point of the sophisticated Parisian tourist who happens to be passing through the countryside. Such a vantage point is beneficial, for it provides Stendhal with the opportunity to compare

³ A citation from Danton which introduces us to the novel itself.

provincial ways and women with those of the capital of France. Imperceptibly, this tourist evolves into a more devious and intrusive author than the one we met in Armance. Intruding at will to explain, correct, or emphasize a character trait, a thought, or an action as the mood strikes him, or so it seems, he occasionally addresses the reader even more directly and personally than in his first novel.

The Rouge is divided into two parts: the first is restricted to life in the provinces, and in the second the hero moves on to the "théâtre des grandes choses," Paris. This structural division neatly corresponds to a contrast between life in the country and in high society and between two women who are found--each one--in a separate and distinctive socio-political geographical setting. Julien's love affair with Mme de Rênal rapidly becomes the focus of our attention in the first part of the novel, and the conquest of Mlle de la Mole becomes the object of his ambition in the second. In Part Two a certain Mme de Fervaques makes her appearance (she is described, and we hear her speak and partake in her dull correspondance with Julien, but she is a minor character who serves primarily to arouse Mathilde's jealousy). And Mme de Rênal, toward the end of the novel reappears on the scene, briefly and significantly, in ways that make us aware of her enduring importance to the hero and that enable us to ascertain the author's nostalgia for passionate loving tenderness in women. Needless to say, the contrast of the two heroines is an important feature of the novel. This contrast is achieved through various means: indirectly, we perceive their thoughts and observe their behavior; we learn about their interests, concerns and overall motivations. Then, in Part Two, they are compared directly, when Stendhal intrudes to tell us about Mlle de la Mole's amour de tête which he compares to l'amour vrai of

Mme de Rênal. In addition, and more frequently, they are compared when we penetrate into the mind of the hero.

Mme de Rênal

The first man the narrator encounters is "un grand homme affairé et important," the owner of a nail factory and the mayor of the picturesque little town of Verrières, Monsieur de Rênal. He is portrayed symbolically, in a symphony of grey and appears to be a dignified, attractive man close to fifty years old. Then the narrator shifts to a more personal critical viewpoint:

Mais bientôt le voyageur parisien est choqué d'un certain air de contentement de soi et de suffisance mêlée à je ne sais quoi de peu inventif. On sent enfin que le talent de cet homme-là se borne à se faire payer exactement ce qu'on lui doit, et à payer lui-même le plus tard possible. (I, i)

Stendhal's depiction of M. de Rênal is one of the earliest portrayals in literature of the complacently satisfied wealthy bourgeois. Insensitivity, money-grubbing, and vanity are at the bottom of his character. "Tel est le maire de Verrières" and such is the man to whom our heroine is married. If she is unhappy with him it is not immediately apparent, nor is she herself aware of it.

The magnificent plane trees belonging to the municipality are periodically mutilated by the Mayor, who has them clipped in barbarous fashion in order to provide himself with more shade. This habit, which the narrator deplores because it destroys the natural "formes magnifiques" of the trees, further extends the contrast between nature and

the profit-seeking civilization in Verrières⁴ just as it highlights the aesthetic insensitivity of the man responsible for the mutilation. M. de Rênal excels at building walls, too. In town and all around his own large gardens stand the many walls that have earned him the respect of his neighbors. Barriers are everywhere. They suggest the impenetrable walls he has built within his own household, in his relations with his wife.

Mme de Rênal is first seen in Chapter II en promenade with her husband along the public walk (which is bordered by a high retaining wall, another of M. de Rênal's achievements). The method of introduction is somewhat similar to the one Stendhal used for Armance, in that the heroine is immediately placed in her environment without a word about her character or background. But although our information here is also limited--to the knowledge that Mme de Rênal is the wife of the Mayor--there is nevertheless much that is different. Armance, who was introduced as the poor cousin of Octave, hardly ever moved; this heroine speaks and is shown in motion in a manner that defines her role and subtly reveals her character.

Tout en écoutant son mari qui parlait d'un air grave, l'oeil de madame de Rênal suivait avec inquiétude les mouvements de trois petits garçons. L'aîné, qui pouvait avoir onze ans, s'approchait trop souvent du parapet et faisait mine d'y monter. Une voix douce prononçait alors le nom d'Adolphe, et l'enfant renon-

⁴The prevailing attitude of the citizens is summed up thus: "Voilà le grand mot qui décide de tout à Verrières. RAPPORTER DU REVENU. A lui seul il représente la pensée habituelle de plus des trois quarts des habitants." (I,ii) M. de Rênal, of course, personifies this generalization.

çait à son projet ambitieux. Madame de Rênal paraissait une femme de trente ans, mais encore assez jolie.

It is with the attentive eye she directs to her children and her voix douce that Stendhal begins to build the maternal qualities that are ever-present in this woman who is "pretty enough" to hold the reader's interest.

Jean Prévost has astutely observed that Stendhal in the Rouge mastered a rhythm which he had attempted "assez gauchement" in Armance-- a counterpoint, Prévost calls it, "un entrecroisement régulier entre l'intrigue principale et les épisodes qui peignent les mœurs."⁵ While one might demur slightly--to suggest that mores are depicted from the moment the voyageur parisien opens his mouth to comment upon the inhabitants of Verrières--Prévost has nevertheless inadvertently called our attention to something of importance: Stendhal's use of episodes in this novel. For in the Rouge episodes become the significant means by which Stendhal introduces his women. In episodes Mme de Rênal appears before our eyes to move and to speak in ways that demonstrate more about her than the author cares to discuss with elaboration. Her character traits are often illustrated well before they are named. A case in point is an episode that occurs near the parapet wall, while the Rênals are taking a stroll. Stendhal calls it a "petit événement," and as it occurs, he manages to tell us much about his heroine without actually describing her character.⁶ One may recall that in Armance the author's tendency was to name and describe Armance's admirable

⁵ Jean Prévost, La Création, pp. 247-48.

⁶ On the subject of the method of portraying character M. Bardèche has observed that Stendhal first notes the traits and then uses scenes to "éprouver le caractère." While this may be true for Stendhal's heroes, it does not apply to Mme de Rênal. (Stendhal romancier, p. 59.)

character traits, and in his assiduous efforts to tell us how very different she was from all other women, he frequently neglected to show us, by demonstration. He does not lapse into the same error with Mme de Rênal.

As with the character portrayal of his heroines, Stendhal's description of the Rênal marriage is gradual and he leaves much in the shadows. It is not the facts behind their union but the author's personal observations that are scattered throughout the first several chapters of the novel, and nothing about their married life is thoroughly described or analyzed in depth. However, everything we know about the husband leads to the conclusion that--for a tender and sensitive woman--life with this uninspiring man can be neither interesting nor pleasurable. Nevertheless, until some time after the arrival of Julien, Mme de Rênal has been rather oblivious to her husband's shortcomings.

"M. de Rênal vivait fort bien avec sa femme," we are informed in Chapter III. This seemingly innocuous phrase alerts us immediately, for it places one-sided emphasis upon Monsieur: his needs are satisfied. But how does Mme de Rênal live with her husband? We begin to perceive their relationship in the dialogue that follows. It is the husband who monopolizes the conversation. Her small contribution, because it is twice offered timidement, suggests not only an innate timidity but also a habitual deference to her husband. And he is so accustomed to making judgments and pronouncements--with the expectation of his wife's approval and admiration--that when faced instead with

a reasonable question, he verges on anger. Suddenly she cries out, for their second son has just climbed up on the wall, as the eldest had been longing to do, and is now running along the parapet.

La crainte d'effrayer son fils et de lui faire tomber empêchait madame de Rênal de lui adresser la parole. Enfin l'enfant, qui riait de sa prouesse, ayant regardé sa mère, vit sa pâleur, sauta sur la promenade et accourut à elle. Il fut bien grondé. (I, iii)

This realistic interplay between mother and child brings forth the heroine's genuine spontaneous concern. Instead of stating outright that Mme de Rênal is the incarnation of maternal love, instead of dwelling at length upon the admirable womanly qualities that promote conjugal and filial devotion--as would Balzac--Stendhal vividly displays her motherly anxieties and selfless love.

The maternal qualities present in Mme de Rênal from the beginning are those that Julien will come to admire. It is with absolute sincerity that, toward the end of the novel, he announces to the jury at Besançon, "J'ai pu attenter aux jours de la femme la plus digne de tous les respects, de tous les hommages. Madame de Rênal avait été pour moi comme une mère." (II, xli) For it is the warmth, maternal devotion, and tenderness that he cherishes in her. There is much of the ideal mother in this heroine, suggesting analogies between Stendhal's own beautiful mother, who was, in memory, "l'âme et la gaieté de la famille."⁷

The "petit événement" leads to the introduction of Julien Sorel's name into the conversation, for it inspires M. de Rênal to advise his wife of his unilateral decision to engage Sorel as a tutor to care for, as he puts it, "les enfants qui commencent à devenir trop diables pour nous." These children, to whom his wife is so deeply devoted, are noth-

⁷Stendhal, La Vie de Henri Brulard, Ch. IX.

ing more than a nuisance to him. Rênal then proceeds to pompously predict how his project of hiring a tutor will add to his own prestige in the eyes of Valenod and other wealthy people in town.

Rênal's decision leaves Mme de Rênal "toute pensive,"⁸ and at this point the author intervenes to tell us about his heroine. In three paragraphs covering less than a page she is portrayed from several perspectives, including her own. The portrayal extends from her outer appearance to her interiority and covers a range that includes her nature, her reputation, and a subtle allusion to her sex appeal.

First we learn about her physical appearance:

C'était une femme grande, bien faite, qui avait été la beauté du pays, comme on dit dans ces montagnes. Elle avait un certain air de simplicité, et de la jeunesse dans la démarche; aux yeux d'un Parisien, cette grâce naïve, pleine d'innocence et de vivacité, serait même allée jusqu'à rappeler des idées de douce volupté. (I, iii)

The shifting perspectives are presented by an author who is free to speculate as he pleases. The initial viewpoint is that of the citizens of Verrières. Everything about Mme de Rênal is wholesome. She exudes freshness and innocence. But neither here nor elsewhere do we learn specific details about her beauty. Following the trend established in Armance, it is the over-all impression that counts. In the Rouge, where the physical description of Mme de Rênal is totally lacking in substance, Stendhal pushes that trend to the limit.

The semicolon, which is generally a coordinating element, becomes a device for separating two different modes of perception. The

⁸ She does manifest some dismay. "Ah! Bon Dieu! mon cher ami, comme tu prends vite un parti!" But Rênal seizes upon her feeble protest as yet another opportunity to enhance himself: her exclamation becomes a compliment when he replies "C'est que j'ai du caractère, moi, et le curé l'a bien vu."

author seems surprisingly explicit when he suggests that Mme de Rênal is physically attractive. But his use of the word volupté conveys a pleasurable rêverie more than it denotes sensuality. In other places Stendhal's voluptés are completely unrelated to physical contact or desire, or anything sexual, for that matter.⁹ Here let us intrude to remark that it is in the guise of a generalized sophisticated Parisian that Stendhal dares refer to her douce volupté. We would suggest that his own pudeur prohibits frankness in matters of a sexual nature--at least in his novels.

Mme de Rênal is quite unaware of her attractiveness to men.

Si elle eût appris ce genre de succès, madame de Rênal en eût été bien honteuse. Ni la coquetterie, ni l'affectation n'avaient jamais approché de ce coeur.

By means of the characteristic aside through which Stendhal comments upon his characters Mme de Rênal's innate modesty is verified. Then, by opposition, he assures us that she is utterly lacking in mannerisms and falsity. Is it only the Parisian who finds her attractive? Apparently not, for in the next paragraph we learn that her subtle charm has impressed one of her countrymen, M. Valenod.

Shy and reserved once again in all that concerns sex, our author uses a colorless mild expression, "faire la cour," to describe Valenod's intentions, informing us that the man's lack of success with Mme de Rênal "avait jeté un éclat singulier sur sa vertu." But if Mme de Rênal

⁹"Madame de Rênal se donna la délicieuse volupté de plaider la cause de sa rivale, et de voir la main et la fortune d'Elisa refusées...." (I, viii)

"Elle s'applaudit de sa démarche. Je n'ai pas été indigne de Julien, se dit-elle, avec une douce et intime volupté." (I, xx) The emphases are ours. Unquestionably Stendhal is, in each example, conveying her pleasure, but what he describes is more the naïve satisfaction of her ego than anything sensual.

has not succumbed to Valenod's attempts to woo her, it is not merely because she is, as others see her, virtuous.

Madame de Rênal, fort timide et d'un caractère en apparence fort inégal, était surtout choquée du mouvement continu et des éclats de voix de M. Valenod.

Valenod, by provincial standards a bel homme, is objectively portrayed by Stendhal as gross and obtrusive. Mme de Rênal, who finds him almost unbearably offensive, possesses a keen sensibility that will show itself in many ways and that is intended to contrast favorably with the kind of perceptiveness or insensitivity that Stendhal attributes to the majority of the townspeople. Clearly her interests are not like theirs: she has an aversion to what they call "de la joie" which earns her the reputation of being "très fière de sa naissance"--undeservedly, for "elle n'y songeait pas, mais avait été fort contente de voir les habitants de la ville venir moins chez elle." Throughout the novel Stendhal lets us know that most people are mistaken about her; few know her at all. His practice, then, is to inform us when others misinterpret her attitudes and inclinations. Here, after invalidating their assumption, he separates and distinguishes her from her peers: "Pourvu qu'on la laissât seule errer dans son beau jardin, elle ne se plaignait jamais." With her marked preference for solitude and her sensitivity to nature Mme de Rênal becomes the predecessor of several gentle and modest heroines who are more content, if not actually happy, when left alone. Etrangère like Armance, she is condemned to live in a society in which she is an outsider.

In the third paragraph Stendhal uses a word he earlier applied to her gracefulness, "naïve," to characterize the woman. "C'était une âme naïve qui ne s'était jamais élevée même jusqu'à juger son mari." As for their marriage:

Elle supposait, sans se le dire, qu'entre mari et femme il n'y avait pas de plus douces relations. Elle aimait surtout M. de Rênal quand il lui parlait de ses projets sur leurs enfants. ... En somme, elle trouvait M. de Rênal beaucoup moins ennuyeux que tous les hommes de sa connaissance.

Confirmed in the second sentence is what we have seen elsewhere: Mme de Rênal's main interest is the welfare of her children. And our author insinuates that if she loves her husband at all it is because of the children--not the man himself. Although the reader is bound to be dubious about her suppositions regarding their married life--"qu'il n'y avait pas de plus douces relations"--Mme de Rênal has no idea that they are erroneous. She expresses few doubts, asking no questions about life and her own existence. As for happiness, like most married women of her era--and many women today--she never wondered if she was fulfilled as a woman, or fully happy with her husband.¹⁰ Her suppositions are vague, as the phrase "sans se le dire" indicates. Such uninformed suppositions tend to plague all of Stendhal's protagonists. They are, however, characteristic of this heroine's mental processes.

In the last sentence we are dealing with a conviction based on experience. She finds her husband less boring than the other men she knows and, in truth, thus far there is no proof that she is mistaken. After all, whom else does she know but Valenod and other men of his kind? This is certainly not to say that her husband is not boring, for in the next paragraph Stendhal subverts everything by remarking, ironically, "ce jugement conjugal était raisonnable," and then, in a devastating description of M. de Rênal's esprit and bon ton, showing how utterly devoid of wit, imagination, and grace the man really is.

¹⁰In this respect she is typical of French women generalized earlier by Stendhal in De l'Amour: "Les femmes françaises, n'ayant jamais vu le bonheur des passions vraies, sont peu difficiles sur le bonheur intérieur de leur ménage, et le tous les jours de la vie." Fragment 86.

Not without generosity did Stendhal observe in De l'Amour that women, unlike men, prefer emotions to reason.

C'est tout simple: comme en vertu de nos plats usages, elles ne sont chargées d'aucune affaire dans la famille, la raison ne leur est jamais utile, elles ne l'éprouvent jamais bonne à quelque chose. (VII)

What Stendhal implies here, and states elsewhere, is that women had few meaningful opportunities to use their reasoning capacities. Placing the blame upon the limitations of their role in society and upon contemporary customs, Stendhal suggests that there are remedies for the situation--in education.¹¹ Nevertheless, in his fiction he has repeatedly chosen to portray women who are guided more by their emotions than by "l'habitude d'être raisonnable," women who are simple, ignorant, and naïve. For such a condition seems to make them all the more vulnerable to amorous passion. They come upon love unawares. Mme de Rênal is Stendhal's first outstanding heroine of feelings and emotion. In the second part of the novel she will stand in direct contrast to a woman whose mind is habitually active, Mlle de la Mole, a heroine who prefers "la raison."

Does Mme de Rênal lack the intelligence and acumen necessary to perceive her husband's true nature, to see him as the reader sees him, or is she deliberately deceiving herself? Whatever may be the reasons, the fact that she does not judge her husband is undeniable and, to some critics, highly reproachable. Whether it be grounded on inability or

¹¹De l'Amour, LIV.

unwillingness on her part has yet to be revealed. It is an enigma that the reader scarcely has time to consider as the narrative moves rapidly forward to introduce Julien.

The Stendhaliste Georges Blin comes close to accusing the author's characters--heroines and heroes alike--of bad faith. "Ils trouvent trop souvent trop de confort à ne descendre qu'à mi-hauteur de leur conscience," he opines. And our heroine is not exempt from his criticism.

C'est le cas, à plus forte raison de Mme de Rênal se dispensant de rechercher pourquoi tant son mari que les hommes d'argent qui le fréquentent l'ennuient ou lui inspirent même de l'aversion.¹²

His point might be acceptable if the Rouge were to end after the introductory chapters. However, in Chapter VII we are given an idea of why Mme de Rênal avoids--or as M. Blin phrases it--gets out of inquiring why her husband and his associates bore or repel her. That avoidance is tied up with her self-preservation, with her "instinct for happiness." Moreover, unlike Armance, unlike Mathilde, Mme de Rênal is nowhere portrayed as a lucid self-examining heroine or as a woman whose spare moments are spent reflecting upon the actions of those who surround her. Not only is it unfair to demand of her something that the author has not given us reason to expect but also Stendhal evidently felt that her cécité was an essential feature of her character. It not only makes her eventual love for Julien more innocent but also, in the end, her forsaking of all conjugal prudence more stirring and dramatic.

Stendhal prepares us for the meeting of Julien and Mme de Rênal

¹²Georges Blin, Stendhal et les problèmes de la personnalité (Paris: José Corti, 1958), p. 517.

and for the attraction of like sensibilities by matching, for the attentive reader, Julien's "invincible timidité" to Mme de Rênal's "extreme timidité." Although the causes of their apprehensions are entirely different, the surprise and delight that each experiences at the sight of the other is equal in intensity. It is in the breathless encounter scene, full of intimacy and rich with the promise of love, that we begin to understand how rarely our heroine has experienced anything approximating le bonheur. "De sa vie une sensation purement agréable n'avait aussi profondément ému madame de Rênal." And when Stendhal notes her appreciation of Julien's physical person--"Madame de Rênal fut frappé de l'extrême beauté de Julien"--we can imagine how limited have been her contacts with men.

La forme presque féminine de ses traits et son air d'embarras ne semblèrent point ridicules à une femme extrêmement timide elle-même. L'air mâle que l'on trouve communément nécessaire à la beauté d'un homme lui eût fait peur. (I, vi)

Everything about Julien appeals to her, from his physical appearance (his female features) to his unpolished manners (the "air d'embarras," his "air étonné," his "air timide d'une jeune fille"). In retrospect, Julien is thoroughly ashamed of the way he looked on that day and would prefer to appear as a "précepteur honoré pour sa science" as he imagines Mme Derville first saw him. Mme de Rênal's first sight of him, however, has not only had a pleasurable effect upon her; it has made a lasting impression:

C'était précisément comme jeune ouvrier, rougissant jusqu'au blanc des yeux, arrêté à la porte et n'osant sonner, que madame de Rênal se le figurait avec le plus de charme. (I, xiii)

Her cherished image of Julien partially explains why he rapidly wins a place in her heart. If she is attracted to him from that moment, it

is because he is sensitive and vulnerable, in every way unlike the robust, cruel, and bullying men she knows. And she, a tender and compassionate woman, does not fear him. She is able to empathize and moves rapidly beyond her self-interest to understand him. Despite her "simplicity," Mme de Rênal has a certain intuition that is apparent from the outset:

Madame de Rênal en était déjà à saisir les moindres nuances de ce qui se passait dans l'âme du précepteur; elle prit ce mouvement pour de la timidité et voulut l'encourager. (I, vi)

This kind of sensitivity enhances her image as an extremely feminine woman, a woman who is "utterly lacking in coquetry." Nevertheless, the presence or absence of specific habits or modes of behavior ought not to be perceived as immutable.

Under the influence of love, it is unconsciously that she begins to alter her behavior, and instinctively that she adopts feminine wiles. When, for example, M. de Rênal asks her what she thinks of his "nouvelle acquisition," Julien, it is "par un mouvement presque instinctif" and "dont certainement elle ne se rendait pas compte" that she conceals the truth. In fact, she lies to her husband. Progressively drawn to Julien she begins, by comparison, to see her husband as he really is. Change invades the domain of her personal interests and activities, too. She begins to pay attention to her attire, buying new clothes and changing her dress several times a day. And the change extends even to the way she wears her dresses. In one of those delightful intrusions, Stendhal directly addresses the reader with a slight touch of irony:

Comme notre intention est de ne flatter personne, nous ne nierons point que madame de Rênal, qui avait une peau superbe, ne se fit arranger des robes qui laissaient les bras et la poitrine fort découverts. Elle était très

bien faite, et cette manière de se mettre lui allait à ravir. (I, viii)

And this from a modest woman hitherto at ease only when "loin des regards des hommes." (I, vi) Again the change in unconscious.

"C'était sans intention directe que madame de Rênal se livrait à tant de soins. Elle y trouvait du plaisir et sans y songer autrement," the author insists, while the reader knows that her desire to please Julien, and thus herself, is behind this coquettish behavior.

By Chapter VII we have seen enough of our heroine to describe her as she is portrayed and to come to some conclusions of our own. Placing her in a repressive milieu that is not conducive to the development of l'esprit, Stendhal works first in the manner of a playwright, revealing her nature by the way she speaks and behaves. Through dialogue we learn that she lives submissively, in relative peace and harmony, with a man whose character will not change: venal, insensitive, ungenerous, unimaginative, boring, and pompous, M. de Rênal typifies all that Stendhal condemns--in life as in literature¹³--and an understanding of his character is necessary to an appreciation of the heroine's situation.

Stendhal has heightened our expectations by insidiously implanting the notion that Mme de Rênal is a woman who has yet to be fulfilled--physically, spiritually--by telling us that she is an extremely attractive woman with an appeal that borders on the sensual, by intimating that life with M. de Rênal does not satisfy the needs of a woman of such a warm and sensitive loving nature.

¹³In La Vie de Henri Brulard he discusses "la bassesse bourgeoise" (Chs. IX and XXIX). In M. de Rênal he depicts it incisively.

The author has given Mme de Rênal few interests--nature and her children. Unquestionably, it is in maternity that she finds an outlet for her emotions; in maternity, too, that she shows her capacity for tenderness and devotion. It is interesting to note that thus far she resembles the woman Stendhal has described in a letter to his friend Salvagnoli, "une femme charmante" who is, according to Stendhal, the product of her era and her milieu:¹⁴

Mme de Rênal est une de ces femmes qui ne savent pas si elles sont belles, qui l'ignorent, qui regardent leur mari comme le premier homme du monde, tremblantes devant ce maître et croyant l'aimer de tout leur coeur, douces, modestes, tout entières à leur ménage, chastes et retirées, aimant Dieu et priant.

We would be remiss if we did not point out that this letter was written for purposes of publicity. Although Stendhal wanted prospective readers to believe that Mme de Rênal is typical of provincial women in France in 1830, this is certainly not what he conveys in the novel, where he gains a special tension by placing her at odds with her milieu, thereby enhancing her character. Nor does the author's summary analysis of his heroine take into account the ways she changes.

There is nothing false or mean about this gentle, unambitious, undemanding, unselfish woman. For the modern reader, however, unmitigated virtue can be as boring as life with M. de Rênal. We look for some imperfections in this woman, some small details showing that she is human, capable of a petty act or a bit of cruelty. Happily, our search will not go unrewarded when she suffers the torments of jealousy.¹⁵

¹⁴She is "une femme charmante comme il y en a beaucoup dans la Province" and her character is a result of "cette nouvelle vie de province si ennuyeuse, si pleine de soupçons, qui a envahie la France depuis 1800 ... impossible au milieu des moeurs gaies qui ont régné de 1715 à 1790...." (Letter to Vincenzo Salvagnoli).

¹⁵Specifically, the treatment of her chambermaid, "Elle abhorrait Elisa en ce moment et venait de la brusquer." (I, viii) Compare also the satisfaction she experiences when Julien refuses to wed Elisa. See footnote 9, on page 47.

We are bound to feel that her prosaic marital situation is regrettable. But we do have some reservations about her naïveté in regard to both her existence and her husband. Because we are, in the beginning, seldom party to her thoughts--and those we do share are limited--we soon suspect that Stendhal's heroine is a woman of limited intelligence.

Perhaps she is. She never shows great flashes of insight. Her pursuits are not intellectual and she has no original ideas. In nonfictional writings Stendhal shows no predilection for naïve unintelligent women. Naïveté is something he hopes women will overcome as quickly as possible (still, with Mme de Rênal the process of déniement is not rapid). Unintelligent women apparently did not please him.¹⁶ It would seem that there was, for Stendhal, a subtle distinction between simple uneducated women and stupid women. His novels are well stocked with simple naïve women and it is they who win the hearts of Stendhal's heroes. Stendhal's problem is to dissuade his reader from concluding that his heroine is altogether dense and lacking in intelligence. And he resolves it by intruding into the narrative account of Julien's first month in the Rênal household, to defend her by means of hypothesis.

Just as Mme de Rênal is beginning to pity Julien tenderly for his extreme poverty, the author inserts a few paragraphs about her education and past life. Whether this is done to justify her ignorance or to prevent us from concluding that she is stupid, it is certain that Stendhal is not presenting her "life history." Factual information here is more limited than it was for Armance. We do not

¹⁶"On ne saurait aimer une femme d'un esprit trop inférieur."
De l'Amour, XXXII.

see the child in the woman, and can only imagine what her upbringing was like. We have no idea what happened to her parents (they are not mentioned), at what age she entered the convent, and when or why she left it to marry M. de Rênal. Does this lack of information bother us? Most readers, unaware that it is missing, seize with alacrity upon what Stendhal does disclose. Too, there is little mystery about this heroine who is such a creature of the present, so convincingly is she shown from the beginning as a maternal figure and a shy retiring woman that we have no questions about her motivation. Her background seems of minor importance and only through close examination and careful consideration of Stendhal's method of portrayal does one become aware of the omissions.

Stendhal himself is not concerned with probing her past, as a cursory examination of these paragraphs will indicate. What he conveys can be reduced to several key ideas: Mme de Rênal may be simple, but she is not unintelligent. What she has been exposed to--education, marriage, and so on--has influenced her sensitive and proud nature, but she has learned little of positive value. Instead, this exposure has turned her ever-inward, and in order to survive assaults upon her peace of mind she lives a kind of interior existence, which is religious in essence, oblivious to all but her children. With her limited experience ("elle n'avait aucune expérience de la vie"), she has come to some firm conclusions about people, men in particular. She accepts them as they are and does not dream that they could be otherwise.

"Madame de Rênal était une de ces femmes de Province que l'on peut bien prendre pour sottés pendant les quinze premiers jours qu'on les voit," Stendhal begins. This is an inverted defense of his heroine, addressed to the reader who has reached the erroneous conclusion that

she is indeed sotte.¹⁷

Her reticence is justified by the social milieu:

Cet instinct de bonheur, naturel à tous les êtres, faisait que, la plupart du temps, elle ne donnait aucune attention aux actions des personnages grossiers au milieu desquels le hasard l'avait jetée.

The matter of her intelligence is pursued in the next paragraph:

"On l'eût remarquée pour le naturel et la vivacité de l'esprit si elle eût eu la moindre éducation," Stendhal hypothesizes. Placing the blame for her arrested development upon her miserable education affords Stendhal another opportunity to attack the Jesuit order. We learn that she was raised "chez les religieuses passionnées du Sacré Coeur de Jésus et animées d'une haine violente pour les Français ennemis des Jésuites." (The irony requires no comment: misplaced religious zeal is not their only form of hypocrisy.)

The form and content of this education are not discussed. Glossing over all the practical details of her existence in the convent, Stendhal alludes to the principles inculcated by the sisters:

Madame de Rênal s'était trouvée assez de sens pour oublier bientôt, comme absurde, tout ce qu'elle avait appris au couvent; mais elle ne mit rien à la place, et finit par ne rien savoir.¹⁸

By qualifying her education as absurde the author accounts for her igno-

¹⁷Elsewhere he told us that the women in town think she is sotte "parce que, sans nulle politique à l'égard de son mari, elle laissait échapper les plus belles occasions de se faire acheter de beaux chapeaux de Paris ou de Besançon." (I, iii) This is, of course, Stendhal's way of implying that Mme de Rênal's values are different; she is not frivolous.

¹⁸From a man who had very definite ideas about what women ought to be taught this is certainly not a far-reaching critique of convent education. His analysis of convent education in De l'Amour is not much more extensive. "L'éducation actuelle des femmes, ce mélange bizarre de pratiques pieuses et de chansons fort vives, est la chose du monde la mieux calculée pour éloigner le bonheur." Fragment 119.

rance. Interestingly, in Lucien Leuwen Stendhal continues to rely upon a faulty convent education to "explain," if not the character of one Mme de Chasteller, at least that gentle heroine's lack of experience. Here, however, it is the affective aspects of the education that interest him, and once they are indicated, he is able to assert, in phraseology reminiscent of that which he used for Armance, "Son éducation fut faite par la douleur."¹⁹

As for the opposite sex, based upon Mme de Rênal's acquaintance with three men:

la grossièreté, et la plus brutale insensibilité à tout ce qui n'était pas intérêt d'argent, de préséance ou de croix; la haine aveugle pour tout raisonnement qui les contrariait lui parurent naturelles à ce sexe, comme porter des bottes et un chapeau de feutre.²⁰

It is no wonder that she is favorably impressed by Julien; one wonders only about the length of time it will take before she surrenders completely to his charm.

What we cannot fail to notice in Stendhal's treatment of Mme de Rênal's past is that facts are meaningful only insofar as they explain her naïveté and shed some light upon her outlook. No one individual has exercised a positive and lasting influence upon her character or her habits. Her training, barely indicated, has been an éducation en négative. She has managed, nonetheless, to preserve a certain inde-

¹⁹ Stendhal has replaced the "assez grands malheurs" endured by Armance with the all-embracing douleur. Briefly summarized, Mme de Rênal, as the heiress to a huge fortune, was subjected to the "flat-teries mielleuses et empressées" of the sisters which experience, combined with her "penchant à la dévotion passionnée" gave her that "manière de vivre tout intérieure." Wounded by life in the convent, she fared no better in marriage, where her husband responded to her "besoin d'épanchement" with incomprehension and cruelty.

²⁰ It is probably with this passage in mind that Maurice Bardèche describes Mme de Rênal as "innocemment cynique." Op. cit., p. 210.

pendence of spirit- which thrives on love and will flourish brilliantly. And she has a natural aptitude for happiness; it has not been stifled, despite the repressive atmosphere in which she finds herself. In her development, in the past and in the mobile present, she appears to be less a product of her cultural milieu than a self-determined woman. Whatever the restraints she must overcome to give expression to her aptitudes, to satisfy the yearning of her heart, they are more within herself than socially imposed.

Given Mme de Rênal's unfortunate marital situation, one might think that she would be an ideal prey for the nefarious influence of romantic novels . . . like Flaubert's convent-educated Emma, who never quite recovers from her earliest readings about adventure, passion, and love. But Mme de Rênal does not read novels as a means of escape, and "le très petit nombre de romans que le hasard avait mis sous ses yeux" have failed to stimulate her imagination. Now, considering what Stendhal wrote to his friend Salvagnoli about the reading habits of provincial women, it is surprising that literature should have no place in the life of this heroine. Stendhal maintained that women in the provinces were voracious readers who read as many as six novels a month, sometimes as many as twenty! And in De l'Amour "depuis le premier roman qu'une femme a ouvert en cachette à quinze ans, elle attend la venue de l'amour passion" (Fragment 141) . . . further evidence that this heroine is neither typical of her era nor a product of her socio-cultural environment. That she does not turn to novels for enlightenment, for diversion, is a "fact" Stendhal delights in stressing.

In De l'Amour the generalized women he discusses are constantly thinking about love: "les dix-neuf vingtièmes de leurs rêveries habituelles sont relatives à l'amour." (VII) However, Mme de Rênal is an exception to this rule. If she thinks about love at all, it is rarely and her notions about it are atypical. The Curé Chélan has spoken about love à propos of Valenod's intentions--adulterous love, to be sure--and has painted such a disgusting picture of love that it comes to represent, to her, "l'idée du libertinage le plus abject." His lesson, which Mme de Rênal does not forget, authenticates her bouts of religious remorse. Furthermore, based on the few novels she has read "elle regardait l'amour comme une exception ou même tout à fait hors de nature." (I, vii) Thus in her "ignorance" she reproaches herself nothing and is at liberty to enjoy the early stages of her friendly relationship with Julien. Ignorance justifies the way she remains blind to the true nature of her feelings--for a while at least. And even after she admits to herself that she loves, there is ignorant bliss in her perceptions--"elle venait à songer à la douceur de vivre avec Julien innocemment, et comme par le passé"--and a delightfully, incredibly naïve chasteness, too:

Comme madame de Rênal n'avait jamais lu de romans, toutes les nuances de son bonheur étaient neuves pour elle. Aucune triste vérité ne venait la glacer, pas même le spectre de l'avenir. Elle se vit aussi heureuse dans dix ans qu'elle avait été en ce moment. ... Jamais je n'accorderai rien à Julien, se dit madame de Rênal, nous vivrons à l'avenir comme nous vivons depuis un mois. Ce sera un ami. (I, xiii)

Because she dismisses the lessons of literature and has no expectations or preconceptions, ignorance permits her a maximum amount of freedom, freedom to act according to her impulses, to experience everything in a fresh uninhibited manner. Her behavior, modest but not constrained,

is marvelously open to change at every moment. And the reader knows how her virtuous decisions are forgotten when love and happiness are at stake.

Stendhal's heroines do not follow the seven steps of crystallisation traced in De l'Amour. A tender woman such as Mme de Rênal invariably passes through the stage we indicated in our discussion of Armance, moving from extreme pity--for Julien's poverty--to admiration--when he rebuffs her offer of money--"elle le respecta, elle l'admira, elle en avait été grondé." This admiration places Julien on an equal footing, although he never knows it. Age distinctions have no more meaning to her than class differences.

As is usually the case with Stendhal's heroines, the intervention of a third person, often an insignificant "rival," forces the recognition or reaffirmation of the heroine's love for the hero. A jealousy that is, typically, unfounded stimulates love. For Mme de Rênal the pangs of jealousy bring her to ask herself "Aurais-je de l'amour pour Julien?"; they intensify her amorous passion and obliterate her most prudent resolutions.

Among the visible signs of Mme de Rênal's growing affection are "les soins plus tendres" that she permits herself, to assuage Julien's injured pride. "La nouveauté de ces manières fit pendant huit jours le bonheur de Mme de Rênal." After taking his arm for the promenade "elle s'appuya avec une façon singulière à Julien." Elsewhere it is "avec amitié" that she leans on him, and still later "d'une façon marquée." Yet no matter what she says and does, Julien long remains blind to the obvious, persistently viewing this unsnobbish, unaffected woman as a class enemy.²¹ Even after she has given herself to him, he is quick to

²¹"Il se dit: Elle est bonne et douce, son goût pour moi est vif, mais elle a été élevée dans le camp ennemi." (I, xvii)

to misjudge her.

Regarding the act of love itself, Julien, when he attains his objective, misses out completely on "le bonheur." For while seducing Mme de Rênal he is attentive to his notion of "devoir," involved in playing the role of an experienced Don Juan "au lieu d'être attentif aux transports qu'il faisait naître, et aux remords qui en relevaient la vivacité." Stendhal's point is that whenever Julien calculates, he fails to enjoy the fruits of his success with the opposite sex. As a result, the big event of his life is a total disappointment: "Mon Dieu! être heureux, être aimé, n'est-ce que ça?" Undoubtedly, our Julien has read too many novels.

As for Mme de Rênal, we are not allowed to penetrate her state of mind. There are, however, some references to her "transports"--as above, then later when Stendhal observes that Julien's departure "ne fit point cesser les transports qui l'agitaient malgré elle, et ses combats avec le remords qui la déchiraient." These transports are remarkable when viewed retrospectively--in the light of other Stendhalian love scenes where "transports" of passion are notably absent. But if Stendhal is herein implying that Mme de Rênal has been sexually fulfilled he does it with utmost delicacy. The responsive chords he stresses are her "indignation réelle," her "cruelles alarmes," and her fear of eternal damnation.

Only afterward, and with the aid of memory, does the event itself assume any importance. Passion is a state of mind that is divorced from the act of love. As we shall see, it is the chaste moments of in-

timacy that give the heroine and hero the most intense satisfaction.

The boudoir scenes in Stendhal's novels, far from being erotic, are not even the occasion for sensual pleasure. Reticence, if not extreme chastity, is what characterizes Stendhal's treatment of the realities of physical love. Sexual passion, physical arousal, and the satisfaction of desires are neither described nor intimated in the Rouge. Instead, we have an ironical allusion to what occurred: "On eût pu dire, en style du roman, que Julien n'avait plus rien à désirer." (I, xv) Some of the ramifications of Stendhal's decidedly pejorative use of the word "novel" will be examined later. Here "style du roman" connotes effusiveness, inflation--in a word, the enflure that Stendhal detested and struggled to avoid.

One cannot overlook the frequency with which Stendhal refers to novels in his own novels and elsewhere. In De l'Amour, speaking of the Italians, lauding their character, he says pointedly that in Florence "personne ne lit." (XLIX) And in the chapter "De l'Italie": "c'est le manque de la lecture des romans et presque de toute lecture qui laisse encore plus à l'inspiration du moment," he remarks, in praise of the spontaneity of Italian love. As for Italian girls, they are quite fortunate: "si elles aiment, elles sont livrées entièrement aux inspirations de la nature." (And in Stendhal's novels it is notable that the real "love scenes" habitually take place out of doors, in a natural setting.) The second paragraph of this fragment on Italian girls points--in the first sentence--directly to Mme de Rênal:

Comme si le hasard avait décidé que tout ici concourait à préserver le naturel, elles ne lisent pas de romans par la raison qu'il n'y en a pas. A Genève, en France, au contraire, on fait l'amour à quinze ans, pour faire un roman, et l'on se demande à chaque démarche et presque à chaque larme: Ne suis-je pas bien comme Julie d'Etanges? (Fragment 56)

As we suggested earlier, Mme de Rênal's indifference to novels highlights her "natural" spontaneous manner of loving. Above, when Stendhal goes on to oppose his Italians to the French we are obliged to recognize that too much familiarity with the novel of love--the "grand roman," La Nouvelle Héloïse--breeds artifice . . . and sometimes more. For in the Rouge and Leuwen the characters who are inspired by novels consistently fail to understand what love is all about. And the Stendhalian heroine who strives for "le grand amour à la Rousseau" is invariably incapable of loving "naturally," from the heart. Hence in Stendhal's novels "le roman" is self-negating.

The day following the first "nuit d'amour" we see Mme de Rênal, madly and passionately in love with Julien, blushing profusely:

Pour elle, elle ne pouvait le regarder sans rougir jusqu'aux yeux et ne pouvait vivre un instant sans le regarder; elle s'apercevait de son trouble et ses efforts pour le cacher le redoublaient. Julien ne leva qu'une seule fois les yeux sur elle. D'abord, madame de Rênal admira sa prudence. Bientôt, voyant que cet unique regard ne se répétait pas, elle fut alarmée: "Est-ce qu'il ne m'aimerait plus, se dit-elle; hélas! je suis bien vieille pour lui; j'ai dix ans plus que lui.

En passant de la salle à manger au jardin, elle serra la main de Julien. Dans la surprise que lui causa une marque d'amour si extraordinaire, il la regarda avec passion, car elle lui avait semblé bien jolie au déjeuner et, tout en baissant les yeux, il avait passé son temps à se détailler ses charmes. (I, xvi)

Pressure on the arm, a touch of the hand, an uncontrollable blush, or a meaningful glance--these are the ways Stendhal's women reveal their hearts. Limited physical contact is endowed with a rare significance.

It is the touch of the hand that sends our author into exaltation. "Le plus grand bonheur qui puisse donner l'amour," he declared over and over in De l'Amour, "c'est le premier serrement de main d'une femme qu'on

aime."²¹ "Souvenir" of Gina or Méthilde, it matters little. What fascinates us is that he focuses upon the hand with a frequency and a fervor that border on fetishism. In the Rouge Stendhal has created several scenes that deal with the touch of the hand. On two outstanding occasions the hand itself becomes the focus of dramatic tension.

Both scenes take place in the garden at Verger. One will recall that it is during those full and active days spent in the countryside that Julien and Mme de Rênal begin to experience a happiness unknown, a bonheur rousseauiste which Julien will recall with pleasure when he is confined in his prison cell at the end. The first scene is prepared from Julien's perspective. His project is to conquer her hand: "Julien pensait qu'il était de son devoir d'obtenir qu'on ne retirât cette main"--the depersonalizing "on" makes Mme de Rênal herself insignificant. His maneuvers take on the allure of a bitter and painful combat, a matter of life or death. For Julien, then, pride is at stake, and his success is marked by relief from fear and anxiety. If there is satisfaction it is a "jouissance d'orgueil." Happiness comes from conquest.

However, from Mme de Rênal's point of view the struggle turns into pure poetry:

Pour madame de Rênal, la main dans celle de Julien, elle ne pensait à rien; elle se laissait vivre. Les heures qu'on passa sous ce grand tilleul ... furent pour elle une époque de bonheur. Elle écoutait avec délices les gémissements du vent dans l'épais feuillage du tilleul, et le bruit de quelques gouttes rares qui commençait à tomber sur les feuilles les plus basses. (I, ix)

Now, if ever there are sexual overtones it is in this scene, when she "abandons" her hand to him; and as she speaks, her voice is

²¹De l'Amour, XXXII. And Fragment 69: "Quel moment que le premier serrement de main d'une femme qu'on aime." See also Fragment 32.

"mourante." It is with few words, and in the passive voice--"elle se laissait vivre"--that the full intensity of her serene and unexpected bliss is conveyed. Perhaps it could be argued that Stendhal uses the passive voice to stress the very passivity of his heroine. (A propos, it will be shown that in his next novel the passive voice is used to denigrate one of his heroines.) As for Mme de Rênal, if she has often seemed passive and docile until now, that impression does not long endure. For she demonstrates a willingness to hold her hand in Julien's by her own actions,²² and is neither passive nor impassive:

Mme de Rênal, transportée du bonheur d'aimer, était tellement ignorante, qu'elle ne se faisait presque aucune reproche. Le bonheur lui ôtait le sommeil. (I, ix)

In regard to subtle changes in vocabulary, which accompany changes in the woman, we have noticed that after Mme de Rênal has given herself to Julien and is fully committed to loving him, her thoughts, her desires are no longer in the realm of vague suppositions. And the passive voice gives way to "Mme de Rênal brûlait de se trouver seule avec Julien: elle voulait lui demander s'il l'aimait encore." (I, xvi, our emphasis.) The passionate woman in her has awakened.

In the garden, two chapters later, we find that Julien has become more audacious. This time his plan is to take possession of Mme de Rênal's hand in front of her husband--as repayment for the latter's scorn. But Julien is distracted sensually. Swept up by emotions he

²² Julien ne remarqua pas une circonstance qui l'eût bien rassuré; madame de Rênal, qui avait été obligée de lui ôter la main, parce qu'elle se leva pour aider sa cousine à relever un vase de fleurs que le vent venait de renverser à leurs pieds, fut à peine assise de nouveau, qu'elle lui rendit sa main presque sans difficulté, et comme si déjà c'eût été entre eux une chose convenue. (I, ix)

forgets himself and becomes responsive to the woman in her:

Il osa placer sa main très près du joli bras que la robe laissait à découvert. Il fut troublé, sa pensée ne fut plus à lui, il approcha sa joue de ce joli bras, il osa y appliquer ses lèvres. (I, xi)

For Mme de Rênal, "tout était imprévu." It is unadulterated happiness:

Son âme fut comme enlevée par ce bonheur charmant; ... la présence d'un bonheur que jamais elle n'avait même rêvé lui donn[a] des transports d'amour et de folle gaieté.

That her happiness is totally untutored and spontaneous, "un bonheur que jamais elle n'avait même rêvé," will be particularly meaningful in the second half of the novel as we compare her with Mathilde.

When Stendhal shifts back to his hero, Julien has forgotten his "noire ambition." More important, he is no longer playing a role and can now experience the fragile, ephemeral "pleasure" that seems to be the reward for sensitivity:

Pour la première fois de sa vie, il était entraîné par le pouvoir de la beauté. Perdu dans une rêverie vague et douce si étrangère à son caractère, pressant doucement cette main qui lui plaisait comme parfaitement jolie, il écoutait à demi le mouvement des feuilles du tilleul agitées par ce léger vent de la nuit, et les chiens du moulin du Doubs qui aboyaient dans le lointain. (I, ix)

The final sentence--lengthy, attenuated, rhythmic, cadenced almost in the manner of Chateaubriand--is similar in quality to the final sentence in the passage that was presented from Mme de Rênal's vantage point. Stendhal, who generally charms less by the eye than the ear, is attentive here to the fluctuations, the sounds and silences that correspond to an emotional state. Such transcendent moments which stand out in Stendhal's novels are infused with profound poetic meaning. This is "la musique du bonheur."

Yet Stendhal's allusion to Mme de Rênal as not a person but a force ("le pouvoir de la beauté"), and his classical treatment of her

"joli bras" and her hand that is "parfaitement jolie" combine to create a strange sense of disembodiment. Her arm, her hand, are but the excuse for rêverie. Julien, as Stendhal's observations suggest,²³ does not yet see or appreciate the whole woman. Not until after he has left Mme de Rênal far behind and gone on to Paris will he be capable of cherishing the woman and her love. And not until the end of the novel, when in his prison cell, does he experience happiness in her presence:

Pour Julien, excepté dans les moments usurpés par la présence de Mathilde, il vivait d'amour et sans presque songer à l'avenir. Par un étrange effet de cette passion, quand elle est extrême et sans aucune feinte, madame de Rênal partageait presque son insouciance et sa douce gaieté.

-- Autrefois, lui disait Julien, quand j'aurais pu être si heureux pendant nos promenades dans les bois de Vergy, une ambition fouguese entraînait mon âme dans les pays imaginaires. Au lieu de serrer contre mon coeur ce bras charmant qui était si près de mes lèvres, l'avenir m'enlevait à toi. ... Non, je serais mort sans connaître le bonheur, si vous n'étiez venue me voir dans cette prison. (II, xiv)

Julien in the present savors his past. Here is indicated the kind of shared happiness of mutual confidence that is extremely rare in Stendhal's novels. And, as in Armance, it is something of a prelude to death.

The sensitive, gentle heroine painted in Part One is in no way static. Her hidden loving nature, stimulated by amorous passion, emerges with vibrant splendor. Mme de Rênal awakens from the torpor of marital existence to become a woman full and complete. No doubt she is an uncom-

²³Pointedly, "Mais cette émotion était un plaisir et non une passion. En rentrant dans sa chambre il ne songea qu'à un bonheur, celui de reprendre son livre favori; à vingt ans l'idée du monde et de l'effet à y produire l'emporte sur tout." (I, xi, our emphases.)

plicated personality, especially in comparison with Mathilde. Yet her behavior and manner of loving are diverse. Sometimes gay, youthful, even childlike, she rises up from her docility to become assertive, yet never domineering. She exhibits "une adresse vraiment admirable chez une femme si naturelle" (II, xviii), says Stendhal with affectionate irony. She can display a remarkable presence of mind, when intent upon saving Julien from her husband's ire, for instance; still, she is made to seem, throughout the novel, uncalculatingly "naturel." She sins and repents, but she can only continue her transgressions. And Stendhal insists upon the absence of premeditation: "Aucun projet ne paraissait dans toute cette conduite." (I, xv)

As if to confirm the many ways his heroine has changed, our author, near the end of Part One, says, "Ce n'était plus cette femme simple et timide de l'année précédente; sa fatale passion, ses remords l'avaient éclairée." (II, xxiii) Nevertheless, certain aspects of Mme de Rênal remain unchanged. There is in her an undiminished generosity and purity of motive. "Elle aimait Julien mille fois plus que la vie." (II, xviii) Nor is she unfeeling toward her brutal, inconsiderate husband:

Elle eut sacrifié sa vie sans hésiter pour sauver celle de son mari, si elle l'eût vu en péril. C'était une de ces âmes nobles et romanesques.... (II, xxiii)

However much Mme de Rênal has been "éclairée," there clings to her a modesty, an innocence, and even a naïveté, this last reappearing near the end when she tries to "reason" with Julien about the nature of her love for him:

Dès que je te vois, tous les devoirs disparaissent, je ne suis plus qu'amour pour toi, ou plutôt, le mot amour est trop faible. Je sens pour toi ce que je devrais sentir uniquement pour Dieu: un mélange de respect, d'amour, d'obéissance ... En vérité je ne sais pas ce que tu m'inspires. Tu me dirais de donner un coup de couteau au geôlier, que le crime serait commis avant

que j'y eusse songé. Explique-moi cela bien nettement avant que je te quitte, je veux voir clair dans mon coeur. (II, xliii)

To hear these words is to know that her love for Julien is more than motherly. Yet it is the maternal image that Stendhal leaves with us in the closing lines of the novel:

Madame de Rênal fut fidèle à sa promesse. Elle ne chercha en aucune manière à attenter à sa vie; mais trois jours après Julien, elle mourut en embrassant ses infants.

This simple image of a woman who has died of a broken heart is placed in opposition to our fading picture of Mathilde--dressed in "longs vêtements de deuil," throwing coins to the multitude, burying Julien's head with "her own hands." But is dying of a broken heart less romantic than the romantisme fougoux that Stendhal betrays in Mathilde's gestures? In any case, Mme de Rênal's love is indubitably eternal. And she herself is, in our estimation, not only a very complex "simple woman," but also one of the most vital and touching of Stendhalian heroines.

Mathilde de la Mole

To become thoroughly acquainted with Mathilde de la Mole is to realize that young and beautiful heroines before her bear her scant resemblance. There is, in literature, no precedent for a woman like the proud and unpredictable woman in Part Two of the Rouge. She is a unique and original creation who, in our opinion, is less a product of her era than of Stendhal's imagination.

Though it would be easy to list her traits, Mathilde's character

does not lend itself to facile analysis. As the novel progresses, we understand that this heroine, endowed with every possible advantage of wealth and high birth, is an erratic and divided woman with conflicting needs and desires, as we intend to demonstrate. She is highly imaginative, much more "romanesque" than Armance, and, in certain respects, "impossible," as many writers (including the author himself in the context of the novel) have asserted. However, her impossibility does not make her less believable than Mme de Rênal. Nor does it interfere with our sympathy and approval of her personal aspirations or with our admiration for her audacity.

The reader in search of an evaluation of Mathilde's character cannot entirely rely upon the hero's and author's views of Mathilde.¹ Other witnesses contribute their impressions, which can prove confusing if every bit of information is taken seriously, particularly since the author, contrary to his custom with Mme de Rênal, does not often intrude to tell us whether or not these impressions are at variance with the truth. Mathilde herself is a witness, revealing to us a very strong self-conception. To know her one must follow closely all the action of the novel, penetrating her thoughts, observing her actions, watching her change under the influence of love.

Attentive to the effect that she produces upon others (unlike Mme de Rênal), Mathilde is extremely responsive to her own feelings and reactions but not to the feelings of those people whom she encounters daily. Vanity, which is one of Mathilde's predominant traits, will be

¹In fact, what we are told in Part Two, Chapter XIII seems designed to obscure our understanding of her personality. "Ce n'était point le caractère de Mathilde qui faisait rêver Julien.... Il avait assez de sens pour comprendre qu'il ne connaissait point ce caractère. Tout ce qu'il voyait pouvait n'être qu'une apparence."

seen as an impediment to selfless and generous loving. In De l'Amour Stendhal tells us that vanity is characteristic of French women. By stressing Mathilde's vanity, which is accompanied by "dryness of heart," the author endeavors to show that his heroine is typical of her class and social milieu. His idea of "La Pique de l'amour-propre" points directly to Mathilde.

La pique est un mouvement de vanité; je ne veux pas que mon antagoniste l'emporte sur moi, et je prends cet antagoniste lui-même pour juge de mon mérite.²

Mathilde's pique is fundamental to her unsteady relationship with Julien. She is intent upon dominating and controlling the man who, she believes, would be her master, and "victory" is on her mind as it is on Julien's.³ Proud, vain, headstrong, Mathilde is a worthy adversary for an ambitious and calculating young hero.

Although vanity and dry-heartedness are traits that Stendhal uses to limn Mathilde's character, traits that, in the novel, he derives from the upper-class Parisian milieu, Mathilde scarcely resembles the French women whom Stendhal generalizes in De l'Amour. She is the anti-thesis of French women.⁴

We have Stendhal's explanation of what he was attempting. His capsule analysis of Mathilde appears in his letter to Savagnoli. It may be taken with a grain of salt; nevertheless, the language is clear.

²De l'Amour, XXXVIII.

³"Dans la pique," Stendhal says, "on n'est nullement occupé du but apparent, il ne s'agit que de la victoire." (De l'Amour, XXXVIII, our emphasis.) He tells us that "l'amour par pique" passes rapidly, unlike "l'amour passion." And it is to l'amour passion that Julien returns after he has made his conquest and achieved his worldly ambitions.

⁴"Les femmes françaises," he proclaims, "sont des êtres moins agissants, moins énergiques, moins redoutés, et surtout moins aimés et moins puissants que les femmes espagnoles et italiennes." XLI.

"L'auteur a osé peindre le caractère de la femme de Paris" he maintains.

"M. de Stendhal n'a rien inventé; ... il a osé peindre l'amour de Paris."⁵

It is on the socio-cultural level that one should understand Mathilde's character, or so he suggests. Here, as in many other cases, Stendhal's character escaped his control. It may be that his explanation of his intentions was factitious, or that he did not clearly see what he had in fact created. It is apparent to the modern reader that as much as Mathilde may correspond to her milieu she differs in extraordinary ways.

Thus to perceive Mathilde as typical of a noble Parisian woman is to seriously limit the scope of her character. For in his portrayal of Mathilde Stendhal moves well beyond the realm of love by decisively depicting certain traits and quirks which suggest that she is qualified to play a more significant role in life than that of wife, mother, or mistress. She will not assume a major position in politics, although she is apparently well-suited to it, presumably because the role of the upper-class woman in Restoration France is conventionally circumscribed. What Stendhal "dares" to reveal to us is a woman who wants much more out of life than that offered by the immediate present and a predictable future. However, if there is nothing fragile, passive, or illusory about the ways Mathilde shows dissatisfaction and conveys her desires, the modern reader should not eagerly conclude that Stendhal was thereby expressing profound feminist sympathies. The heroine's expressed ambitions and aspirations are very much at variance with those of her peers, and they cannot be realized. In Stendhal's earliest novels the woman's role will be essentially limited to the pursuit of love.

⁵Romans et Nouvelles, Vol. I, pp. 700-714.

And ultimately, because Stendhal intrudes in order to enlighten us, it is Mathilde the mistress that we view and judge. No wonder the critics judge her harshly on this score. So does her creator! It is her manner of loving that he reproves, as will his hero.

Not surprisingly, Stendhal has given Mathilde traits that he wanted us to appreciate in the character of Armance: intelligence, pride, independence of spirit, and "singularity" to which he insistently directed our attention in his first heroine will be more thoroughly appreciated in Mathilde, primarily because they are well demonstrated. Her singularité and pride strike us forcefully. These traits are not merely noted and verified by other characters; they are also richly displayed.

Slowly, Mathilde's character is developed. The method of gradual portrayal through many perspectives, designed to bring out all of Mathilde's unique qualities and attributes while tantalizing us in the process--by leaving much of her character unknown--requires an extreme effort of reconstruction on the part of the reader.

Like Armance, Mathilde is portrayed in contrast to her peers, at odds with her milieu. Like Mme de Rênal too, Mathilde is made to seem different from those who surround her. But does Mme de Rênal really astound us as much as Mathilde? This lively heroine is truly an être d'exception. To portray her, Stendhal uses contrast and comparison inordinately. She is compared not only to other women in Paris but to Mme de Rênal and--perhaps most notably--to men as well.

While the general method of portrayal appears to remain the same

as for Mme de Rênal, there are noteworthy differences of degree and emphasis. And these differences, because of their frequency and manner, indicate that the author's own identification with this unusual woman is extremely personal . . . closer than with Armance or Mme de Rênal.

In what ways is it personal? Although we will not entirely ignore Stendhal's invention of incidents that correspond to memories and reveries that he himself experienced with a loved one, it is more the kind of woman that he has created that bespeaks self-identification. Energetic and unpredictable, she is the author's answer to nineteenth-century lethargy and boredom. By her own thoughts as much as through Julien's perceptions and the author's observations she emerges as an extremely virile woman.

Sometimes Stendhal's affection for Mathilde will be fairly obvious, as in his more obtrusive interventions: "Nous avouerons avec peine, car nous aimons Mathilde...." Foreseeing in advance reproaches that might be made, he is more than willing to recognize that she is unusual. "Nous nous hâtons d'ajouter que ce personnage fait exception aux mœurs du siècle." But while he has stressed her singular behavior, he would have us favor her for it; for in the next breath we find him subtly attacking other conventionally educated girls for their prudence. (II, xi)

The theme of nonconformism recurs in another intrusion, this one lengthier and parenthetical but no less significant. In it Stendhal makes an immediate play for the attention and sympathies of the reader. "Les âmes glacées," he says, will accuse him of indecency (which is sufficient to pique our curiosity and ally us with those who are compassionate). Then on to "les mouvements de folie qui dégradent le caractère de Mathilde" (which should, he hopes, do nothing of the sort).

Folie is to be understood in the positive sense; it stands for enthusiasm, spontaneity, spirit.

If Mathilde is, as he asserts, totally imaginary "et même imaginé[e] bien en dehors des habitudes sociales ... du XX^e siècle" (a refrain of what he said in Chapter XI), we recognize that this is sufficient reason to enjoy her as a vital creation. For, as in his earlier intervention, it becomes apparent that Stendhal is slyly poking fun at all that characterizes contemporary values and mores to thoroughly convince us that Mathilde--with her imprudent behavior, her "folies," her utter disdain for wealth, "des chevaux, de belles terres et tout ce qui assure une position agréable"--is deserving of our devoted attention if not our continuous admiration.

In the paragraph that concludes this parenthetical discussion he uses the word that critics seize upon with alacrity, "impossible," to describe Mathilde. The easy familiarity of his tone, however, should alert us that he is not completely serious:

Maintenant qu'il est bien convenue que le caractère de Mathilde est impossible dans notre siècle, non moins prudent que vertueux, je crains moins d'irriter en continuant le récit des folies de cette aimable fille. (II, xix)

And thus he deals with unconventional ways which should no longer disconcert us. Mathilde is admittedly "impossible," but he will make her believable by interesting us in everything she says, thinks, and does. Almost by force of will he imposes her upon his reader.

With knowledge of Stendhal's attitude toward the Renaissance it is not difficult to discern his affinity for Mathilde. In De l'Amour he wrote:

Au moyen âge, la présence du danger trempe les coeurs, et c'est là, si je ne me trompe, la seconde cause de l'étonnante supériorité des hommes du XVI^e siècle. L'originalité qui est chez nous rare, ridicule, dangereuse

et souvent affectée, était alors commune et sans fard.
(XLI)

Bold and vigorous, Mathilde embodies traits of Stendhal's personal image of the Renaissance man. Like Faustus she craves power over men and destiny. Add to this her desire to act and to live dangerously and she becomes Stendhal's first Renaissance heroine.

Mathilde, who identifies in spirit with her ancestor Boniface de la Mole and with Marguerite de Navarre, venerates the Renaissance. Even her conception of love harkens back to the Renaissance:

Elle ne donnait le nom d'amour qu'à ce sentiment héroïque que l'on rencontrât en France du temps de Henri III et Bassompierre. Cet amour-là ne cédait point bassement aux obstacles; mais, bien loin de là, faisait faire de grandes choses. (II, xi)

because this is the kind of love that suits her imaginative and eminently heroic nature. She sees such love as a kind of proving ground, and it certainly appears to be the only one available to a young lady of her background. Great in its audacity, such a love demands courage and strength of character which she possesses to a remarkable degree.

We are apprised that Mathilde's admiration of the Renaissance era is not shared by family and acquaintances. Likewise her romantic obsession with the amorous history of Boniface and Marguerite, which is another mark of her singularity. One knows how Mathilde's intense interest in Marguerite's beau geste--"car c'est une tête, une tête"--is finally satisfied at the end of the novel. We have Stendhal's words that it is the memory of Boniface and Marguerite "sans doute" that gives his heroine the "superhuman courage" to behave as she does. And the author may have intended a symbolic connection between Mathilde's love for her beheaded ancestor and her strange final performance on the one hand and her "amour de tête" for Julien, as one critic has maintained.⁶

⁶Robert Adams, Stendhal: Notes on a Novelist (New York: The Noonday Press, 1959), pp. 42-43, 114.

This dramatic climax to the novel, which has been widely criticized and attacked as invraisemblable, undoubtedly is incredible. After all, necrophilia is neither widespread nor particularly palatable. But Mathilde's action is not altogether inconsistent with her "impossible" character. No folie of the moment, Stendhal's grand finale has been carefully prepared in detail. In our opinion it satisfies his taste for the wildly romantic extremes which he was otherwise at pains to banish from his writing by controlling and polishing his style to avoid lyrical effusiveness.

Nevertheless, these aspects of Mathilde have been subject to a certain amount of adverse criticism. Harry Levin suggests that Mathilde's cult of her beheaded ancestor shows her to be a less natural woman than Mme de Rênal.⁷ F. W. J. Hemmings, who seems to share Levin's opinion, raises a more serious objection. He compares Julien with Mathilde and finds them both lacking in authenticity.

Although it is, or will be, apparent that Mathilde--intellectualizing about love, is less natural than Mme de Rênal, we cannot agree with Hemmings who notes that both Julien and Mathilde conform to borrowed models and asserts that there is a "vital criticism" implicit in Stendhal's portrayal of these characters who are "trying to live up to an alien ideal."⁸

In relation to models, René Girard, who thinks that the need for a "médiateur" nullifies spontaneity and is a sign of vanity, expresses yet another viewpoint. Julien dreaming of Napoléon, Mathilde dreaming of Boniface "sont plus éloignés de leur médiateur que ne sont les êtres

⁷ Harry Levin, Gates of Horn, p. 126.

⁸ F. W. J. Hemmings, Stendhal: A Study of His Novels (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 116-17.

qui les entourent." He feels that our protagonists are therefore freer--"moins esclave"--than the others. Mathilde in the salon (which she despises) "incarne la passion," but alone with Julien "elle change de rôle" and, by vanity, becomes like the others, normative.⁹ This interesting interpretation--which shows that Stendhal's characters are never one thing for all and furthermore suggests that the definition of a heroine may depend upon the way the novel is read--supports our conviction that Mathilde's personal identification with the Renaissance should not be scorned or derided.¹⁰ In fact, toward the end of the novel Stendhal has his hero comment upon the "romanesque" and "too adventuresome" aspects of Mathilde's nature. Then Julien tells her "vous étiez faite pour vivre avec les héros du moyen âge." It would be difficult to deny that this is a favorable definitive judgment, and one that is shared by the author.

Like Stendhal's earliest young heroine Armance, when first we meet her Mathilde is extremely subdued: she does not utter a word. The pattern of the silent young woman seated opposite the hero is then the same in the Rouge. Description of Mathilde's physical features is characteristically minimal, with the exception of her blond

⁹ René Girard, Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset), 1961, p. 148.

¹⁰ When Stendhal was a very young man, and long before he began to write fiction, he singled out the Renaissance, writing to his sister "c'est là [siècle de François Ier] où les femmes brillèrent." Letter to Pauline, April 19, 1805, in Correspondance, ed. by Henri Martineau and V. Del Litto, Vol. 1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 194.

hair which later becomes the focus of dramatic action and, of course, her eyes which are once again of prime interest to Stendhal. It is by the look in her eyes that Julien judges her:

Il pensa qu'il n'avait jamais vu des yeux aussi beaux; mais ils annonçaient une grande froideur d'âme. Par la suite Julien trouva qu'ils avaient l'expression de l'ennui qui examine, mais qui se souvient d'être imposant. Madame de Rênal avait cependant de bien beaux yeux, se disait-il ... mais ils n'avaient rien de commun avec ceux-ci. (II, ii)

The observation is brief and meaningful: hauteur, coldness, and boredom . . . all to be developed and explored. No less noteworthy is the way that Julien validates his impression by comparing her to Mme de Rênal. Stendhal soon does the same: he intrudes to tell us that her eyes sparkle with the "feu de la saillie" which he promptly compares to the light of passion and generosity in the eyes of Mme de Rênal. Presumably, the implication is obvious and it will be a while before this covert assessment of Mathilde changes. Although generosity will never be one of her qualities, "passion" does enflame her head and finally emblazons her heart.

Stendhal, like his hero, proceeds by disparities. Directly or indirectly, the contrasts and comparisons persist until the very end of the novel where--in the aftermath of Julien's decapitation--we are presented with distinctive and distinguishing images of each woman. But to what end? For what purposes are these two women compared?

Julien uses contrasts and comparisons to stimulate and to justify his reactions. As a novice he depends upon them to form judgments. Hence the frequency with which he evokes the tender loving image of his first mistress to match it unevenly against the present.

Mathilde le regardait avec une expression singulière. Voilà bien la coquetterie des femmes de ce pays telle que madame de Rênal l'avait peinte, se dit Julien. Je n'ai pas

été aimable pour elle ce matin, je n'ai pas cédé à la fantaisie qu'elle avait de causer. J'en augmente de prix à ses yeux.... Plus tard sa hauteur dédaigneuse saura bien se venger. Je la mets à pis faire. Quelle différence avec ce que j'ai perdu! quel naturel charmant! quelle naïveté! Je savais ses pensées avant elle, je les voyais naître, je n'avais pour antagoniste, dans son coeur, que la peur de la mort de ses enfants; c'était une affection raisonnable et naturelle, aimable même pour moi qui en souffrais. J'ai été un sot. Les idées que je me faisais de Paris m'ont empêché d'apprécier cette femme sublime.

Quelle différence, grand Dieu! et qu'est-ce que je trouve ici? De la vanité sèche et hautaine, toutes les nuances de l'amour-propre et rien de plus. (II, x)

What Julien fails to realize is that Mathilde corresponds perfectly to his youthful yearning for "une femme plus belle et d'un génie bien plus élevé que tout ce qu'il a pu trouver en province," Mme de Rênal included. (I, xii) Stendhal understood, as a novelist, that to have Julien fall immediately in love with Mathilde would diminish the reader's interest in her character. Julien's antipathy is provocative and it forces the reader to ask questions. Is she as haughty and unpleasant as he thinks? Does he misread her "expression singulière"? What is she really like? Other angles of vision will suggest that Julien is a bit prejudiced, to say the least.

What is certain is that Mme de Rênal's image is embellished at the expense of Mathilde who, in the early months, appeals to Julien no more than she did when he first saw her. Haughtiness, vanity, and egoism--trait by trait Mathilde is painted en négatif through Julien's eyes, all the more unattractive because she is measured against Mme de Rênal. However, when she is played off against her peers it is another story. Stendhal can hardly conceal his admiration for this woman who surpasses everyone in that which he values most highly: nonconformity, spontaneity, energy, and even the desire to live dangerously.

Thus, in answer to our earlier question, Stendhal's method of

comparison seems to have one fundamental purpose: to convey the detrimental aspects of Mathilde's nature. Whether the perspective is Julien's or Stendhal's, Mathilde is--as opposed to Mme de Rênal--extraordinarily proud, vain, and rather selfish. Stendhal cannot bring himself to state outright "c'était une âme égoïste,"¹¹ although he had no such inhibitions when it came to describing Mme de Rênal by epithet ("C'était une âme naïve."). This reluctance to confront the reader directly with Mathilde's serious character flaws suggests that he was more partial to her than he would care to admit. But vanity will be apparent in her early interior monologues; and a certain lack of compassion, if not selfishness, can be detected in her behavior toward almost every character in the novel--to name the one trait that Stendhal avoids mentioning. And yet, despite her faults--and to the author's credit for he has portrayed an imperfect but likable creature--we do not condemn her. She wins our affection.

There is still another explanation for this method. When Julien is madly and passionately in love with Mathilde, "maîtresse absolue de son bonheur comme de son imagination," (II, xxiv) when the goal of winning her heart becomes his sole ambition, thoughts of Mme de Rênal are far from his mind. This does not prevent Stendhal from conjuring up her image whenever and wherever it suits him. At the opera where Mathilde is daydreaming about Julien:

Grace à la musique, elle fut ce soir-là comme Madame de Rênal était toujours en pensant à Julien. L'amour de

¹¹Egoïste is perhaps the closest approximation for the English word "selfish." It may be that Stendhal had selfishness in mind when he has Julien expostulate about "vanité" and "les nuances de l'amour-propre" (see preceding citation on pages 81-82). But the point is that Julien must compare in order to evaluate Mathilde. Like most of Stendhal's heroes, and like Stendhal himself, Julien needs a model to which he can refer--whether to help sort out his impressions or to justify his reactions.

tête a plus d'esprit sans doute que l'amour vrai, mais il n'a que des instants d'enthousiasme; il se connaît trop, il se juge sans cesse; loin d'égarer la pensée, il n'est bâti qu'a force de pensées. (II, xix)

The tiniest reference to Mme de Rênal and her "amour vrai" is sufficient to cast doubt upon the sincerity of Mathilde's passion for Julien. And the entire citation lends weight to Stendhal's later contention that he had portrayed two different ways of loving: "C'est l'amour de tête comparé à l'amour de coeur," he asserted, after carefully examining the novel he had written. Perhaps if we were to scrutinize each passage in which the heroines are compared, it could be shown that all such passages are predicated upon the concept of two different ways of loving. Nevertheless, whereas Mme de Rênal's love is a spontaneous giving of herself heart and soul, an unquestioning and constant devotion to be sure, Mathilde's "amour de tête" does evolve into something different from what it was at the inception.

Her love, which began as a caprice of the intellect, becomes emotional. "Pour la première fois Mathilde aime," we are told in Chapter XXXII. "Cette âme sèche sentit de la passion tout ce qui est possible dans un être élevé au milieu de cet excès de civilisation que Paris admire." (II, xxxv) Furthermore, she changes under the influence of love, albeit briefly, for in the end Stendhal will have her appear as concerned with her self-image as she is with saving Julien from the guillotine.

There is an interesting similarity in the situations of these two heroines. It concerns boredom, "ce grand ennemi des gens heureux," as

Stendhal referred to it in De l'Amour.¹² In the early years of the nineteenth century he had considered writing about a certain "type" of woman--"une femme timide, occupée, mais cependant devant commencer à juger son mari."¹³ . . . unfavorably no doubt. This is Mme de Rênal avant la lettre, bored by her husband but for some reason incapable of recognizing it, as we have seen. Mathilde, too, is bored. But if the source of her boredom is different, so is her state of mind.

In the salon of Monsieur de la Mole boredom prevails. Conversations are understandably dull and meaningless because every controversial topic has been banished. People may know that they are bored, but they dare not admit it: "Les uns se consolait en prenant forces glaces, les autres par dire toute la soirée: Je sors de l'hôtel de la Mole...." Only Julien and Mathilde find it profoundly disturbing. Stendhal did not often discuss boredom in De l'Amour, but what he did say about it is particularly relevant to the heroine he later placed in the midst of a society in which "asphyxie morale" reigned unchallenged.

Plus grand est l'ennui de la vie habituelle, plus sont actifs les poisons nommés gratitude, admiration, curiosité. Il faut alors une rapide, prompte et énergique distraction.

C'est ainsi qu'un peu de rudesse et de non-curance dans le premier abord, si la drogue est administrée avec naturel, est presque un sûr moyen de se faire respecter d'une femme d'esprit. (XXXIXter)

The second paragraph had potential for development in the novel. The notion that a femme d'esprit could be won over by a little rough treatment is delightfully illustrated at every turn in the relationship that evolves between Julien and Mathilde.

The first paragraph is very nearly a thumbnail sketch of Mathilde

¹²Ch. XXXIX.

¹³Letter to Edouard Mounier, Aug.-Sept., 1803. Correspondance I, p. 80.

en situation, bored and in need of a quick cure. In the novel, at the Bal de Retz, Stendhal tells us, "Mathilde s'ennuyait en espoir."

Mais ni la danse, ni le plaisir de plaire à l'un des plus jolis hommes de la cour, rien ne put distraire Mathilde. Il était impossible d'avoir plus de succès. Elle était la reine du bal, elle le voyait, mais avec froideur.

Quelle vie effacée je vais passer avec un être tel que Croisenois! Où est le plaisir pour moi, ajouta-t-elle tristement, si après six mois d'absence je ne le trouve au milieu d'un bal qui fait l'envie de toutes les femmes de Paris? Et encore, j'y suis environnée des hommages d'une société que je ne puis imaginer mieux composée.... Et cependant, ajoutait-elle, avec une tristesse croissante, quels avantages le sort ne m'a-t-il pas donnés: illustration, fortune, jeunesse! hélas! tout excepté le bonheur.

Les plus douteux de mes avantages sont ceux dont ils m'ont parlé toute la soirée.... Je suis belle, j'ai cet avantage pour lequel Mme de Staël eût tout sacrifié, et pourtant il est de fait que je meurs d'ennui. Y a-t-il une raison pour que je m'ennuie moins quand j'aurai changé mon nom pour celui du marquis de Croisenois? (II, viii)

As we follow the progression of her thoughts we find that Mathilde is not really depressed. Nor are there overtones of deep self-pity in the conversation she carries on within herself. Her ability to examine herself critically (favorably, too) is quite refreshing. This high degree of self-awareness about her position contrasts sharply with Mme de Rênal's thoughts about her marital situation. What is more, Mathilde refuses to accept her current condition passively. Boredom is intolerable, and she does all that she can to dissipate it.

Ennui, as Stendhal expresses it in Mathilde, is not at all like the ennui de vivre and lassitude that had been articulated by romantic heroes such as Saint-Preux and René. Nor is there any possibility that, from boredom, Mathilde--or any other of Stendhal's heroines for that matter--could be subjected to the disillusioning and devastating round of experiences endured by an Emma Bovary. As it is rendered by Stendhal, boredom is a positive force that, once recognized, can be regenerative. Mme de Rênal avoids boredom by withdrawing from the company of those who

offend her. Mathilde avoids it in many ways: by provocatively replying to the letters of her admirers, by projecting her imagination upon energetic men, by identifying with a bygone era, by inventing witticisms and--most effectively of all--by engaging in the grand projet of loving Julien Sorel: "Du moment qu'elle eût décidé qu'elle aimait Julien, elle ne s'ennuya plus." (II, xii) In Stendhal's books boredom is "almost the prime condition,"¹⁴ the prerequisite to falling in love--for a woman. This is what Stendhal implies in De l'Amour when he uses the word "distraction," and this is the route that both heroines follow in the Rouge: the first woman bored without knowing it, the second bored and uncomfortably aware of it.

Here is our first glimpse of Mathilde through Julien's eyes: "une jeune personne, extrêmement blonde et fort bien faite," apparently an attractive young lady; however, her sway over the hero, despite her beauty, is by no means immediate for his earliest impressions are far from agreeable. "Elle ne lui plut point." And he swiftly concludes that she will "never be a woman in his eyes."¹⁵ This conclusion hints at her lack of femininity and sets the tone for future encounters.

A brusque and decisive woman, there is nothing soft or feminine about her. When later she appears unexpectedly before Julien in the

¹⁴Victor Brombert has discussed Stendhal's use of boredom and finds that "it is almost the prime condition of fervor." Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 78.

¹⁵The Rouge, II, ii.

library, her hair in curlers, "Julien lui trouva l'ai dur, hautain, presque masculin." The virility that he perceives in her manner recurs in her gestures and even in the sound of her voice--"cette voix vive qui n'a rien de féminin" . . . for him. Stendhal seems to corroborate Julien's impressions when he conjectures: "Il se serait presque avoué si elle était moins à la mode, que son parler avait quelque chose d'un peu coloré pour la délicatesse féminine," which is not to say that he is denigrating his heroine. On the contrary, he delights in her atypical mode of speech; it distinguishes her from other refined women and is the kind of imperfection that her wants us to approve.

Much later, toward the end of the novel, one notices a curious statement made by Julien in prison: "Le ciel devait à la gloire de ta race de te faire naître homme," he says to Mathilde. (II, xlii) Could this be anything other than a direct allusion to her virility, spoken by a disinterested hero who by now knows her almost as well as we do?

In intellect Stendhal compares Mathilde to men only: "Elle avait le malheur d'avoir plus d'esprit que MM. de Croisenois, de Caylus, et ses autres amis." (II, viii) What is surprising and amusing is her awareness on this score:

L'esprit, j'y crois, car je leur fais peur évidemment à tous. S'ils osent aborder un sujet sérieux, au bout de cinq minutes de conversation ils arrivent tous hors d'haleine, et comme faisant une découverte à une chose que je leur répète depuis une heure. (II, viii)

By her faculty of criticism we recognize that Mathilde is a woman after Stendhal's heart. Intellectually equal when not superior to men, she is frequently the author's mouthpiece in regard to the dullness of society life, the absence of energy, and sycophancy.

Through her criticism of men and manners Stendhal rebukes the nobility and launches a limited attack upon the Restoration government.

Knowing, as we do, how high on Stendhal's list of priorities he places reading and the acquisition of ideas, we cannot fail to be impressed by the way Mathilde has developed her mind--on her own, independent of parental supervision and guidance.

Although the novels of Sir Walter Scott have been forbidden to her by her mother (no great loss, for when Stendhal wrote the Rouge he was no longer an admirer of Scott's realism), Mathilde has access on the sly to all the wondrous books (which sent Julien into ecstasy when he first saw them) in her father's library. Her readings are diverse, ranging from history to political tracts to novels. "Cette pauvre fille, à dix-neuf ans, avait déjà besoin du piquant de l'esprit pour s'intéresser à un roman," Stendhal observes approvingly (II, iv), for he has endowed her with the qualities of mind that he had hoped to inspire in his sister Pauline.

Reading, which he represented to Pauline as a praiseworthy and educational means of escape from the tedium of daily life, has influenced the formation of Mathilde's esprit in many ways. History and memoirs of the Renaissance era reinforce her love for the sixteenth century. Contributing to her deep interest in ideas, books likewise stimulate her fiery imagination--whereas we know how the nobility frowns upon both ideas and imagination: "La moindre idée vive semblait une grossièreté." (II, iv)

Mathilde's familiarity with novels is not without adverse effects: it breeds in her a certain naïveté in regard to love. According to what

Stendhal told us in Part One, "à Paris l'amour est fils du roman" (I, vii) and he is determined to prove that love, as it has been depicted in literature is a distortion which, if believed, will eliminate le bonheur of love's inherent joys and sorrows.

Stendhal implies that it is under the influence of her reading that Mathilde decides that she is in love with Julien.

Elle repassa dans sa tête toutes les descriptions de passion qu'elle avait lues dans Manon Lescaut, la Nouvelle Héloïse, les Lettres d'une Religieuse portugaise, etc., etc. Il n'était question, bien entendu, que de la grande passion; l'amour léger était indigne d'une fille de son âge et de sa naissance. (II, xi)

She then skillfully, imperiously, arranges an assignation with him.

But once Julien arrives in her bedroom, book learning is of no avail.

Like a drill sergeant Mathilde orders him about, telling him what to do with the ladder, etc. "Et c'est là une femme amoureuse! pensa Julien, elle ose dire qu'elle m'aime! tant de sang-froid, tant de sagesse dans les précautions...." However, after he has obeyed her commands, her "sang-froid" evaporates and Mathilde is confronted with the enormity of the situation: "Elle n'avait nullement prévu l'état affreux où elle se trouvait." Mutual embarrassment becomes the keynote of an unforgettable love scene that frequently borders on hatred. Mathilde has no intuitive sense of how to behave to alleviate the tension; she cannot move graciously beyond her preoccupation with self to discern Julien's feelings. Her movements are constricted, performed out of a sense of "duty":¹⁶

¹⁶ There are several references to devoir: "S'il n'y avait rien de tendre dans son âme, c'est que ... quelque étrange que ce mot puisse paraître, Mathilde, dans toute sa conduite avec lui, avait accompli un devoir." And, "Mademoiselle de la Mole croyait remplir un devoir envers elle-même et envers son amant."

Mathilde faisait effort pour le tutoyer. Elle était évidemment plus attentive à cette étrange façon de parler qu'au fond des choses qu'elle disait. (II, xvi)

Needless to say, novels have not provided her with savoir-faire or sophistication. She remains very much the innocent and inexperienced jeune fille of whom there were and are many in France and elsewhere, whose awkwardness and discomfort, we submit, have nowhere been so acutely described in a "love scene" in French literature.

It is by the effort of her own will that she yields to Julien. "Mathilde finit par être pour lui une maîtresse adorable" is the ironical comment that informs us she has responded with some warmth and is no longer a virgin. Skirting description of the physical union itself, Stendhal focuses instead upon the ambivalence that precedes it and upon an aftermath totally devoid of tenderness on the part of both the hero and the heroine.

The discrepancy between what Mathilde has experienced and what novels have promised is enormous:

Il n'y eut rien d'imprévu pour elle dans cette nuit que le malheur et la honte qu'elle avait trouvés au lieu de l'entière félicité dont parlent les romans.

Thus, far from enriching or facilitating Mathilde's first amorous experience, the romanesque image of love leads instead to disappointment. And Mathilde wonders if she does indeed love Julien after all--in sharp contrast to Mme de Rênal who, ignorant of the lessons of literature, suffers not from disappointment but from twinges of conscience ("les remords"). Nor is she ever torn by doubts as to whether or not she loves the man to whom she has given herself.

While it is clear that Mathilde's first-hand acquaintance with love has been psychologically--if not physically--discomfiting, in the days that follow this disappointment will not be what disturbs her most.

Her qualms stem from the notion that she now has a master whose power over her is limitless. And if there is one thing that Mathilde cannot tolerate, it is that she should depend upon another for her well-being and happiness. Even before she engaged in the liaison with Julien she had misgivings:

La profondeur, l'inconnu du caractère de Julien eussent effrayé, même en nouant une relation ordinaire. Et elle en allait faire son amant, peut-être son maître!

Quelles ne seront ses prétentions, si jamais il peut tout sur moi? Eh bien! je me dirai, comme Médée: Au milieu de tant de périls, il me reste MOI. (II, xiv)

Her intrepid self-sufficiency, if not her loathing of masculine control, rings out clearly.

It is Mathilde's courage, Stendhal tells us, that gives her the strength to rebel against Julien's domination (as she sees it, for domination is certainly not on Julien's mind); and her need for anxiety-- "l'idée qu'elle jouait à croix ou à pile son existence entière"--urges her on.

Maurice Bardèche has analyzed Mathilde's character to propose that she is very much the "héroïne de Corneille." Now, undeniably there are many strains in Stendhal's heroine reminiscent of Corneille's women: her "caractère ferme" and her inveterate pride which are suggestive of Chimène and Emilie; a need for conflict and anxiety; her love of chance and of danger as well. M. Bardèche writes:

Elle aime le danger, il y a en elle un besoin d'anxiété.... Elle a le mot des héroïnes de Corneille: "Tout doit être singulier dans le destin d'une fille comme moi." Elle se donnera donc à Julien par héroïsme, parce qu'il n'y a pas de réparation possible. Mais elle se refusera ensuite par le même besoin d'héroïsme, et, comme les jeunes filles de Corneille, pour dépasser un acte difficile par un acte plus difficile encore. Elle se refusera par défi, et aussi pour rester à ses yeux une héroïne, c'est à dire ... celle qui n'est point domptée.¹⁷

¹⁷M. Bardèche, Stendhal romancier, pp. 217-18.

But if we share his conviction that Mathilde is Corneillian it is for somewhat different reasons. Her sense of honor, for example--a rigid and ludicrous notion of duty that obliges her to carry out what she has promised:

Elle avait décidé que s'il osait arriver chez elle avec le secours de l'échelle du jardinier, ainsi qu'il lui été prescrit, elle serait tout à lui.... Mademoiselle de la Mole croyait remplir un devoir envers elle-même et envers son amant. (II, xvi)

The so-called heroic aspects of Mathilde's character which Bardèche has chosen to emphasize are more often apparent as a reflection of the author's vocabulary in the novel.¹⁸ Furthermore, the critic has given Stendhal little credit for his very original interpretation of a woman who needs to be constantly challenged and who thrives upon the unexpected and the unknown.

Finally, in reference to the citation above, we believe that M. Bardèche forces the comparison on dubious grounds.¹⁹ Specifically, it is not "par besoin d'héroïsme" that Mathilde refuses to submit to Julien but, in fact, because she believes she has fallen out of love. "Son mot si franc [Julien's] vint tout changer en un instant: Mathilde, sûre d'être aimée, le méprisa parfaitement." This new attitude is directly related to her need for anxiety, a need that closely allies her with her creator whose conviction that uncertainty enhances love had earlier been revealed.²⁰

¹⁸The recurrence of the word héroïque is striking: not only Mathilde's identification with "les temps héroïques de la France" (II, x; II, xiv), but also her notion of love as a "sentiment héroïque" as well as her acts of "héroïsme" at the end of the novel.

¹⁹It should be noted that Bardèche reads the Rouge "d'un bout à l'autre" as a political novel. And he unquestioningly accepts Stendhal's factitious analysis of Mathilde as gospel. Op. cit., pp. 189, 210.

²⁰Mathilde's need for uncertainty is elsewhere manifested as a delight in the unforeseen. It is because she knows in advance what men are going to say to her and how they will behave that she finds them so lackluster and contemptible.

Mathilde's "besoin d'anxiété" is spotlighted in Chapter XII where the term is found in italics in the epigraph and becomes explicit in her interior discourse. There she ruminates upon the difficult challenge of loving Julien, and it is the "noire incertitude de l'événement" that appeals to her.

Twice in De l'Amour Stendhal refers to uncertainty:

Toujours un petit doute à calmer, voilà ce qui fait la soif de tous les instants, voilà ce qui fait la vie de l'amour heureux.²¹

Passion dissolving into doubts, stimulated by anxiety. Only when one is uncertain can love be sustained. This was the special form that love often took for Stendhal, and for his heroine, and whether we call it doubt or anxiety it amounts to the same thing. Assured of Julien's love, Mathilde ceases loving him; however, when in doubt her love increases.

Tension and uncertainty, sometimes translated into the need to esteem and to be esteemed, are at the core of the game of love as it is played between Julien and Mathilde, sustaining not only that love but the interest of the reader as well. And when the game is over, when the score is tallied, it is Mathilde who remains in doubt:

Julien suivait son rôle avec tant d'application qu'il était parvenu à lui faire penser qu'elle était celle des deux qui avait le plus d'amour. (II, xxxii)

While critics have often observed that Mathilde rebels at the idea of being mastered, there is a tendency to ignore evidence suggesting that Mathilde longs to be dominated.

²¹De l'Amour, XXXII, XXXIX.

What we have found operating in Mathilde is a streak of sadomasochism, that is, a need to suffer and to inflict suffering upon others. Leaving aside the sexual connotations of the term, and attending only to the emotional, psychological components, can there be any question that Mathilde is impelled to make other people suffer? With stinging sarcasms she adeptly cuts to the core of a man's self-esteem: "Cet esprit triomphait dans l'art de torturer les amours-propres et de leur infliger des blessures cruelles." (II, xx) In the beginning Julien is an objective witness to her cruelty: "elle répondait à ses amis par des plaisanteries outrageantes à force de piquante énergie," and he is "indignant at the outrages made upon masculine dignity." (II, xiii) But then her cruelty is turned against him, though not in the form of jest or verbal sally. Recounting to him the feelings she supposedly had for other men, she tells him about the letters she wrote to them:

Les derniers jours elle semblait contempler Julien avec une sorte de joie maligne. Ses douleurs étaient une vive jouissance pour elle.²²

Abuse and scorn are so seldom accorded to her that she reacts with astonishment when she encounters unkind treatment:

La froideur de son partenaire la déconcerta. Elle fut d'autant plus étonnée, que c'était elle qui avait coutume de produire cet effet-là sur les autres. (II, viii)

Like Julien she cannot tolerate scorn: "Elle avait été méprisée et ne pouvait le mépriser." And yet, paradoxically, she wants to be mistreated and dominated by the man she admires.

Her yearning to suffer becomes apparent at the opera. Hearing the words of the héroïne de l'opéra, "Il faut me punir de l'excès d'adora-

²²II, xviii, our emphases.

tion que je sens pour lui, je l'aime trop!" Mathilde goes into a trance. The temptation to suggest that this is merely a temporary romantic notion of hers, because she is moved by the music, is great. But, in fact, we soon discover that there is nothing fanciful about the emphasis that Stendhal has placed upon the words of the song. As F. W. J. Hemmings has pointed out, while Stendhal sometimes uses language gracelessly, he never uses it carelessly.²³ Confirmation of this observation may be found in a subsequent passage where Mathilde exclaims to Julien, "Punis-moi de mon orgueil atroce," and elsewhere, "Oui, tu es mon maître, règne à jamais sur moi, punis sévèrement ton esclave quand elle voudra se révolter." Here, too, is proof that she yearns to be dominated by the man she admires. That she submits to punishment is shown in the battle between them, for it is by feigned indifference ("non-curance") and cruelty that Julien masters her in the end.²⁴

This woman, whose capacity to inflict suffering is not diminished by her desire to suffer, becomes a complex heroine vacillating between compulsion and audacity. To dominate and yet be dominated, to punish and be punished, to hold everyone in contempt and yet be admired for it--if not by others at least by the one man she cannot easily abuse--these are the contradictory impulses that we find in Mathilde.

Any attempt to show that Stendhal's own impulses were sadistic would undoubtedly be wasted effort: cruel treatment of women was not his forte. Nevertheless, he insisted upon the rigors of the beloved

²³F. W. J. Hemmings, Stendhal: A Study of His Novels (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 108.

²⁴Specifically "les mots cruels" with which he addresses her.

and the perils and sufferings of the one who loves. The sublime of love, for Stendhal, is marked by intense suffering of which both Mathilde and Julien--who suffer intermittently--may be seen as the author's self-projections.²⁵

The intrinsic value that Stendhal has given to angoisse and extrême malheur in De l'Amour and other autobiographical works as well as in his novels originates in his own experience. "L'état habituel de ma vie a été celui d'amant malheureux," he confides in La Vie de Henri Brulard. (II)

Facile conquests held few attractions for this man who plotted out numerous strategies preparatory to winning a woman's favor,²⁶ campaigning lengthily in order to seduce her. Love as the struggle of opposing forces was a form of warfare. And the joy of conquering an implacable foe--an imperious, majestic Mathilde--had been envisioned by Stendhal long before he undertook the writing of his second novel:

Il y a un plaisir délicieux à serrer dans ses bras une femme qui vous a fait beaucoup de mal, qui a été votre cruelle ennemie pendant longtemps et qui est prête à l'être encore.²⁷

And Julien, engaged in a "commerce armé" to wonder: "Serons-nous aujourd'hui amis ou ennemis?" (II, x) little dreaming that he will one day luxuriate briefly in victory--"La voilà donc, cette orgueilleuse à mes pieds!" (II, xxix)

²⁵In this regard Jean Starobinski's essay "Stendhal pseudonyme" is extremely revealing, for he illuminates Beyle's "self-personalization." L'Oeil vivant (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

²⁶"En amour notre vanité dédaigne une victoire trop facile." (De l'Amour, X). At the age of twenty Stendhal carefully listed the practices most useful in the conquest of women. Mélanges de Littérature, II (Paris: Le Divan, 1933), pp. 22-24.

²⁷De l'Amour, Fragment 19.

Julien's subjugation of Mathilde takes on personal meaning for Stendhal. Not only is she the woman who causes the hero great anguish. She becomes the woman who made Stendhal suffer. Through Julien, to whom he lends so many of his own feelings and desires,²⁸ Stendhal relives love and conquers his "ennemie" at last. In fiction this conquest is ultimately irrevocable, for afterwards Julien rejects Mathilde. Surely Julien's success was compensatory for Stendhal, perhaps a form of literary "revenge," as Jean Prévost has suggested.²⁹

One particularly moving passage in the novel conveys how much of himself Stendhal invested in Julien, the dreamer, who, because of his fears and timidity, is destined to live more intensely in his imagination than in actuality. The passage appears shortly before the culmination of Julien's conquest; he is calmly talking to Mathilde about her character and simultaneously struggling to control his wayward emotions. He cannot reveal his real feeling for Mathilde, but the reader will have a glimpse into his thoughts:

Ah! se disait-il en écoutant le son des vaines paroles
que prononçait sa bouche, comme il eût fait un bruit
étranger; si je pouvais couvrir de baisers ces joues si
pâles et que tu ne le sentisses pas. (II, xxx)

The duality of Julien the speaker-actor and Julien the tender, passionate lover is easily reconciled, for all his success thus far has resulted from role-playing, subterfuge, and deception.

²⁸The parallel between Julien's astonishment and joy upon receiving a declaration of love from Mathilde and the reactions of Stendhal, who was no less overwhelmed to learn from Giulia di Rinieri that she would be his, has been drawn by several critics: A. Caraccio, *Stendhal* (Paris: Hatier, 1951), p. 151; F. W. J. Hemmings, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

²⁹"La revanche imaginaire, ce rêve de compensation qui succède à la douleur de l'échec et en marque la convalescence, est un des excitants les plus forts de l'imagination créatrice." *Op. cit.*, p. 246.

Passion is in the intensity of his desire--a desire that corresponds to the erstwhile yearning of Henri Beyle in the presence of the woman he held in awe and dared not embrace.³⁰ Modest and exquisitely chaste, his desire is nonetheless poignant because it is unattainable. To pursue it would be to reveal his hand too soon.

In love the most ardent desires are those that are simple and chaste. And here the fusion of the author and hero is complete.³¹ It is not at the moment of the experience itself that Stendhal's hero more often arrives at happiness. Le bonheur is attained elsewhere, mentally, and tends to require the intervention of distance or time: "Son amour et son bonheur augmentaient à mesure qu'il s'éloignait de la bataille." (II, xxx) Is this true of Stendhal's heroines as well?

Mme de Rênal has little difficulty surrendering to the moment itself, which is something that Julien finally recognizes when he compares her to Mathilde--from whom he is now demanding "guarantees" of her love for him.

Madame de Rênal trouvait des raisons pour faire ce que son coeur lui dictait: cette jeune fille du grande monde ne laisse son coeur s'émouvoir que lorsqu'elle s'est

³⁰Jean Prévost argues convincingly that Stendhal's love for Méthilde Dembowska stands behind the story of Julien and Mathilde, for "sources of emotion," suggesting that what Méthilde touched off in M. Beyle was passed on to Julien--"Tous les malheurs de Julien, ses rêves quand il est repoussé, ses rêves en présence de Mathilde quant il n'ose s'approcher d'elle...." Op. cit., p. 246.

³¹Michel Crouzet interprets Julien's thoughts in a different way. "Le souhait de Julien de l'insensibilité de l'aimée révèle ce désir d'une absence radicale de la femme." (Preface to De l'Amour (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965), p. 25.) But it is clear to us that Julien desperately desires this limited physical contact with Mathilde yet fears her uncertain reaction. In fact, he expresses a similarly chaste but intense desire earlier: "Elle va se fâcher, m'accabler de mépris, qu'importe? Je lui donne un dernier baiser, je monte chez moi et je me tue ... mes lèvres toucheront sa joue avant que de mourir!" II, xix, our emphases.

prouvé par de bonnes raisons qu'il doit être ému.
(II, xxx)³²

Expectations and preconceptions do not impinge upon Mme de Rênal's capacity to live, fully and intensely, the time she spends in the presence of the man she loves. Notwithstanding her extreme modesty or the feelings of remorse with which she berates herself afterwards, happiness comes to Mme de Rênal easily; naturally and unselfishly too, for her nature is such that she derives as much pleasure from giving as receiving. Despite the differences of class and the disparity of age between this motherly woman and the youthful Julien there exists a kind of equality that Julien will never encounter with Mathilde.

Encouraged to believe that happiness is her due, Mathilde has demands and expectations that are not easily fulfilled. Her quest for le bonheur is, in the Stendhalian context, perfectly legitimate. He even seems to approve the way she goes about it. But there is no getting around the evidence that she is aggressive, arrogant, and, occasionally, downright unpleasant. She usurps the masculine role and even after undergoing a kind of metamorphosis she will revert to characteristic behavior--offending Julien by her ways.

It is, then, when she is truly in love "for the first time" that Mathilde begins to be contented: "Mathilde fut presque heureuse

³²When this passage is placed alongside of Stendhal's intrusive remarks in Chapter XIX ("L'amour de tête a plus d'esprit ... que l'amour vrai....") we see that Julien has finally reached the proper conclusion about Mathilde's intellectual way of loving.

ce jour-là car elle fut toute à l'amour." (II, xxx) And for a brief period she changes under the influence of love.

In what ways does she change and how does she remain the same? First, her pride is submerged ("On eût dit que jamais cette âme altière n'avait été agitée par l'orgueil") as she defers to Julien and willingly obeys him. Second, her manner with Julien is so completely altered that it begins to resemble that of Mme de Rênal:

Quand la douceur de Mathilde, qu'il observait avec étonnement, et l'excès de son dévouement étaient sur le point de lui ôter tout empire sur lui-même, il avait le courage de la quitter brusquement. (II, xxxii)

She is now docile and compliant; her behavioral changes are remarkable, "but" . . . as Stendhal will indicate, her fundamental character remains the same:

Mais, submise et presque humble avec lui, elle n'en montrait que plus de hauteur envers tout ce qui dans la maison l'approchait, parents ou valets. (II, xxxii)

With the onset of her pregnancy the pace of the novel accelerates. Events press upon the protagonists. Decisiveness is required. And Mathilde slips easily into her old familiar position of command.³³

There are many angles of vision through which Mathilde is portrayed. They do not always correspond to those of the hero:

Que cette grande fille me déplait!... Quels cheveux sans couleur à force d'être blonds! On dirait que le jour passe à travers!... Que de hauteur dans cette façon de saluer, dans ce regard! quels gestes de reine! (II, viii)

³³"Laisse-moi conduire nos affaires," s'écria-t-elle avec transport et en le serrant dans ses bras." And on the same page, "Pour obéir à Mathilde, dont il connaissait l'amour pour le commandement...." II, xxxiii, our emphases.

The Marquis de Croisenois does not share Julien's distaste. He sees her as a very marriageable party: nevertheless, he is troubled by her singularity, which he tries to rationalize away:

Et d'ailleurs, cette singularité peut passer pour du génie. Avec une haute naissance et beaucoup de fortune le génie n'est point un ridicule, et alors quelle distinction! Elle a si bien, d'ailleurs, quand elle veut, ce mélange d'esprit, de caractère et d'à-propos qui fait l'amabilité parfaite.... (II, viii)

This exterior societal image of Mathilde is shared by M. Croisenois' peers who have no difficulty discerning Mathilde's attractiveness. At the Bal de Retz, where Mathilde is the star attraction, Julien overhears a lively dialogue among young men who are enumerating her "perfections," much to Julien's surprise: "Puisqu'elle passe pour si remarquable aux yeux de ces poupées, elle vaut la peine que je l'étudie." However, while they agree about the allurements of the "sublime" Mathilde, it with a bit of fear that men enjoy her company.

Certain perspectives tend to confirm the accuracy of Julien's observation that Mathilde is haughty and regal. The image of Mathilde as a queen surrounded by her admiring courtiers occurs at the ball and within the La Mole salon. And the Italian proscrit Altamira exclaims, "Comme elle serait belle sur un trône!" Although Mathilde's manner may be arrogant and disdainful, this is one man who views it favorably:

Le comte Altamira était un des admirateurs les plus déclarés de l'air hautain et presque impertinent de mademoiselle de la Mole; elle était suivant lui l'une des plus belles personnes de Paris. (II, vii)

The problem of sorting out these and other viewpoints to better compose a coherent image of Mathilde is not resolved by the author. We must make of the various impressions what we will. Croisenois' estima-

tion, for example, is evidently valid,³⁴ but it betrays his own conventionality and lack of imagination. Altamira, on the other hand, approves in Mathilde what most men find disquieting--an approval which not only confirms the existence of these traits but also forces the reader to re-evaluate Mathilde's manner, for certainly Stendhal gives us reason to believe that Altamira is an honorable and admirable witness.

To return to Julien, his initial response to Mathilde's physical appearance is spontaneous and sincere. But as his disagreeable impressions accumulate it becomes apparent that he is biased and sees her as a representative of the nobility and a "poupée parisienne." His hostile reactions are colored by both his touchiness at being treated like the subaltern that he is, and by the tender idealized memory of Mme de Rênal.

Eventually, his viewpoint is modified--"Il commençait à ne plus prendre pour de la sécheresse ce genre de beauté qui tient à la noblesse du maintien." (II, x) And this process of change is one that owes as much to Mathilde's singularité--which so disturbs Croisenois--as it does to her flattering attentions to Julien--they are balm for his supersensitive ego.

The little telltale signs of growing affection which Stendhal cherishes--a slight pressure on the arm, gentle attentiveness to his words--will lead Julien to the obvious conclusion: "Mais non, ou je suis fou ou elle me fait la cour." Still, he has his doubts; however, his image of Mathilde is now completely altered: "Mon Dieu, qu'elle

³⁴In another setting the La Mole's chambermaid gives credence to Mathilde's singularity when she tells Julien that "le deuil" of her mistress "n'était point pris pour attirer les regards. Cette bizarrerie tenait au fond de son caractère." II, x, our emphasis.

est belle! que ses grands yeux bleus me plaisent, vus si près, et me regardant comme ils font souvent." (II, x)

It is at this point that Julien decides he will seduce her, an enterprise that would be well-nigh impossible, were it not that Mathilde has already ruled, in her mind, that he will be her lover. It is she who takes the initiative and this is a significant detail which portends her endeavors to remain in charge--by calling all of the plays. It is a detail that frees Stendhal to disclose her imperious nature and highlight her virility. Thus in the beginning of the love affair, as toward the end, we see her as a very determined, aggressive young woman.

Pride, too, goes a long way to explain why Mathilde does not wish to bend her will to Julien's. And it is a bit odd that none of her admirers, with the exception of Julien, has anything to say about her orgueil immense. It is a trait impossible to overlook. Mathilde's father will readily acknowledge that she is haughty and more proud than he of the name she bears.³⁵ Then, when Julien's victory over Mathilde is imminent, Julien sees her as Stendhal conceives her, a monster of pride: "J'ai su me faire aimer de ce monstre d'orgueil." (II, xxxv) If ever Julien and Mathilde reconcile their differences, it will be through the humiliation of her pride and the assertion of his that they do arrive at a limited understanding.

Although Mathilde's pride recedes into the background as other aspects of her nature are emphasized and illustrated, although her pride is submerged or on rare occasions squashed, never for a moment

³⁵ However, not until the end of the novel does he do so: "Une fille d'un caractère si altier, d'un génie si élevé, plus fière que moi du nom qu'elle porte! dont la main m'était demandée d'avance par tout ce qu'il y a de plus illustre en France!" II, xxxiii.

does Stendhal lead us to believe that it has disappeared. And if we have forgotten about it, he will intrude to remind us that, while quiescent, pride remains in the inner recesses of Mathilde's heart, potentially lethal--for it is capable of destroying passion.³⁶

L'orgueil féminin, which Stendhal found altogether fascinating in De l'Amour, was only faintly traced in the character of Armance. In Mathilde it assumes immense proportions; it becomes synonymous with the woman, bred into her from birth and impossible to eradicate, even through love. It is in the last chapters of the novel that we recognize fully the importance that Stendhal bestows upon this trait. He exposes Mathilde's pride with zest, unmercifully.

Mathilde's vain attempts to gain favor for Julien, her efforts to save his life, her drastic courageous actions--in a word, her "héroïsme" is presented as a manifestation of her pride and vanity. Doubtless her love for Julien inspires her onward--"Exaltée par un sentiment dont elle était fière..."; however, "elle avait un besoin secret d'étonner le public par l'excès de son amour et la sublimité de ses entreprises." (II, xxxix) And for Julien she becomes importunate and tiresome.

It is Stendhal who renders Mathilde ridiculous. We see her dashing about like the proverbial chicken with its head cut off; she becomes a comic figure, which is regrettable for we had grown attached to her. Stendhal evidently felt that an absurd Mathilde, a Mathilde with whom we would no longer sympathize, was necessary. He had to prove that it is Mme de Rênal who really knows how to love unselfishly, completely, without forethought or regret.

³⁶"Après quelques mois de tempêtes, l'orgueil tue l'amour." De l'Amour, XXXIX.

There remains another observer of Mathilde, whose perceptions and attitudes have not been thoroughly discussed. This most interesting witness is none other than Mathilde herself, alert, intelligent, and prone to self-examination. In her interior monologues we have direct access to her thoughts. And these monologues serve several purposes. By penetrating her thoughts, the reader gains insight into her nature. We discover traits that have not yet been pinpointed by other characters and we discern aspects of Mathilde that Stendhal never mentions.³⁷

Her thoughts are an incontrovertible source of knowledge about what moves and displeases her and why. Along with Stendhal's interventions and intrusions, the conversations Mathilde holds within herself are the author's most effective means of building sympathy for her. We have the sense of participating in intimate confidences that are not disclosed to anyone else, not even to Julien, who will wind up knowing her better than any other character in the novel.

The first interior discourse is lengthy and rambling.³⁸ Traveling swiftly over a range of associations, it translates well the movement of thoughts. Other monologues are brief and terse, quickly to the point. Here, too, there is nothing heavy-handed about the rendering of Mathilde's pensées intimes.

Nor does Stendhal ignore the jeune fille that is in the impetuous budding woman. When, for example, her thoughts begin to take a slight-

³⁷With his use of the interior monologues as a means of revealing character Stendhal has broken with literary tradition, as Jean Prévost has pointed out. Op. cit., pp. 249-50. Thoughts are no longer proof of pre-established traits. Often thoughts precede actions, instead of explaining or justifying them after they have occurred.

³⁸See p. 86 herein for a partial transcription of these thoughts.

ly ponderous philosophical turn, they are lightened by the touch of immaturity that one notes in her self-congratulatory assessment of her cleverness: "Ah! c'est un bon mot que je viens de me dire! quel dommage qu'il ne soit pas venu à façon de m'en faire honneur!" Of course, these words also betray an abiding interest in recognition, a self-absorption that Stendhal will quickly stress by mentioning her vanity:

Mathilde avait trop de goût pour amener dans la conversation un bon mot fait d'avance; mais elle avait aussi trop de vanité pour ne pas être enchantée d'elle-même. (II, viii)

Even when Mathilde's thoughts are preposterous, the tone therein is not turgid or oppressive as it was too often for Armance, whose interior monologues are permeated with a melancholy that pall. Mathilde's attitude is never gloomy or despondent. On the contrary, her enthusiasm knows no bounds.

The thoughts that are directly proposed to the reader, then, are never despairing nor self-disparaging.³⁹ In fact, it is Mathilde's inclination to see herself clearly, in a distinctly positive light, that differs radically from the habitual manner in which Mme de Rênal views herself: falteringly, hazily, and with a small dose of self-deprecation.⁴⁰

Lucidity is the overriding disposition in so many of Mathilde's interior discourses. Her self-awareness contributes to our conviction

³⁹When she is miserably unhappy it is by exterior description that we are apprised of her malheur. 1) Julien sees her "il fut étonné de l'extrême douleur qui était dans ses yeux, c'était à ne pas reconnaître leur physionomie habituelle." II, xxx. Or 2) Stendhal tells us, "Depuis un mois elle était malheureuse, mais cette âme hautaine était bien loin de s'avouer ses sentiments." II, xxx.

⁴⁰For example, Mme de Rênal says to herself "Ah! si j'avais connu Julien il y a dix ans quand je pouvais encore passer pour jolie!" I, xvi.

that she is a strong and confident being. Self-analytical, though hardly self-critical, she is quite capable of recognizing that she has been born with every possible advantage, that she has been graced with beauty, intelligence, and so on.

In speaking of the protagonists of the Rouge, Victor Brombert claims that their spontaneity is protected by their blindness to themselves, and that they lack "awareness of their successes and of their qualities."⁴¹ As a generalization this is too broad. Though it applies well to Mme de Rênal, it is not true of Mathilde. "Tout doit être singulier," Mathilde tells herself, "dans le destin d'une fille comme moi." While the thought may be a bit comical, it is not an unusual one for an unusual woman, and that is the point. Such a phrase is testimony to our judgment that Mathilde is thoroughly aware of her personal merits and inherent worth.⁴² She sees herself as exceptional and has great expectations.

To digress for a moment, just why a critic will persist in insisting upon the inveterate blindness of Stendhal's protagonists by calling into question their lucidity is somewhat perplexing.⁴³ For it seems to us that Stendhal takes pains to ensure and to indicate to the reader that his characters--despite their "reasonings"--are not omniscient, far from it! Thus we see them making mistakes about what is going on in the mind of another, misinterpreting gestures, at-

⁴¹Victor Brombert, Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom, pp. 74-75.

⁴²Stendhal corroborates: "Que pouvait-elle désirer? la fortune, la haute naissance, l'esprit, la beauté à ce qu'on disait, et à ce qu'elle croyait, tout avait été accumulé sur elle par les mains du hasard." II, xi.

⁴³Blin, as we have noted elsewhere, expresses a viewpoint that is similar to Brombert's and he quotes Victor Brombert (La Voie o-blique) to buttress his argument.

titudes, and motivations. They even delude themselves about the nature of their own feelings.

In a novel no character should be so perspicacious as to discern all the thoughts and emotions of another. And certainly in Stendhal's novels there would be no suspense, no movement, no "obstacles" without a certain measure of obtuseness.

Mathilde, who is proficient in the art of self-examination, cannot be fully attuned to the effect that she produces upon Julien. (Nor, for that matter, can Mme de Rênal.) She cannot read clearly in his heart. Other than Julien, the only one possessing the skill to fathom Julien is Stendhal (and even he does not share everything with us). If Mathilde could know what Julien thinks or feels, she would find his timidity, his fears, his anxiety--all the weaknesses that Mme de Rênal values--intolerable.⁴⁴

There is little reason to pity Mathilde: a woman who is so well endowed in every way and conspicuously conscious of it does not immediately elicit the reader's compassion. Why then do we empathize and on occasion even identify with her?

Leaving aside the matter of Stendhal's interventions in defense of his heroine, it is through the ramifications of Mathilde's self-analytical interior discourses that a bond is established between the nineteenth-century woman and the modern reader. Far from being complacent in her acute awareness of her superiority, she is discontented. Her best qualities have not brought her happiness, and instead of enjoying her little social successes she views them with a jaundiced eye.

Mathilde probably does expect too much out of life. Her irre-

⁴⁴"A la première faiblesse que je vois en lui, je l'abandonne," she affirms to herself. II, xi.

pressible urge for happiness Stendhal traces to the influence of conventual education, slyly implying that Mathilde's desire is pernicious.⁴⁵ What Stendhal's readers know, however, is that all his cherished creatures are on the lookout for le bonheur, although they do not all conceive it alike.

Julien is happy when he least expects it, and never happier than when removed from the contingencies and anxieties of daily existence--in revery.

Mme de Rênal lets things happen to her. And happiness arrives almost à son insu. The difference with Mathilde is that she is not willing to wait. Instead, she deliberately takes an active part in the shaping of events to better determine her future.

Our understanding of the boring, repressive milieu in which Mathilde has been raised and is obliged to live comes from numerous sources. Our sense of its claustrophobic repressiveness is conveyed through Mathilde's perceptions. She thinks about what the future holds in store for her: marriage to a "worthy" nobleman, chosen by her father as her companion for life, the Marquis de Croisenois, a perfectly charming and utterly plat individual. Life with him would be but a continuation of the life she already knows, dull and insipid, like the man himself. The certainty with which she articulates

⁴⁵"Mademoiselle de la Mole avait été, au couvent du Sacré Coeur, l'objet des flatteries les plus excessives. Ce malheur jamais ne se compense. On lui avait persuadé qu'à cause de tous ses avantages de naissance, de fortune, etc., elle devait être plus heureuse qu'une autre....

"Mathilde n'avait point échappé à la funeste influence de cette idée. Quelque esprit qu'on ait, l'on n'est pas en garde à dix ans contre les flatteries de tout un couvent, et aussi bien fondées en apparence." II, xii.

⁴⁶"Sans grande passion, j'étais languissante d'ennui au plus beau moment de ma vie, de seize ans jusqu'à vingt. J'ai déjà perdu mes plus belles années." II, xi.

her "distaste" is persuasive,⁴⁷ and soon, almost in spite of ourselves, we begin to feel compassion for her distress. Her yearning for a different kind of existence--unknown and unpredictable, an existence in which she will be seen performing in marvelous ways--becomes more appropriate than romanesque. We find ourselves caught up in her destiny, hoping for her success.

Our conclusion, as Mathilde's thoughts are revealed, and through the recurrence of fundamental aspirations--is that her happiness is bound up with the struggle for autonomy.⁴⁸

It is not by chance that Stendhal introduces the name of Mme Roland into an interior discourse: "S'il y a une révolution, pourquoi Julien Sorel ne jouerait-il pas le rôle de Roland et moi celui de Mme Roland?" (II, xix) History and the Mémoires tell us that Mme Roland was an extraordinary woman, passionate and courageous, and to Stendhal's thinking one of the rare génies to be born a woman.⁴⁹ It seems fitting that his exceptional heroine, who is a secret revolutionary, should partake of Stendhal's admiration for his ideal reader, Mme Roland.⁵⁰ The fact that Mathilde is deeply attracted to revolutionary ideas further suggests that she wants to break the fetters of social confinement to escape the conventional mold.

But if Mathilde strives for independence, it is clear that she

⁴⁷ And Stendhal, to emphasize her distaste: "Elle voyait l'avenir non pas avec terreur, c'eût été un sentiment vif, mais avec un dégoût bien rare à son âge." II, xi.

⁴⁸ Her exclamation, "Il me reste MOI!" (quoted from Corneille's Médée), forcefully expresses it.

⁴⁹ De l'Amour, LV. Her Mémoires, he says, had a tremendous influence upon him.

⁵⁰ Her name was always on Stendhal's list of the "chosen few" he had selected as capable of appreciating his books.

has few options, if any. The choice of husband is in the hands of her father. And it is men who wield the power, controlling the mechanisms. Still, she aspires to a life in which she will be able to figure significantly, meaningfully, in the masculine domain: "Je me sens au niveau de tout ce qu'il y a de plus hardi et de plus grand," she declares (to herself).

It is in the light of her desire to break out, to put herself to the test, to live fully, dangerously, that she ignores social conventions and begins to pursue the hero, tentatively at first, and then, convinced of the appropriateness of the venture, boldly and vigorously:

Compagne d'un homme tel que Julien, auquel il ne manque que la fortune que j'ai, j'exciterai continuellement attention, je ne passerai point inaperçue dans la vie. Bien loin de redouter sans cesse une révolution comme mes cousines ... je serai sûre de jouer un rôle et un grand rôle, car l'homme que j'ai choisi a du caractère et une ambition sans bornes. (II, xviii)

In Balzac's novels there are beautiful women in high positions who aid and abet inexperienced and talented young men. Balzac himself always maintained that a man could succeed by ingratiating himself with the right woman who would then lend support to his efforts. What we see in Mathilde's thoughts is a curiously distorted converse: a woman of superior social status who wants to be well in advance of most men in the political arena, and first among women. By following Julien's star she may arrive.

Toward the end of the novel we discover that Mathilde has not relinquished her goal of playing a "great role."⁵¹ And given her

⁵¹In a letter to her father, regarding herself and Julien, she says, "De quelque bas degré qu'il parte, j'ai la certitude qu'il s'élèvera. Avec lui je ne crains pas l'obscurité. S'il y a révolution, je suis sûre pour lui d'un premier rôle." II, xxxii, our emphases.

outlook as well as her positive virile qualities one wonders: to what can she legitimately aspire? After all, Stendhal does not hide the fact that acceptable outlets for a woman like Mathilde are nonexistent in the Restoration era. If political power remains beyond her grasp, Stendhal will have his heroine secure her empire through love. Her attempts to escape social confinement may not come to much, but, oh, what enthusiasm in her folies! what drama in her final performance!

If it was tentatively and hesitantly that the gentle heroine of Stendhal's first novel was opposed to her outgoing active rival Mme d'Aumale, it is with assurance and a clear sense of purpose that the douce Mme de Rênal is contrasted to the energetic, audacious Mathilde. Stendhal's need to elicit that which he values--by comparing--does not vanish in his next novel, the opposition of one heroine to another becoming something of a pattern. However, the author's intention--in opposing either Mme d'Hocquincourt or Mme Grandet to the modest Mme de Chasteller in his next novel, Lucien Leuwen--is to prove that the latter is in every way a superior woman; whereas in La Chartreuse de Parme the comparisons of timid Clélia Conti with the Duchess of Sanseverina do not degrade either heroine.

It is the timid, shy, retiring women of modest ways that the Stendhalian hero reveres and adores. After Mme de Rênal these women become exceedingly remote and more and more retiring. Mme de Chasteller's sphere of action is so limited as to be almost nonexistent. She lives less by virtue of her thoughts, words, and actions than by

the strange mysterious power of her gaze. And although Stendhal will finally defend and explain her character, he fails to animate her successfully. And the traits he claims for her--apart from her emotionalism--are not displayed. If she comes to life at all it is in the mind of the hero who creates and recreates her in accordance with his own personal needs and yearnings.

CHAPTER III

LUCIEN LEUWEN

Stendhal began to write his third novel, Lucien Leuwen (1833-1835) after he received from Mme Jules Gauthier a manuscript she called Le Lieutenant, sent to him for advice and corrections. His imagination stimulated, he hastily drew up the initial outline for his own novel.

By far his most massive novel, it was never finished. Interesting marginal notes regarding his intentions and his reactions to what he had written will be found in the edition edited by Henri Martineau, notes which sometimes clarify the impression he wished to make upon the reader, the ideas he had for future development, the models behind his fictional characters as well as the direction the novel was to take in Part Three (never written).

Vast were the intentions that never saw the light of day. Plans and projects succeeded the first outline, accompanying the writing of the novel. Stendhal projected a happy ending of marriage between the hero and heroine (it would have been the only such ending for one of his novels), and numerous other incidents that were never included.

The plot structure is deficient, the novel seeming to lack a sense of direction. The problem of analyzing character portrayal is compounded by our awareness that bits and pieces do not always hold together: at times the action ceases abruptly, unexpectedly; inci-

dents are unexplained and perplexing; happenings to which Stendhal alludes never occurred. In short, the novel displays all the faults of an incomplete, overlong manuscript.

As in other novels, the author is present, hovering over his characters. Earlier themes and techniques abound. Yet technical innovation is displayed in the presentation of his heroines. However, they are neither more vividly depicted than the heroines of the Rouge, nor more credible, nor more fascinating. In fact, the two women who are lengthily portrayed, Mme de Chasteller and Mme Grandet, are less appealing than a minor figure, Mme d'Hocquincourt.

In structure the novel is similar to the Rouge in that Part One investigates society and mores in provincial Nancy while Part Two returns us, with Lucien, to Paris where the novel began (the first two chapters take place in Paris). Comparison of the provincial against the Parisian--in customs, attitudes, and women--emerges here as in the Rouge, but the focus, the sharp outline and clear sense of intention are lacking. In Lucien Leuwen the "naturel" of the provinces no longer concerns Stendhal. Nancy is an ugly, depressingly uninteresting town and Mme de Chasteller, the unspoiled, unaffected heroine who provides the novel with romantic interest, longs to be elsewhere, preferably Paris. She is, we learn, altogether out of place in the town of Nancy where, at her father's behest, she resides.

The figure who looms behind Mme de Chasteller is the proud Milanese, Méthilde Dembowska. Inaccessible to Stendhal who, by his own admission, loved her throughout his life, Méthilde died in 1825. Yet the memory of her was as fresh as if Stendhal had been with her only yesterday, when he began to write his novel. "For me," Stendhal scribbled revealingly in a margin, "tu n'est qu'un naturaliste: tu ne

choisis pas les modèles mais prends pour love toujours Méthilde et Dominique."¹ It pleased him to idealize her in fiction and to recreate a past that might have existed between Dominique (himself) and Méthilde in the emotional involvements of his loving duo, Lucien Leuwen and Bathilde de Chasteller.

Unlike Méthilde, Stendhal's heroine loves practically from the first moment she sets eyes upon Lucien. Stendhal invokes the cherished dream of a woman. The revered and awesome Méthilde comes to life as the "celestial" Bathilde, a woman who is now responsive, at least in her thoughts, a heroine who loves and is faithful to the end . . . as Stendhal had hoped Méthilde would be with him. "Après de Léonore," Stendhal wrote in De l'Amour, "je trouvais un monde où tout était céleste, tendre, généreux."² Léonore was apparently Stendhal's name for Méthilde. And so often in the novel Stendhal's world of feeling, "après de Léonore" becomes Lucien's, "après de Bathilde."

Mme de Chasteller

Mentioned in Chapter II, Bathilde de Chasteller first appears in Chapter IV where she is looking out of her window. Our hero, entering the town of Nancy, catches sight of her and falls from his spirited horse right before her eyes. La chute, symbolic of precipitous love, sets in motion Lucien's quest for her esteem. Here begins his mortification, their mutual cristallisation and the jeu des regards as well.

¹Romans et Nouvelles, I, p. 1517. Dominique, we know, is Henri Beyle, alias Stendhal.

²De l'Amour, XXXter.

"Ceci annonce Mme de Chasteller comme l'héroïne du roman," Stendhal noted on a margin, certain that this first visual encounter was portentous.³ Sad to say, the reader misses the impact. For as soon as she is introduced the silent unknown woman eludes us. She disappears from sight for weeks, and for more than one hundred pages! Instead, we are treated to several frustrating false beginnings. Minor characters discuss her, describing her background and past history for the inquisitive hero. But Mme de Chasteller herself is absent. Nor is she to be seen in the bourgeois and upper-class milieus that Lucien successfully penetrates.

In fact, it can be said that we do not make her acquaintance in the Stendhalian sense--through the author's personal intrusions and Mme de Chasteller's pensées intimes--until past the midpoint of Part One. Our interest wanes, and so does Lucien's: "Lucien n'avait jamais rencontré dans la société cette Mme de Chasteller qui, autrefois, l'avait vu tomber de cheval à son arrivée à Nancy; il l'avait oubliée." (XIII) Yet it is noteworthy that Stendhal, by using other persons to discuss his heroine, to reconstruct her background especially, deviates from his habitual familiar methods. And we find here a means that will serve him well in the portrayal of the Duchess of Sanseverina. Moreover, it can be said that a new approach in Leuwen portends the flexibility with which the Chartreuse will be narrated.

³Romans et Nouvelles I, p. 1498. He also wrote, "For me. Ne pas épargner les petits mots qui aident l'imagination à se figurer les choses. C'est l'héroïne, dira-t-on, cela [Lucien's first glimpse] le montre clairement." p. 1497. But the reader has yet to be convinced.

"C'était une jeune femme blonde qui avait les cheveux magnifiques et l'air dédaigneux." This is Lucien's first vision of Mme de Chasteller. Stendhal summarizes our hero's disenchantment with Nancy and army life, directing us to the woman who, like a breath of fresh air, momentarily alters Lucien's daily existence.

Toutes les idées tristes de Lucien s'envolèrent à l'aspect de cette jolie figure; son âme en fut ranimée. Les murs écorchés et sales des maisons de Nancy, la boue noire, l'esprit envieux et jaloux de ses camarades, les duels nécessaires, le méchant pavé sur lequel glissait la rosse qu'on lui avait donnée, peut-être exprès, tout disparut.... La jeune femme ferma sa croisée et regarda, à demi cachée par le rideau de mousseline brodée de sa fenêtre. Elle pouvait avoir vingt-quatre ou vingt-cinq ans. Lucien trouva sans ses yeux une expression singulière; était-ce de l'ironie, de la haine, ou tout simplement de la jeunesse et une certaine disposition à s'amuser de tout? (IV)

Again, as in previous novels, it is the eyes that emerge from the spare description of the heroine. These perplexing eyes will convey much more than the scorn or lack of interest that was visible in the eyes of Armance, more than the ennui and haughtiness that Julien immediately perceived in the eyes of Mathilde. Lucien muses:

Je vois briller au fond de ses yeux, malgré toute la prudence qu'elle se commande, quelque chose de mystérieux, de sombre, d'animé, comme s'ils suivaient une conversation bien autrement intime et relevée que celle qu'écoutent nos oreilles. (XXII)

As we will discover, it is the eyes that say what her lips are incapable of uttering. Armance's regard singulier had not the strange and powerful fascination with which Mme de Chasteller's expression singulière is endowed. "Son regard modeste et même timide avait été si noble que quand elle contre-passa Lucien, malgré lui, il avait baisé les yeux." (XIII) At this point in the novel he has yet to speak to her or hear the sound of her voice. And a few days later, "il regarda ses yeux; mais la simplicité et le sérieux de leur expression

annonçaient une rêverie un peu triste...." At the ball her eyes overwhelm him:

Il était alors debout et immobile, près de la contredanse ou figurait Mme de Chasteller.... Elle le regarda; mais pour cette fois Lucien fut incapable de juger ce regard; il en fut comme brûlé, enflammé. (XVI)

For Lucien, Mme de Chasteller's eyes--"les plus beaux yeux ... et qui disent tout ce qu'ils veulent"⁴--are more than a feature of extreme beauty. They are an index of her character. And for the reader it is through her eyes that we more often discern her feelings, as well as her interests. In this novel, where "voir" means "aimer," the regard will be the major channel of communication. In a heroine who is confined, inordinately repressed and otherwise incapacitated the eyes become the most interesting aspect of Stendhal's portrayal.⁵

Like the women we have discussed thus far, Mme de Chasteller is inexperienced and, until she meets the hero, has never known love. Emphasizing her lack of experience before launching into his own description of her character, Stendhal pleads for our sympathetic understanding:

On prie le lecteur de ne pas trouver trop ridicule Mme de Chasteller. Elle n'avait aucune expérience des fausses démarches dans lesquelles peut entraîner un coeur aimant.... Elle ne trouvait guère de raison dans sa tête pour venir à son secours, et n'avait aucune expérience réelle. Jamais elle n'avait été troublée par un senti-

⁴This observation is made by the postmaster, Bouchard, to Lucien. IV.

⁵Gilbert Durand has pointed out that all of Stendhal's heroes have "une frénésie de voir, et si possible, de voir sans être vu." He goes so far as to suggest that a special study of the "complexe de Psyché" in Lucien Leuwen would be in order. Le Décor mythique de la Chartreuse de Parme (Paris: José Corti, 1961), pp. 212-18.

ment autre que celui de la timidité en étant présentée à quelque grande princesse, ou celui d'une indignation profonde contre les Jacobins qui cherchaient à ébranler le trône des Bourbons. (XVIII)

The Sacré Coeur education and the early mariage de convenance are familiar to us. She was "bien dirigée" by a kind, polite, and lackluster husband who had the good grace to leave her widowed and wealthy when she was in her early twenties.⁶

Generous toward the needy, noble by nature, she is dedicated to the cause of the Legitimists, as was her husband. Her principal pre-occupation being "rêverie," she reads neither novels nor newspapers. She is, if not indolent, certainly the least active of all the heroines Stendhal has created.

Naturally the big event in Mme de Chasteller's life is falling in love. It alters her daily existence, upsets her placid frame of mind and her tranquillity and, from time to time, brings her moments of happiness. But that love changes her character or behavior is debatable. That it does not prompt her to become active, independent, or self-assertive is certain.

Robert Adams is of the opinion that Mme de Chasteller is "completely on the anonymous periphery of things." This he attributes to

⁶"C'était une âme simple, sans expérience des choses de la vie ni d'elle-même. Elle avait passé dix ans au couvent et seize mois dans le grand monde. Mariée à dix-sept ans, veuve à vingt, rien de tout ce qu'elle voyait à Nancy ne lui semblait agréable." XIX.

Her age fluctuates. In the beginning she "appears" to be in her mid-twenties; above she is twenty; soon she is twenty-two. We are, by now, accustomed to such inconsistencies.

feminine modesty which makes so many of her motives obscure or undramatic.⁷ But in truth the woman herself is undramatic by temperament.

It is by design that Stendhal's women are set apart from the society in which they are obliged to live--Bathilde de Chasteller perhaps more so than others. What is it that makes her so isolated and even elusive? In our opinion it is, first of all, the structure of the novel; secondly, other people's notions about her; and thirdly, her own feelings about life in Nancy and the townspeople, whom she scorns. Add to these her utter disdain for what interests others--money, "éclat social"--plus her "accès de rêverie," and the picture of a woman on the "periphery of things" is complete.⁸ Mme de Chasteller's elusiveness is built right into the novel where, in the place of the little scenes and incidents that, in previous novels, reveal a heroine's interests, attitudes, and character, Stendhal substitutes second-hand information: anecdotes about her, gossip, and hearsay.

Then, when Stendhal finally steps in to tell us the truth about her, we discover that her remoteness extends to her character: "Le trait le plus marquant du caractère de Mme de Chasteller était une nonchalance profonde." (XV) "Elle avait l'âme naturellement élevée.... Cette disposition lui donnait de l'indifférence et de la négligence

⁷R. Adams, Stendhal, p. 93.

⁸In Chapter XIX we are told about her "mépris pour cette haute société de Nancy," and that the public is "mesquin," and "platement méchant."

In Chapter XXIII "Mme de Chasteller était si triste chez elle." Much later Stendhal decides to mention boredom: "Jusqu'à l'apparition de Leuwen à Nancy, elle avait été en proie à l'ennui." But it is an afterthought on his part, and her boredom is far from regenerative: "cet ennui eût été ... pour elle un état délicieux, comparé au malheur de voir rarement [Lucien]...." XXXIII.

pour toutes les petites choses." (XVIII) She is completely out of touch with the political realities of the day and, if Lucien is correct, her very manner is distant and indifferent: "Ou je me trompe fort, pensa-t-il [the third time he sees her], ou cette femme songe bien peu à tout ce qui l'entoure." (XIII) Like some unearthly creature, she is above it all, ethereal, remote and, as Lucien sees her, angelic, celestial:⁹

Son esprit se croyait fondé à mépriser Mme de Chasteller, et son âme avait de nouvelles raisons chaque jour de l'adorer comme l'être le plus pur, le plus céleste, le plus au-dessus des considérations de vanité et d'argent, qui sont comme la seconde religion de la province. (XXI)

The inhabitants of Nancy tend to see her as rather cold and proud--"[une] femme ... fière de ses richesses et de ses manières froides." (XVI) According to Dr. Du Poirier she is "prude, remplie d'un orgueil insupportable." (XX) Mlle de Serpierre, who admits that people don't really know the woman, tells Lucien that she appears to be "haute comme les nues; elle n'est pas aimée à Nancy." (XIII) However, opinions are divergent and contradictory, for the postman earlier told our hero that people adore her: "elle les enjôle, ils l'aiment." (IV) And by the account of Captain B . . . "toute la jeunesse de la ville est folle d'elle." (III)

Such fickle judgments, which seem to set the stage for the fluctuating optic of Proust, give consistency to the society in which our heroine is found, but, of course, they do not adequately define her. "Personne à Nancy n'avait deviné ce caractère," says Stendhal. (XVI)

⁹The image of Mme de Chasteller as an angel is impressed upon us from start to finish. "Elle parle comme un ange," says Bouchard; IV; she is graced with a "physionomie franche et chaste." XIV; and Lucien "se disait qu'il n'avait jamais rencontré une physionomie aussi céleste." XVI; elsewhere, "Ainsi des anges se parleraient...." XVII; furthermore, Lucien lovingly addresses her as mon ange, and sees her as cet être angélique.

Some of the testimony is emitted by dishonest or envious mouths, and obscures the truth by impugning her morals.¹⁰ Lucien is confronted with tales about her penchant for officers and rumors of her alleged affair with a lieutenant-colonel, Thomas de Busant--rumors which give him a "soupçon." (Stendhal assures us that Busant is an utter bore. Mme de Chasteller, however, has been unable to put an end to his frequent visits. Has she no will power?)

The knowledge that Mme de Chasteller is an ultra enragée scarcely troubles our ardent Republican. It is the thought that she has loved another that causes him endless heartache, just as the unsubstantiated gossip about her morality conflicts with his perception of her as a pure and perfect creature:

"Eh bien! je l'aimerai et je la mépriserai, se dit-il. Et quand elle m'aimera, je lui dirai: "Ah! si votre âme eût été plus pure, c'est pour la vie que je vous eusse été attaché." (XX)

Of course the reader knows that she is as she looks and behaves, as her name implies, chaste. But Lucien can never be sure. Casting about for a meaningful obstacle to love, Stendhal comes up with doubt about the lady's chastity; perhaps he drew inspiration from his own suspicions about Méthilde and a famous poet, Ugo Foscolo.¹¹ Yet if there is any real obstacle to love--other than what is imagined by his lovers--it is their inability.

¹⁰"Tout de même en voilà un que j'ai solidement blagué, lui et son juste milieu se dit Bouchard," after telling Lucien about Mme de Chasteller's love life. IV.

¹¹This is what Hemmings has suggested. Stendhal, p. 148. But Stendhal suspected more than one man; "moi, jaloux de Vismara," he wrote on a margin of Leuwen. Romans et Nouvelles, p. 1531. And he was also jealous of a certain Giorgi. Letter to Méthilde, June 11, 1819, Correspondance I, pp. 969-73.

Lucien is held in check by awe, and by fear: "il avait peur de soi-même, il avait une bien plus grande peur de Mme de Chasteller." Furthermore, as Stendhal tells us more than once, Lucien is not a Don Juan. "Un serrement de main est une ville de Capoue pour moi; je m'arrête extasié dans les rare délices d'une faveur si décisive au lieu de marcher en avant." (XIX) To possess Bathilde physically, to consummate his love, is not his intention. Once he makes her acquaintance and succeeds in being admitted into her home (his earliest "goal"), he has limited aims: to kiss her hand, at most to embrace her. To elicit from her an avowal of love would make him happier yet:

A mon retour de l'expédition de N ... il y a eu un moment où il n'eût dépendu que de moi de m'assurer les privilèges les plus solides. J'aurais pu obtenir qu'elle me dît nettement qu'elle m'aime et de l'embrasser chaque jour en entrant et en sortant. Et je ne puis pas même lui baiser la main! (XXVIII)

As for the heroine's inability, she is curiously incapacitated:

Aussitôt qu'elle se sentait émue, sa tête se perdait, et elle n'avait d'autre prudence, dans ces cas extrêmes, que de ne rien dire et de rester immobile. (XVIII)

It is particularly here that Stendhal establishes coherency of character: emotionality immobilizes and paralyzes her, inside and out. The consequences, in terms of dramatic action, are disastrous, for she will be incapable of acting independently and of responding favorably to her lover.

In examining Stendhal's own statements about Mme de Chasteller we recognize that he envisioned her as a richly diverse, complex personality. She is "simple," but she is not dense. She possesses "un

esprit vif, clairvoyant, profond," insists Stendhal. She just doesn't realize it! Her character is "sérieux et tendre," yet she preserves a certain insouciance and has a "caractère heureux et même gai." Her speech is natural and gracious; her ideas are "nettes et brillantes, et surtout complaisantes...."

How does Stendhal illustrate assertions such as the last one? If the following remark, "elle lui disait la vérité sur tout avec un naturel, une vivacité que l'on rencontre rarement chez une femme de vingt-deux ans," does not satisfy us, then Stendhal will refer us to Lucien: "Je ne l'aimerais pas, que les soirées que je passe près d'elle seraient encore les plus amusantes de ma vie." (XXVIII) This is one way of distracting us from the content of her ideas, to cover up for her lack of profundity. Nonetheless, her ability to make meaningful conversation, let alone small talk, is open to question: "Mme de Chasteller aimait surtout que Leuwen lui confiât ses idées sur elle-même, à diverses époques, dans le premier mois de leur connaissance, à cette heure...." (XXXIII) If she has ideas of her own they relate solely to her estimation of Lucien's character.

No reader fails to appreciate Stendhal's endeavors to depict a woman who, though stifled and repressed, retains a joie de vivre along with inherent dormant potentials that need only be encouraged to blossom. And yet, to define a woman as a complex, untested being and then to give the reader the sense that she is truly a woman of many facets--these are, in this particular novel, two different matters.

Despite Stendhal's own words about her, despite such an interesting opinion as this one from Dr. Du Poirier:¹²

¹²We find it interesting because Du Poirier sees in her something that Stendhal was incapable of portraying, and has no trouble envisioning her traveling down the road to freedom. Stendhal, however, could not find ways or means to get her moving.

C'est, selon moi, une femme d'un caractère sérieux, tendre, obstiné.... La seule timidité de Mme de Chasteller la retient à Nancy; donnez-lui un prétexte, et elle part. (XXXV)

despite Lucien's passion for her, Mme de Chasteller remains a pale and unimpressive woman. Her circumscribed actions confirm that she is timid and withdrawn. And there is, moreover, an unmistakable strain of dependency in her, to which Stendhal affixes no label and attaches no importance:

Elle ne voyait pas que c'était en suivant les avis des autres qu'elle se trompait; si elle eût suivi dans les petites choses comme dans les grandes le premier aperçu de son esprit, rarement elle eût eu à s'en repentir. (XVIII)

However, when we come to know her well, it is clear that she is far from self-reliant. Nor is it only in "les petites choses" that she relies upon others.

Nowhere is this more conspicuous than at the end, after her jealous unappointed guardians have contrived the fausse couche to rid themselves of Lucien and thereby put an end to the lovers' bonheur. Desperate, Mme de Chasteller sends for the "enterprising" Mme de Constantin. The latter finds Bathilde "absolument folle et prête à prendre tous les partis." Bathilde, who cannot yet act on her own, confides and looks to her friend for advice about the "grande affaire de sa vie." However, Mme de Constantin's suggestion that Mme de Chasteller accompany the Constantins to Paris is greeted with these words: "N'aurais-je pas l'air de courir après M. Leuwen?" (XL) Not only hesitant, our heroine remains fearful and dependent even as she tries to throw off the fetters that hold her down. In this respect her character is woefully static. Stendhal wants her restrained, shy and modest to the end.

We could, like Simone de Beauvoir, place our faith in Mme de Chasteller's "brilliant intelligence," dismissing her inability to put this intelligence to good use as the fault of institutions and mores.¹³ But while we agree with Mme de Beauvoir that Stendhal's poorly educated heroine is under the control of an "imbecile father," it does not necessarily follow that she is ever the innocent victim or that she is "not responsible for [her] mistakes." On the contrary, she often appears to be her own victimizer. Her "trait marquant" is not "nonchalance." It is, in our opinion, inveterate passivity.

She has great wealth and a certain "freedom" conferred by widowhood: "elle aimait sa liberté," says Stendhal. Yet she has passed easily from the tutelage of her husband back into the hands of her father. One of the first things Stendhal tells us is that "Mme de Chasteller avait dû renoncer à l'idée de Paris. Au seul mot de Paris, son père lui parlait avec aigreur et lui faisait une scène." (XIV) She is not blind to what her father has been doing:

Enfin, elle fut seule. Elle pleura longtemps. Elle songea avec amertume à son amie intime, Mme de Constantin, que la politesse savante de son père était parvenue à éloigner. (XIX)

Yet she tolerates his interference. We never hear murmurs of protest, and she does not chafe under restrictions.

She seems distressingly resigned to masculine tyranny, to what Lucien--in a rare ideological discussion with her--qualifies as the

¹³ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1952), p. 243.

"pouvoir déspotique"¹⁴ that is upheld by the Church, and which other women in the novel are somehow able to control to their own advantage.

We would not want to be accused of ignoring Mme de Chasteller's struggle toward self-awareness. In this same conversation with Lucien she begins to recognize that her convent education amounts to a pack of lies and that her husband, by omission, helped to keep her in the dark. However, these revelations lead to nothing momentous. This declaration she makes to Lucien, "Vous me changez, peut-être est-ce en mal," is strong in implication but deficient in amplification. For she continues to submit to her father's will.

It is, it seems to us, less Mme de Chasteller's "situation" per se that restricts her than her docile acceptance of it. Her compliance is thoroughly in keeping with her character. She has little curiosity and no desire to venture out into the world. She would like to move to Paris. Why? "Elle ne regrettait qu'une chose de Paris, la musique italienne, qui avait le pouvoir d'augmenter, d'une façon surprenante, l'intensité de ses accès de rêverie." (XV)

If she is animated it is generally to uphold "les lois de la pudeur" with which she is too often obsessed. Or, when she does move, it is as if she is forced. At the ball, seen through Lucien's eyes:

Cette froideur parfaite de Mme de Chasteller se change
lorsqu'elle est obligée de parler ou d'agir, en une grâce

¹⁴Richard Bolster, who would convince us that "l'oeuvre de Stendhal fait l'apologie d'une espee d'individualisme total [for women]," quotes all that Lucien says to Mme de Chasteller in order to prove Stendhal's feminist sympathies. Stendhal, Balzac et le féminisme romantique (Paris: Minard, 1970), p. 103. However, Lucien's words do not differ in substance from remarks Stendhal made in the Rouge relative to marriage and Mme de Rênal's situation. "Il vaut mieux qu'une femme ennuie son mari faute d'esprit et qu'elle soit fidèle à ses devoirs. Là, comme ailleurs, la religion est le plus ferme appui du pouvoir déspotique." Leuwen, XXVII. Here, like Mme de Chasteller, the reader is made aware of the culprits. But does Bolster really believe that this heroine seeks self-determination?

dont je n'avais pas même l'idée.¹⁵

What do we see when her thoughts are disclosed? The following interior monologue, which appears toward the end of Part One, conveys the magnitude of both her helplessness and her loneliness.

"Jamais mon père, pensait-elle, ni aucun des mes parents ne consentira à ce que j'épouse M. Leuwen, un homme du parti contraire, un bleu, et qui n'est pas noble. Il n'y faut pas même penser; lui-même n'y pense pas, Que fais-je donc? Je ne puis plus penser qu'à lui. Je n'ai point de mère pour me garder, je manque d'une amie à qui je puisse demander des conseils: mon père m'a séparée violemment de Mme de Constantin. A qui, dans Nancy, oserais-je seulement faire entrevoir l'état de mon coeur? Il faut donc que je sois sévère pour moi-même. Je n'en dois veiller qu'avec plus de vigilance sur la situation dangereuse dans laquelle je me trouve." (XXXIII)

To penetrate her thoughts is to discover not the "fond de gaieté presque inaltérable" that is so widely touted by Stendhal and his hero, but instead a ponderous solemnity which accentuates her "caractère sérieux." Her major concerns--Lucien's integrity, her feminine retenue--are turned inside out until, exhausted, they no longer interest us.

Neither here nor elsewhere are we caught up in her dreams and aspirations. Apparently she has none--a lack that makes her rather bland. She seems to be an ideal of a woman. She cannot stir from the pedestal on which Lucien so determinately places her: "Son coeur avait besoin de trouver a Mme de Chasteller un mérite sans tache. Il l'aimait ainsi." (XIX) And she, from the beginning, would be as he desires her.¹⁶

In the interior monologue we note that while the thought of mar-

¹⁵XVI, our emphases. To get a more complete picture of her unwillingness to reveal herself we turn again to Lucien telling himself that she really has "un esprit charmant, rieur, amusant, mais on dirait qu'elle se repent toujours de l'avoir montré." XXV, our emphases.

¹⁶Alone in her room she accuses herself of having violated "aux yeux de Leuwen, cette retenue féminine sans laquelle une femme ne peut être estimée d'un homme digne, à son tour, de quelque estime." XIX. And "j'ai détruit par un seul instant d'oubli la pureté de la pensée qu'il put avoir de moi." XVIII, our emphasis.

riage has entered her mind, she is ever the dutiful daughter, prepared to accede. Her characteristic submissiveness is not surprising. What does confound us is her thought toward the end: "Il faut donc que je sois sévère pour moi-même." For what has she been with herself, as with Lucien, if not sévère? ("Lucien savait combien elle était susceptible pour ce qu'elle appelait les égards dus à son sexe.")

The incident in which she over-reacts to Lucien's impetuous kiss on her hand is a case in point. "Ce n'était plus la même femme;... la pudeur blessée la mit hors d'elle même." And raising herself high, she overwhelms him with her anger. After having been coldly dismissed by her, Lucien contrasts Mme de Chasteller to the amiable and seductive Mme d'Hocquincourt. Mme de Chasteller is bitterly reduced to "un air hautain, un regard sévère, une robe qui monte jusqu'au cou." Yet, despite the "extreme coldness" with which Bathilde greets him on his next visit, Lucien cannot cease loving her. And he opens up his heart to her:

Je manquais du courage; il était au-dessus de mes forces de m'exposer à votre sévérité habituelle pour moi. Il me semblait entendre mon arrêt de votre bouche.... Je crains d'être puni par vous d'une façon sévère, car vous n'avez pas d'indulgence pour moi. (XXXIII)

It is in her rigors and with her "sévérité habituelle" that Bathilde de Chasteller rejoins the woman whom Henri Beyle loved and could not forget.

To Lucien, his mistress is an exacting judge and, as Stendhal wrote to Méthilde, "l'estime de ce qu'on a tendrement aimé [est] le premier des biens."¹⁷ Stendhal's fond hope was, like Lucien's¹⁸ to please the woman

¹⁷Letter of June 11, 1819, Correspondance I, p. 973.

¹⁸Lucien: "je veux la combattre, je suis battu et me voilà désirant lui plaire...." "Je l'aime, se dit-il, tout haut, ou du moins je désire lui plaire." XIX.

he revered and adored, a "celestial," "sublime" woman who was virtually unapproachable.

The theme of woman as a divine judge, noted in Armance, recurs and is made explicit when Lucien confesses to Bathilde:

Vous m'inspirez de la terreur. A peine rentrée dans les salons de Nancy, vous redeviendrez pour moi cette divinité implacable et sévère.... (XXIII)

In fact, this confession is analogous to what Stendhal wrote about fear and apprehension in De l'Amour:

Plus un homme est éperdument amoureux, plus grand est la violence qu'il est obligé de se faire pour oser toucher aussi familièrement, et risquer de fâcher un être qui, pour lui, semblable à la Divinité, lui inspire à la fois l'extrême amour et le respect extrême.¹⁹

Méthilde, the inspiration for these observations, has been astutely assessed by Gilbert Durand as "la synthèse de la féminité dans ce qu'elle a de redoutable et de bénéfique à la fois."²⁰ We do not see her behind all of Stendhal's heroines (Durand does), but it is certain that she is behind Stendhal's portrait of Bathilde de Chasteller. Stendhal's sharpest memories of Méthilde were transferred to Lucien.

"Lucien n'abordait ... Mme de Chasteller qu'avec une sorte de terreur." Trembling with fear and uncertainty each time he approaches her door, he becomes the image of his creator. Stendhal avowed to Méthilde:

Il y a une preuve de mon amour bien frappant, c'est la gaucherie dont je suis avec vous, ... et que je ne puis surmonter. Je suis brave jusqu'à votre salon, dès que je vous aperçois, je tremble.²¹

Then in the novel we see Lucien gauche and uncertain, or "rouge comme un

¹⁹ De l'Amour, "Des Fiascos," #4.

²⁰ Durand, Le Décor, p. 147.

²¹ Letter of October 4, 1818, Correspondance I, p. 973

coq," blushing like an adolescent and well aware of his trouble:

Quand je suis auprès d'elle, au lieu de chercher à me faire une position un peu convenable, je ne songe qu'à la regarder comme un enfant. (XXVIII)

And Stendhal wrote to Méthilde:

En votre présence je suis timide comme un enfant, la parole expire sur mes lèvres, je ne sais que vous regarder et vous admirer.

Stendhal's heroine, like Beyle's mistress, was able to disarm her suitor. Deploying her "sévérité habituelle" she reduced him to a state of worshipful admiration. That Stendhal conferred the same strange pouvoir absolu wielded by Méthilde upon Lucien's divine and rigorous mistress is obvious. Less apparent is the way Stendhal's vivid memories of Méthilde as a cold and unresponsive woman handicapped him in the portrayal of Bathilde de Chasteller.

Of course Stendhal encourages the reader to believe that Mme de Chasteller is wild about Lucien. Nevertheless, faithful to his image of Méthilde as she was when alone with him, that is, neither encouraging nor "indulgent," Stendhal was unable to paint a responsive heroine. Instead, he made a conscious effort to amplify her chastity, stressing her purity to the extent that she seems more virginal than Armance.

In Lucien's company as in public she seems to live in constant fear of betraying herself. With her "figure parfaitement froide" she appears cool and self-contained, yet she is always on her guard, unable to relax. Her manner--the froideur glaciale, the excessive self-control, the aversion to physical contact--suggests more than cool composure: it borders on frigidity.

When face to face with Lucien she never surrenders herself to the moment. The ways that Mme de Rênal reached out to her lover, the

little gestures, the declarations of love, affectionate cuddling or touches of the hand permitted to other heroines are absent here. And in all this Stendhal was undoubtedly painfully true to his experience with Méthilde. "Loin de vous je vous vois indulgente et bonne pour moi, votre présence détruit ces douces illusions," he declared.²²

Yet he would soften the impression Mme de Chasteller makes upon others by assuring us that his heroine is not a cold woman. No matter how cold, scornful, disdainful, or severe on the outside, Bathilde de Chasteller is, if Stendhal is to be believed, warm and tender inside. With contrast as the mode Mme de Chasteller is compared to her peers. Stendhal carefully distinguishes between their politeness, which is excessive and phony, and the demeanor of his heroine, "simple et froide." Her coldness--or so he would have us believe, for this is what he wanted to believe about Méthilde--is an admirably noble restraint which thoroughly disguises the warmth that burns within. It is an exterior "froideur," something like a Petrarchan coldness, simmering, in Stendhal's words, "de cette froideur voisine des flammes," and on the verge of changing into "bienveillance et même en transports, si vous savez les inspirer." (XVI) However, the sad truth--known to those who have read the novel--is that these suggested hidden capacities remain forever submerged. When Mme de Chasteller is alone with the man she adores, (1) there are no "transports"; (2) she cannot speak of love; (3) she will not display her affection. How, then, does Stendhal compensate for her inability? And how does he convince us that she is not dispassionate?

The conditional tense is adapted to various ends in Stendhal's

²²Ibid.

fiction. As we noted in the Rouge, the hero relies upon it to express intense, seemingly unattainable amorous desires. The narrator uses it to paint a heroine's latent qualities and to postulate events that might have occurred "if only." If only Julien had been attuned to the nature of Mme de Rênal's feelings, if only Lucien had dared to say a few words to Mme de Chasteller observing him from her window.

Earlier we saw Lucien figuring that he could have assured himself of certain "privileges" if only he had seized the moment. In this novel where action between the lovers is not forthcoming, where love is deeply interiorized instead of manifested, the conditional is particularly important. Stendhal turns to it frequently:

S'il avait eu un peu plus d'expérience, il se serait fait dire qu'on l'aimait. Avec de l'audace il aurait pu se jeter dans les bras de Mme de Chasteller et n'être pas repoussé. (XXVII)

Elsewhere he calls upon other characters who will restructure reality, adding movement where there is none; Mme d'Hocquincourt, for example, speculates upon what would happen if the lovers dared to let themselves go: "Les voilà reconciliés, et mieux que jamais. En vérité, s'ils l'osaient, ils se jetteraient dans les bras l'un de l'autre." (XXX) Such speculations, concise and uttered with conviction, are more commanding than what does--or does not--take place between Lucien and Bathilde. And there are other subtle methods of showing that Mme de Chasteller is enamored, even when she remains quite motionless.

The outstanding source of animation is the movement imparted to her eyes. "Que je vous croie, et je suis à vous semblaient dire les yeux de Mme de Chasteller." Through her expressive gaze her emotions are transmitted to the perceptive hero, involuntarily, for "elle serait morte de honte si elle avait vu leur expression." (XXVI) Often she

lowers them, fearing the world will know her state of mind, fearing that Lucien will see clearly into her heart.²³ Everywhere "ses yeux ... qui montraient tant de vienveillance" seem to send out promising glimmers.

Our attention is directed to the eyes from the start.

Lucien ... remarqua que lorsqu'elle ne tenait pas les yeux strictement baissés, ils étaient d'une beauté si singulière, que, malgré elle, ils trahissaient sa façon de sentir actuelle. "Voilà des yeux, pensa-t-il, qui doivent souvent donner de l'humeur à leur maîtresse; quoi qu'elle fasse, elle ne peut pas les rendre insignifiants." (XIII)

Lucien's conviction that her eyes betray her emotions stems from Stendhal's theory in De l'Amour: "On peut tout dire avec un regard, et cependant on peut toujours nier un regard, car il ne peut pas être répété textuellement." (XXVII) And in Leuwen the heroine's eyes utter distinct and meaningful words of their own accord.

At the ball, where our protagonists dance together and converse for the first time, Lucien explains his timidity:

"Je n'ai point d'expérience de la vie, je n'avais jamais aimé; vos yeux vus de près m'effrayaient, je ne vous avais vue jusqu'ici qu'à une grande distance."

Ce mot fut dit avec un accent si vrai, avec une intimité si tendre: il montrait tant d'amour, qu'avant qu'elle y songeât, les yeux de Mme de Chasteller, ces yeux dont l'expression était profonde et vraie, avaient répondu: "J'aime comme vous." (XVIII)

In the second paragraph we have the objective account of what Mme de Chasteller has said. The marvelous thing about visual verbalization is that it is subject to more than one interpretation. Thus when Mme de Chasteller snaps back to her senses, she is overcome with remorse and certain that she has overstepped the bounds of propriety: "Je me

²³"Les yeux baissés pour éviter les regards de Leuwen..." XXVI. And "La nuit qui tombait ... lui permit de ne plus craindre les regards." XXIII. Our emphases throughout.

suis compromise à jamais dans l'esprit de M. Leuwen. Mes yeux lui ont dit: 'je vous aime follement.'" But Lucien's reading is slightly different: "Il croyait avoir lu dans ses yeux qu'elle l'aimerait un jour."

In ferreting out these divergent versions (five-page intervals separate Stendhal's from that of the heroine and then the hero) we can see how far our author has moved from his early statement in De l'Amour. It is Mme de Chasteller's eyes that function in the dialogue of love.

Glances given and received, an unexpected irrepressible blush, surreptitious glances, eyes spying, eyes averted--these are substituted for physical movement and spontaneous actions. Rather than dramatize the woman whom he so complacently describes, Stendhal creates a symphony of involuntary reflexes; and from beginning to end the eyes play the dominant chords.

The jeu des regards is pervasive. Constantly we find Stendhal's lovers suspended in immobility, gazing at each other:

Mme de Chasteller restait pensive, la tête appuyée sur son éventail. De temps en temps, ses yeux se tournaient vers Lucien qui était immobile, pâle comme un spectre, tout à fait tourné vers elle. Les yeux de Lucien étaient d'une indiscretion qui l'eût fait frémir si elle y eût pensé. (XVII)

Although in a crowded ballroom, they are isolated. The jeu des regards is played silently and often secretly.

The image of the shy and gentle woman peeking out at her lover from behind the persiennes, an image that appeared both in Armance and the Rouge, is tenacious in this novel. From the start the "persienne peinte en vert perroquet" is linked with the heroine, who observes Lucien with ever-increasing interest.

Malgré toutes les remontrances qu'elle se faisait à elle-même, elle n'avait pas quitté ses persiennes. Ses yeux étaient guidés dans l'obscurité par le feu du cigare de Leuwen. (XX)

Always that "deep silence" marks her lengthy vigils, making them especially meaningful.

Les journées ne marquaient pour elle, n'avaient de prix à ses yeux que par les heures qu'elle passait le soir près de la persienne ... à épier les pas de Leuwen, qui bien loin de douter de tout le succès de sa démarche, venait passer des heures entières dans la rue de la Pompe.

Tinged with a curious ecstasy, strangely satisfying, these are Bathilde de Chasteller's happiest hours. And they are her most passionate as well: "Dans l'obscurité profonde, Mme de Chasteller distinguait quelquefois le feu du cigare de Leuwen. Elle l'aimait à la folie en ce moment." (XXI)

This pastime, which, in the beginning, passes for innocent contemplation, à la longue impresses us as a highly refined form of voyeurism. The feu du cigare is associated with her kindled emotions. Her absorption in Lucien's every movement, her imitation of him when he is smoking his cigars are implicitly ardent.²⁴

Only when she is alone can Mme de Chasteller give vent to her feelings. Here in her room, separated by distance from her lover, adoring him from afar, secure in her privacy, she has both the freedom to dream and to love with a certain abandonment that is never to be discerned when they are face to face.

Nevertheless, there is one instance which Stendhal chooses to call a "moment d'abandon." And yet to us it seems to be a matter of momentary paralysis on her part.

This occurs in Chapter XXXIII. Beforehand she has decided that

²⁴"Bathilde passait les soirées derrière sa persienne à respirer à travers un petit tuyau de papier de réglisse qu'elle plaçait entre ses lèvres comme Lucien faisait pour ses cigares." XXII. An orthodox Freudian would undoubtedly find more sexual symbolism here. We doubt that Stendhal had in mind anything more symbolic than matching her secret emotional fire to that of the glowing cigar.

she has been seeing too much of Lucien and is determined to tell him so. But he looks so miserably unhappy that her firm resolve melts into pity and she has not the strength to carry out her project.

Elle avait rassemblé tout son courage pour combattre un être fort, et elle trouvait l'extrême faiblesse. En un instant tout changeait, elle n'avait plus à craindre de manquer de résolution, mais bien plutôt de prendre un ton trop ferme.... Elle eut pitié du malheur qu'elle causait à Leuwen. (XXXIII)

Her pity for his "malheur" is mentioned no less than four times on one page. It is, in fact, this ability to empathize with the misfortunes of others that proves she is warm, generous, and tender-hearted.

As Lucien turns to leave, he stumbles on the stairs and what happens next is as rare as it is unexpected.

Mme de Chasteller eut pitié de lui, elle eut l'idée de lui prendre la main à l'anglaise, en signe de bonne amitié. Leuwen, voyant la main de Mme de Chasteller s'approcher de la sienne, la prit et la porta lentement à ses lèvres. En faisant ce mouvement, sa figure se trouva près de celle de Mme de Chasteller; il quitta sa main et la serra dans ses bras, en collant ses lèvres sur sa joue. Mme de Chasteller n'eut pas la force de s'éloigner et resta immobile et presque abandonnée dans les bras de Leuwen. Il la serrait avec extase et redoublait ses baisers. A la fin Mme de Chasteller s'éloigna doucement, mais ses yeux baignés de larmes montraient franchement la plus vive tendresse. (XXXIII)

Everything is in slow motion, as if this moment should remain forever etched upon their sensibilities. Physically this is their most intimate moment. But what does Mme de Chasteller feel? We look to her tear-bathed eyes for an indication, and there the expression is one of "tenderness." If our heroine is sensually stirred we do not know it. True to form, she remains immobile, neither yielding nor responsive. This paralysis is, of course, thoroughly consistent with what Stendhal told us earlier. Emotion overwhelms her. But to interpolate passion would be inappropriate. Even her gesture--"de lui prendre la main"--was cautiously presented by Stendhal as one of "friendship."

"Almost abandoned" is not quite,²⁵ and nothing in the passage suggests otherwise.

Here frozen in immobility, Mme de Chasteller cannot move beyond her own self-interest to respond in a meaningful way. Whatever her emotions, they are indecipherable. It is Lucien's joy and "ecstasy" that are disclosed: "Bientôt il fut ivre de bonheur." But by turning our attention to the hero, Stendhal betrays his own inability to probe into her emotions. For it is, of course, Stendhal who steers clear of Mme de Chasteller's state of mind at the auspicious moments in the novel. If Mme de Chasteller cannot formulate her desires, if her passions nowhere set her into motion, it is because Stendhal could not bear to demean her (an anxiety that shows in his notes). He avoids touching upon thoughts and motives that would make her less than perfect and he thereby sacrifices vivacity. Instead, he has chosen to represent her as a dreamy, aloof, and reticent woman, elevating her even more by emphasizing her retenue and pudeur. Yet the qualities that make her admirable--and indeed less real than ideal--are precisely those that inhibit her and further doom her passivity.

She will not take responsibility for her own destiny, an inability or refusal that announces existential mauvaise foi. The similarities between Mme de Chasteller and Armance need not be reiterated. It is Bathilde de Chasteller's inactivity, her lack of energy and gumption, that disappoint us.

²⁵This is not the only place Stendhal uses the telling adverb presque. "Mme de Chasteller, qui lui donnait le bras, le laissait dire et s'appuyait presque sur lui; elle le regardait avec les yeux attentifs si ce n'est attendris." XXIII. Again, everything is in the eyes; "very nearly," ("almost") is ambiguous. She dares not lean; Stendhal dares not show her to be physically responsive. The same applies elsewhere: "Leuwen serra le bras qu'on lui offrait, et le mouvement fut presque rendu." XXVII, our emphasis.

Mme Grandet

Forceful and calculating, the ambitious woman whom Lucien unenthusiastically courts in Part II of the novel may well have been created as the intentional exact opposite of the sensitive, retiring Mme de Chasteller.¹ At least it can be verified that where Mme de Chasteller is noble the bourgeois Mme Grandet is ignoble. And although certain endowments such as beauty, artistic abilities, and a dubious courage do indeed distinguish Mme Grandet from her peers, in no way do they make her superior, as we shall see.

This heroine is a "pseudo-heroine," a term that F. W. J. Hemmings has applied to Mme d'Hocquincourt. She is not simply "subsidiary" to the hero's true love.² She is, we feel, meant to impress us unfavorably through a portrayal that is biased and one-sided. Which is not to say that the use of multiple perspectives is abandoned or that we are forbidden entry into her intimate thoughts. The secret desires, the feelings, the aspirations, the goals she pursues, and the models she would emulate are known to us and sometimes only to us:

[Lucien] n'avait point deviné le caractère de Mme Grandet.
Cette femme si jeune, si fraîche, si occupée des peintures

¹In Mme Grandet "he has set forth the exact negative of a Mme Roland, a Méthilde," says Simone de Beauvoir. Second Sex, p. 240.

²See Hemmings, Stendhal, Chapter II, "Patterns and Formulae," for an illuminating discussion of Stendhal's subsidiary heroines. Ignoring Mme Grandet completely, he concentrates upon Mme d'Hocquincourt for this novel.

à la fresque ... était presque continuellement absorbée dans les calculs de la politique la plus profonde. Elle était riche comme un Rothschild et voulait devenir une Montmorency. (XLIX)

Yet such a glimpse into the real Mme Grandet is hardly at variance with what others notice about her. While her thoughts cannot be known to them, most witnesses--her intimate friends, Lucien's parents--devine her nature and easily recognize her aims. Thus the use of other angles of vision prevails; however, the many opinions never conflict or contradict, or lend mystery and complexity to Mme Grandet. When we learn what others--including Stendhal--think of her, as we read her thoughts and understand her motivation, her shallow character rapidly becomes an open book to be read in the harsh light of day. There are no shadows, or "nuances."

It is particularly indicative of Stendhal's unambivalent negative attitude toward Mme Grandet that he makes no attempt to explain or to justify her until the end of the novel where he addresses us as follows:

Nous ferons observer, pour l'excuser un peu d'une telle faiblesse qu'à vingt-six ans qu'elle avait, elle n'avait jamais aimé. Elle s'était sévèrement interdit même ces amitiés galantes qui peuvent conduire à l'amour. Maintenant, l'amour prenait sa revanche, et depuis dix-huit heures, l'orgueil le plus invétéré, le plus fortifié par l'habitude lui disputait le coeur de Mme Grandet, dont la tenue était si imposante et le nom si haut placé dans les annales de la vertu contemporaine. (LXVI)

Like other Stendhalian women, then, Mme Grandet has never known love. But while she is certainly not libertine, she will prove to be worse.

Stendhal's personal comments and interventions do not enhance the nature of this literary creation. They diminish it: "C'était l'invention, c'était l'esprit proprement dit qu l'on ne trouvait point chez elle," he remarks in an early chapter. And we note that the negative phraseology through which our author more often conveys a woman's posi-

tive qualities now serves another purpose. Pinpointing her negative traits, it brings out her deficiencies as well: "elle n'avait rien de romanesque ni dans le caractère ni dans les habitudes." It occurs to us that it is not l'amour, but Stendhal, who is taking a peculiar form of "revenge." For through his portrayal of Mme Grandet he synthesizes and condemns an era, a certain mentality, and the aspirations and prejudices of a particular class as well.

According to his marginal notes, several women of the time inspired this character.³ Nevertheless, we would suggest that she possesses qualities and characteristics drawn in other characters in other novels and even bears a strong resemblance to a nonfictional woman whom Stendhal does not mention in his notes. She is a composite creation and Stendhal's purpose is primarily satirical . . . to the point of caricature.

If little was known about the past life of other heroines, even less is known about Mme Grandet. Her youth is totally ignored and the scant factual information relative to her marriage or inexperience, added much later when we are thoroughly familiar with her banal character, lends no depth or interest. She is the young, attractive wife of a forty-year-old banker who has made a fortune as a cotton manufacturer. And this is Stendhal's introductory description of the lovely lady:

C'était une femme de vingt-trois à vingt-quatre ans au plus; il était impossible d'imaginer des traits plus

³Women unknown to us: Mme Gourieffe, de Menainville, Delessert.

réguliers, c'était [une] beauté délicate et parfaite, on eût dit une figure d'ivoire. Elle chantait fort bien, c'était une élève de Rubini. Son mérite pour les aquarelles était célèbre. (XLIII)

The queen of the wealthy bourgeoisie, she gives magnificent parties and maintains a salon that is frequented by almost everyone worth knowing, except--and to her great regret--"les grands seigneurs." Famed for her high virtue as well as her skill as an artist and her exquisite beauty, she is "une beauté élancée et blonde comme les jeunes Vénitienes de Paul Véronèse." Stendhal exerts himself to impress us with her good looks. Her beauty is flawless--"une vraie beauté sterling"; her complexion is perfection itself. Significantly, however, references to her eyes, and to the regard that is usually so important in Stendhal's women, are carefully omitted. And soon we learn that her traits are not "distinguished." Her face, although perfectly modeled, is habitually expressionless. In short, this beauty which seems so very promising--"la promesse du bonheur"--shall be disappointing when we discover the emptiness behind it. Nor will Stendhal make allowances for her on the basis of her renowned artistic talents. They cannot save her from opprobrium.

We learn that she paints because "cela lui semblait aussi nécessaire à une femme du grand monde qu'un métier à broder" and not, one senses, to satisfy creative impulses. Her regular attendance at the opera, her painting, her music lessons are socially motivated, for the sake of appearance. But if she cultivates the arts in order to cultivate her image as a grande dame, her private beliefs are at variance with her public posture:

La musique, la peinture, l'amour lui semblait des niaiseries inventées par et pour les petites âmes. (XLVI)

Sans commentaire Stendhal offers little insights into her secret feelings

and attitudes. After apprising us of her exaggerated displays of sympathy for the unfortunate priests in China or the impoverished provincial nobles he says, "Mais, dans le secret du coeur de Mme Grandet rien ne lui semblait bas, ridicule, bourgeois en un mot comme d'être attendrie."⁴ And he leaves it to the reader to make the connections and comparisons. Who can forget how Mme de Chasteller was moved to tears at the sight of abject poverty? or her love of music?

For Stendhal art and love are the supreme endeavors. Thus, ironically, Mme Grandet is and she remains just what she was by birth and what she is trying futilely to overcome--"in a word"--bourgeois. By affecting an interest in precisely those things which give meaning to life she is guilty of inexcusable hypocrisy (as opposed to the sort of hypocrisy that serves Julien's social ascension, or the kind of hypocrisy Mathilde shows when paying lip service to the idées reçues of her caste). With a twist of irony, then, Stendhal conveys that it is Mme Grandet who is the "petite âme."

While Mme Grandet has a number of witnesses, few of them are friendly ones and none have anything good to say about her. To examine the opinions of the Leuwens is to see that their viewpoints complement and supplement, confirming that Mme Grandet is an artificial and uninteresting woman. In Chapter LXII Mme Leuwen exclaims

⁴This seems consistent with an observation Stendhal made in De l'Amour: about "l'âme vulgaire"--"elle se moque de l'âme tendre." XXIV.

to her husband, "Mais comment [Lucien] n'a-t-il pas été choqué de ce que ce caractère a du vulgaire. C'est une copie continue!" thereby expanding upon the grâces imitatives that caught Lucien's eye when first he met the lady in question. M. Leuwen-père, who is quite aware of her vulgarity, does not miss her personal limitations either:

Mais Mme Grandet vise au génie, à la grande passion, à l'esprit brillant. Pour une pauvre femme qui n'a que du bon sens, et encore du plus plat.... (XLIII)

Lucien's father recognizes that the lovely Mme Grandet does not have the character that her beauty "announces"; for him she is tiresome. Lucien, however, phrases it otherwise--"cette âme d'une femme de chambre, hôte d'un si beau corps"--with imagery, more harshly. Still, the unanimity is unmistakable.

Repeatedly M. Leuwen refers to this very wealthy woman by the expression "la pauvre petite Mme Grandet," until finally we realize that this refrain strikes both at her spiritual impoverishment and her littleness of mind and character, as does the name that Stendhal has chosen for her.

In Stendhal's novels a woman's name may reflect certain traits of manner and character or be rich with ironical implications. Gina of the Chartreuse recalls the Angelina Stendhal had loved in his youth, just as Bathilde and Mathilde are variations of another name that had personal significance for Stendhal, Méthilde. The name Chasteller is mellifluous and suggestive of the woman's bearing as well as her nature. The brief and nasal sounds of Grandet, on the other hand, are not pleasing to the ear. The name itself embraces the woman's great wealth, alludes to her aspirations to grandeur, and, by opposition, emphasizes the petitesse of character that is so relentlessly disclosed.

Quite early we are told of her multifarious ambitions:

Une haute et sublime dévotion, ou bien avoir de l'esprit comme Mme de Staël, ou bien une illustre amitié; devenir l'ami intime de la reine ou de Mme Adélaïde et une sorte de Mme de Polignac de 1785, être ainsi à la tête de la cour des femmes et donner des soupers à la reine ou bien il fallait au moins un illustre amitié dans le faubourg Saint-Germain. (XLVI)

We recognize that her desires are fluctuating, foolish, and empty by what Stendhal says in the following paragraph:

Toutes ces possibilités, tous ces partis, occupaient tour à tour son esprit et l'accablaient, car elle avaient bien plus de persévérance et de courage que d'esprit. (XLVI)

The one goal that is unwavering--"Elle était rich comme un Rothschild et voulait devenir une Montmorency"--is mentioned over and over to hammer at her pretentiousness. Stendhal lets us know that in her envy of la noblesse d'origine she lacks the one quality with which all his cherished heroines are endowed--noblesse d'âme: "son âme n'avait pas la supériorité qu'il faut pour chercher l'estime des gens qui estiment peu la noblesse." In Lucien Leuwen, as in preceding novels, a title alone does not confer nobility. Paradoxically, in this novel the noble class is as bourgeois as the wealthy bourgeoisie that has now become the ruling class.⁵

It should be noted, less in defense of Mme Grandet than to set the record straight, that among Stendhal's outstanding heroines not one is a French bourgeoise worthy of esteem. The women he would have us revere or applaud invariably come from either the highest level of society (whether in Paris or the provinces) or, as in the case of Lamiel, from the lowest. Although Henri Beyle was a bourgeois himself,

⁵Everyone wants to be esteemed and wealthy. Even the king plays the stock market "dans ce siècle où tout est argent, où tout se vend." LXV.

he constantly inveighed against the bourgeois mentality and did what he could to compensate for his own origins--personally assuming numerous false identities, dissociating himself from his class by condemning bourgeois values. In La Vie de Henri Brulard we find him emphasizing his Italian heritage--whereas Mme Grandet has a heart that is "à peu près l'opposé de ce que l'on se figure comme étant le coeur italien"--and repeatedly stressing the espagnolism when not the noblesse d'âme that his Aunt Elisabeth inspired in him.

In Stendhal's fiction the bourgeois enrichi, male or female, is an unattractive figure. We have seen how M. de Rênal was presented. Mme Grandet is something of a feminine counterpart--platitudinous and uninspiring, puffed up with her own self-importance, vacuous. She is not only a "copy" of what she thinks she ought to be. She is the author's stereotype of wealthy bourgeois ladies of leisure, women whom his reader might encounter in Parisian salons in the mid-eighteenth-thirties, women Stendhal himself found uninteresting, flat, and colorless. And he paints Mme Grandet with their tones, subtly disclosing her insincerity, emphasizing her lack of intelligence, pursuing her ambition and ostentation with a vengeance until she becomes the incarnation of "la bassesse bourgeoise" that he so despised throughout his lifetime.⁶

⁶In La Vie de Henri Brulard we are given further insight into his "horreur pour les détails bourgeois," Chs. IX, XXII, XXIX, XLII. The traits that he associates with the bourgeois mentality--selfish vanity, insincerity, insensitivity--are the antithesis of that which he values: noblesse d'âme, délicatesse, le naturel et l'absence d'hypocrisie, grandeur d'âme, sentiments espagnols.

Hastily and with assurance Lucien draws his conclusions about Mme Grandet whom he finds pretentious, boring, cold, and unintelligent in that order. He assesses her rapidly and negatively, as did Julien when he met Mathilde, courting her out of obligation to his father, for

Faire la cour à Mme Grandet lui semblait une chose horrible, un hydre de dégoût et de malheur. (XLVII)

And if he is somewhat pleased to possess her (the scene itself is omitted) it is out of vanity alone. For while Mme de Chasteller is "tout ce qu'il y a de plus beau, de plus touchant, de plus sublime au monde" Mme Grandet is, to him, "tout ce qu'il y a de bas et de plat ... de grossier et de haïssable." Nor does Stendhal intervene to correct this judgment. In whatever ways Mme de Chasteller was elevated Mme Grandet is lowered, the symbolic chute recurring on several levels: Mme Grandet falls morally and then, to her great astonishment if not ours, she falls in love. Physically too, at the end, she falls at Lucien's feet only to become, in his eyes and ours, a fallen woman.

While the use of contrast and comparison does not disappear, it nevertheless tapers off markedly. For, unlike the hero of the Rouge, Lucien does not habitually evoke the image of the woman he has left behind to validate his reactions to Mme Grandet. To signify her "ignobility" Stendhal shifts the mania for comparisons to the heroine herself who, with persistence and enjoyment, compares herself to her peers and others: "c'était l'habitude et presque la nécessité de se comparer à quelqu'un or à quelque chose pour s'estimer et se juger." Perceiving herself as "à peu près la plus jolie femme de Paris," Mme Grandet forces the comparisons by showing herself off to the world, preferably in the wee hours of the morning when she is "incomparable."

Aussi son bonheur était-il de prolonger jusqu'au grand jour les bals qu'elle donnait et de faire déjeuner les danseurs au soleil, les volets ouverts. Si quelque jolie femme, sans se douter de ce coup de Jarnac, était restée à l'étourdie, entraînée par le plaisir de la danse, Mme Grandet triomphait; c'était le seul moment dans la vie où son âme perdit terre, et ces humiliations de ses rivales étaient l'unique chose à quoi sa beauté lui semblât bonne. (XLVI)

This paltry bonheur is worth mentioning because it requires the others for fulfillment. Wholly unlike Mme de Chasteller and Mme de Rênal who find happiness when removed from society, Mme Grandet wants and needs all eyes upon her.

It is the externals, le paraître, that she deems important. Her behavior is imitated; her pleasures, her desires, and her values too, come from sources outside of herself, making her typical of the Stendhalian vaniteux.⁷ And if there is validity to René Girard's observation that "la vanité et la passion sont les extrémités idéales d'une échelle sur lesquelles sont placées tous les personnages stendhaliens,"⁸ then Mme Grandet is on the bottom rung of that ladder. So preoccupied is she with "les autres," with being what she thinks she ought to be, that she cannot for a moment reflect upon what she really is. Her pathetic need of an audience is apparent in her interior discourses and extends into every aspect of her life:

"Ne serait-il pas négliger un avantage actuel et perdre une grande chance de distinction que de ne pas inspirer quelque amour célèbre par le malheur de l'aimoureux? Ne serait-il pas admirable, dans toutes les suppositions, qu'un homme distingué allât voyager en Amérique pour m'oublier, moi qui ne lui accorderais jamais un instant d'attention?" (XLVI)

⁷In opposition to the being of passion, the noble being who--in the words of René Girard, "tient ses désirs de lui-même et s'efforce de les satisfaire avec la dernière énergie." Mensonge, p. 122. The second part of his statement is questionable, however. For, as we have seen, a woman such as Mme de Chasteller, although "noble," remains petrified.

⁸Ibid., p. 146.

Predictably, the questions she asks herself are posed not with the aim of self-understanding but rather for self-glorification, revealing a soul that is barren. Paradoxically, though engrossed in herself she is, in fact, turned away from herself and sees only her reflection in the eyes of others.

In order to be distinguished and admired Mme Grandet would be loved. Of course she would never respond to her mythical unhappy lover. We noted earlier that love in the emotional sense is a sentiment she scorns. With discretion Stendhal informs us that her experience with the physical side of love has not been felicitous: "L'amour même, dans ce qu'il a de plus réel, ne lui semblait qu'une corvée, qu'un ennui." Toward the end, however, after sleeping with Lucien, her emotions are kindled, her senses very much awakened. It is not with delicacy that Stendhal has her express herself:

Mais enfin, dit l'amour se masquant en paradoxe, qu'est-ce qu'un amant? C'est un instrument auquel on se frotte pour avoir du plaisir. M. Cuvier me disait: "Votre chat ne vous caresse pas, il se caresse à vous." (LXVI)

Here, as always, it is the moi that reigns supreme. Her forceful self-assurance is undeniable. Nevertheless, Stendhal succeeds again in robbing her of her originality by interjecting the words of an expert, whereas elsewhere in the novel she is shown to be inauthentic by her imitative behavior and insincerity.

Undoubtedly it is because Mme Grandet does not believe in love that she is able to play the part of a prude with great conviction. Early on, Lucien remarks to his mother "cette âme est si sèche que je la croyais sage"; and in point of fact she is sage. "Jamais un homme n'avait osé lui baiser la main en tête à tête" we are told by Stendhal. (LXV) But on the other hand she has deprived herself of love's great

pleasures, a meaningful kiss on the hand ranking among the most sublime.

This woman is not the only prude in Stendhal's fiction. ;In earlier novels we met two ambitious women, one of the rising bourgeoisie--the austere Mme de Fervaques of the Rouge, the other one of the nobility--the "dry-hearted," mystical Mme Bonnivet, Armance's aunt. They were laughable minor characters, depicted incisively and with few traits.⁹ And, as we know, despite their moral fervor they were irresistibly drawn to the handsome hero . . . as will be Mme Grandet. The ostentatious morality and the inane ambition that had been lightly satirized in them are blown to tremendous proportions in Mme Grandet, auguring her downfall. "La pruderie," says Stendhal in De l'Amour, "is a kind of avarice, the worst." (Fragment 5) And in a disjointed maxim in the novel he tells us that pruderie results in malheur, which in turn makes a woman mean.¹⁰ Always an unnatural virtue, prudishness, as painted in Mme Grandet, is tantamount to sham.

Mme Grandet is certainly virtuous by reputation, but from the beginning Stendhal tries to show us that her manner is lacking in modesty.¹¹ That special quality which is innate in his repressed heroines and present even in the bold Mathilde, la pudeur, is excised when Stendhal shows her through the eyes of another. Chapter XLVIII, which takes place in her home, features a game of billiards in which "les jolies poses auxquelles Mme Grandet s'abandonnait" are the main attraction. Lucien is both startled and impressed:

⁹This is "la loi du roman" according to Jean Prévost: "les personnages secondaires doivent être plus poussés que les protagonistes; peints en moins de traits mais en traits plus forts." La Création, p. 298.

¹⁰"Rien ne rend méchant comme le malheur. Voyez les prudes." XLIII.

¹¹Much later he is explicit about this deficiency: "Cette femme d'une si célèbre vertu avait si peu d'attention au service de l'habitude nommée pudeur." LXIII.

Il considéra avec une admiration assez peu dissimulée les charmantes poses dans lesquelles se plaçait Mme Grandet ... des poses charmantes et si charmantes....

The vagueness is characteristic of Stendhal's reluctance to be explicit about sexuality. Through reiteration and emphasis upon the "charming" and "pretty" poses he suggests that she is both immodest and provocative.¹² What is particularly interesting about the way Stendhal depicts the lady's movements is the recurrence of the passive voice, the selective use thereof determining that even when she moves she is depersonalized and conceived as an object, as throughout the novel, an object of derision or scorn instead of a vital, dynamic subject in her own right.

With this in mind, and for the sake of argument, it is relevant to note that some critics, who are no doubt eager to pay homage to Stendhal's famous culte d'énergie, have willfully promoted this heroine's vigor and energy--apparently oblivious to the fact that Stendhal does not once mention the word énergie in any context in regard to Mme Grandet. Here is what Richard Bolster has to say:

Cette âme forte est la soeur spirituelle de quelques héroïnes qui confirment l'attitude fondamentalement admirative de Stendhal devant une certaine espèce de femme énergique, même agressive.¹³

But by placing Mme Grandet in the same category as Mathilde, la Sanseverina, Lamiel, and all other assertive women of energy Bolster betrays his own feminist proclivity. For careful consideration of the ways in which Stendhal apprises us of Mme Grandet's activities, if not the way he tells us that she is courageous and tenacious, demonstrates--to the contrary--that admiration is the farthest thing from our author's mind.

¹²His marginal note is blunt: "Le vrai: il regardait sa jambe et ses hanches."

¹³Bolster, Stendhal, Balzac, p. 165.

Lucien's mother testifies that Mme Grandet leads a "vie mouvementée," saying that she runs after happiness "comme une âme en peine." The allusion to her unrest being obvious, what is significant is that this busy woman does not run physically in the sight of the hero--as did Mathilde in the Rouge--or anywhere on the pages of the novel for that matter. The use of active verbs is sparing.

It is in an early chapter that Stendhal indicates she is not passive:

Elle avait engagé son mari à la conduire en Angleterre pour voir si elle trouverait une blonde qui eût plus de fraîcheur, et pour savoir si elle aurait peur à cheval. Elle avait rencontré dans les élégants country seats où elle avait été invitée l'ennui, mais non le sentiment de la crainte. (XLVI)

Certainly she is active and without fear. However, the narration of her activities and petty personal triumphs is habitually restricted to a vague or recent past--a procedure which tends to further minimize activities that are in themselves vain or uninspiring.

In other women le courage is a trait of force and energy. Mathilde's courage is denoted with qualification: "Le courage était la première qualité de son caractère." She is, we know, imprudent and audacious. But courage, depicted in Mme Grandet, is far from laudable: "Elle avait plus de persévérance et de courage que d'esprit"--a comparison which does damage to her intellect and makes her "courage" and "perseverance" meaningless in the same breath.

Not only does she lack imagination; she lacks daring too.

Sa grande fortune l'avait éloignée de bonne heure, et par orgueil, des voies obliques et elle méprisait tout ce qui était crime. Il s'agissait de devenir Une Montmorency sans rien se permettre que l'on ne pût avouer, (XLVI)

Stendhal tells us. And knowing that, for this author, crime is incontrovertible evidence of intense feelings and energy, we surmise that he

can barely conceal his own mépris for such prudence.¹⁴

Indicating that, once again, love is the prime mover; Stendhal declares, toward the end of the novel, "Son âme si sèche, si froide, depuis quelques jours éprouvait des sentiments tendres"--a statement that also reminds us of Mathilde. And at this point it is fruitful to investigate further the similarities between the proud and cerebral Mlle de la Mole and Mme Grandet. On the basis of named or obvious traits these women are certainly allied to one another, if only superficially. For while it is true that Mme Grandet's pride-- "l'orgueil le plus invétéré, le plus fortifié par l'habitude," to which Stendhal twice directs our attention--is wounded by the hero's indifference, so that she finds him all the more desirable, as Mathilde did Julien, nevertheless Mathilde's dynamic pride was more thoroughly stressed, to become a credible pride and not a laughable, unwarranted trait. As Stendhal says of Mme Grandet in a margin, "Elle se glorifie de ce qui fait la pauvreté de son âme."

If Mme Grandet's introspections are, by their narcissism, somewhat reminiscent of Mathilde's, they are nevertheless more self-inflating and surely less interesting. Her thoughts are devoid of critical acumen in regard to other individuals, society, and herself as well. Judging all in terms of fortune and station she does not penetrate the surface, which is not surprising for she herself is all façade. This differentiates her from Mathilde who, like Mme Grandet,

¹⁴See Chapter II, footnote 2 on page 41.

loves to perform before an audience yet has trouble finding one that is worthy of her. Mathilde is a critic of her society; Mme Grandet is a representative. Mathilde, with her strong and valid sense of self, sizes up her peers and her milieu perceptively. And though certainly vain and dry-hearted, she has redeeming qualities--imprudence, imagination, wit, and verve, to name but a few--qualities foreign to Mme Grandet who has only her beauty to recommend her.

It is interesting that Stendhal, in two novels, opposes passion to vanity by making dedicated readers and devotés of history out of his âmes sèches, while, inversely, his tender-hearted, compassionate women dismiss the printed word and avoid the public eye, withdrawing into a private world of douce rêverie. In the Rouge he shows, and in this novel he implies that tender women, uninfluenced by literature et al., are able to feel intensely and to love completely--if not with a certain abandon, at least unselfishly. He insists upon the donnée that novels have not impressed Mmes de Rênal and de Chasteller, thereby leaving them to their own devices and wholly "natural."

Just as the Renaissance come to life for Mathilde, it is the era of the Fronde that Mme Grandet favors. Shunning novels, she finds the stuff and substance of her dreams in the Mémoires of Cardinal de Retz. "Ils avaient pour elle le charme qu'elle cherchait en vain dans les romans." And they serve as a kind of political handbook, adding fuel to the fires of ambition. She looks to women of that period who have made a "niche" for themselves in history.

Le rôle politique de Mmes de Longueville et de Chevreuse
était pour elle ce que sont les aventures de tendresse et

de danger pour un jeune homme de dix-huit ans. (LXVI)

And yet, amusingly, these intrigantes are not models of perfection. That they fell victims to love she finds inexcusable and she is persistently critical of their moral laxity.

Now in her emulation of one illustrious woman our heroine is successful. Her efforts to "play Mme de Staël" have been noticed and her model identified. Stendhal, who had often expressed a profound contempt for this écrivain-femme, has Lucien record the similarities, after remarking himself that Mme Grandet is a "bavarde effrénée."

Je crois, Dieu me pardonne, qu'elle vise à imiter Madame de Staël, se dit Lucien écoutant une de ses tartines. Elle ne laisse rien passer sans y clouer son mot. Ce mot est juste, mais il est d'un plat à mourir, quoique exprimé avec noblesse et délicatesse. Je parierais qu'elle fait provision d'esprit dans les manuels à trois francs. (XLIII)

Unacquainted with Mme de Staël personally, Stendhal discerned her character through her literary style, and what he had to say about her in the eighteen-thirties is substantially the same as what he had written in his Journal as far back as 1805.¹⁵ The analogies between the woman and Stendhal's own Mme Grandet are extensive, as can be seen in the following passage from the Journal, March 9, 1811:

Mme de Staël (Corinne) m'a fait mal. Ce style tendu, dont le moindre défaut est de vouloir commander sans cesse l'admiration, ... cet esprit qui prétend aux honneurs du génie, et qui ne voit pas que sa qualité la plus frappante (le naturel) lui manque entièrement....

It is wholly conceivable that Mme de Staël's mode of expression, and in particular the oft-mentioned "enflure"¹⁶ and the inclination toward

¹⁵Oeuvres intimes de Stendhal (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1955), pp. 606, 740, 816, 1498.

¹⁶Stendhal writes in a note to the novel, "Donner un style toujours un peu enflé à Mme Grandet, même quand elle se parle."

self-aggrandizement which Stendhal did not cease to criticize, found their way into his conception of Mme Grandet. What is certain is that Stendhal's own "répugnance insurmontable"¹⁷ for Mme de Staël, writer and personality, was as intense and as consistent as Lucien's for Mme Grandet.

Can Mme Grandet measure up to the models she has chosen? Evidently not, for:

Elle avait bien plus les théories que la pratique de la haute intrigue politique qui, du temps du cardinal de Retz, faisait la vie de tous les jours des Chevreuse et des Longueville. (LXI)

When, near the end, she jumps to the eighteenth century and conjures up the incongruous image of Mme Roland we know for sure that her personal identification with famous women is inauthentic and ill-advised. If Mme Grandet's husband were to become a minister, then she, at M. Grandet's side (the shadow of Mathilde lingers) would play the part of a Mme Roland. As we have seen, she has many ambitious projects. But this is one dream that is not idle and she does what she can to fulfill it, by striking a dishonorable bargain with Lucien's father to become Lucien's mistress, in exchange for a ministry. Of course the reader recognizes that there exists no common ground between Stendhal's ideal woman and Mme Grandet. Unfeeling, unheroic, and utterly unimaginative, she could not possibly rise to the heights of the magnificent Mme Roland despite the intensity of her ambitions . . . or, rather, because of them.

¹⁷ Stendhal on himself: "Il adorait Shakspear et avait une répugnance insurmontable pour Voltaire et Mme de Staël." Oeuvres intimes, p. 1490.

As the reader suspects from the beginning, Mme Grandet's untested virtue is not quite so strong as her thirst for power and position. In Chapter LXI we find this woman who prides herself upon her morality reflecting about the "condition désagréable" of her tacit agreement with Lucien's father:

"Mmes de Chevreuse ou de Longueville y eussent-elles consenti?--Sans doute elles y eussent consenti, ces grandes dames. Ce qui les place au-dessous de moi sous le rapport moral, c'est qu'elles consentaient à ces sortes de démarches par une sorte de demi-passion, quand encore ce n'était pas par suite d'un penchant moins noble. Plus physique. Elles pouvaient être séduites, moi je ne puis l'être. (Et elle s'admira beaucoup.) Dans cette démarche, il n'y a que de la haute sagesse, de la prudence; je n'y attache certes l'idée d'aucun plaisir. (LXI)

What a marvelous opportunity to witness the twists and turns of the corrupted self as it successfully evades the truth. Steeped in the mauvaise foi of her self-righteous rationalizations, Mme Grandet is not an amusing prude "lasse de son métier," as was Mme de Fervaques. She is a woman ready and willing to exchange her services for a favor, and the transition from prude to prostitute is not to be ignored.

In a marginal note Stendhal wrote scathingly, "Moralité: les femmes honnêtes comme Mme Grandet ne sont que des catins qui ne sont pas encore vendues, faute de prix battant." But instead of inserting this "moralité" directly into the narrative as wisdom truth, Stendhal depends, as usual in such cases of judgment, upon his hero. Lucien, at the end of the novel, refuses to fall under the spell of Mme Grandet's enhanced beauty:

Cette tête si belle de Mme Grandet certes en ce moment ne manquait pas d'expression, charme si rare chez elle. Pour extrême augmentation des charmes, elle avait les cheveux un peu en désordre; elle venait de jeter son chapeau avec distraction.

But then he appraises her as does Stendhal:

Il n'y voyait plus qu'une catin triomphant d'être assez belle pour se vendre afin d'acheter un ministère. (LXVII)

Her heart has been transformed but Lucien, the viewer, cannot know this. He sums her up by her act, and sees her as the poor comédienne that she is.

We have suggested elsewhere that Stendhal subtly condemns everything this woman says and does. Moreover, in his unconscious failure to animate her he adheres firmly and successfully to what he had written in an early marginal note--"Oter tout le gentil et l'imprévu à Mme Grandet"--too successfully no doubt. For although Stendhal has carefully refrained from depicting traditional feminine qualities in her --douceur, tendresse, compassion, in a word le gentil--regrettably he has not compensated for their absence by casting a flattering light upon her traits of force.

Neither vicious nor particularly malicious, Mme Grandet commits no evil deeds. Nor has Stendhal given her a sharp or hateful nature or made her cruel or clever enough to be truly absorbing. She is merely petty, selfish, and self-preoccupied and, sad to say, has not the power to capture our imagination as, say, a Valerie Marneffe, for example--a Balzacian creation who is certainly as unsentimental and unloving as Mme Grandet, but who is much more glorious and gifted in her chosen profession.

Stendhal himself was troubled by Mme Grandet. He would not see that despite the multiplicity of traits he gave her she remains all form without substance, of negligible credibility . . . the caricature

of a woman. Nevertheless, more than three-quarters of the way through the novel, in re-reading what he had written Stendhal sensed her banality and advised himself: "A faire: relever le caractère de Mme Grandet, c'est encore un bien plat personnage. 21 janvier 35." And so it is that in the culminating chapters of the novel he begins to breathe some life into her, giving her dialogue and a dramatic scene of her own. Here, for the first time, she speaks and moves without forethought, without calculation, with imprevu.

But if she is suddenly spontaneous, he raises her up only to lower her again, reducing her to her own vain and empty show. And, as we shall see, Stendhal is not particularly inventive when he sets her into motion. For her behavior and even her words are patterned upon those of another more winsome vaniteuse, Mathilde.

"Sans se l'avouer, elle n'était plus seulement dominée par l'ambition, elle commençait à prendre du goût pour ce jeune homme...." Love, "un sentiment jusque-là si inconnu pour elle, et si impossible," creates a "revolution" as Mme Grandet attempts to define her emotional state. She spends a sleepless night investigating the books in her library, among them novels that for years she had condemned in the name of morality. And then we are told of the novel that suits her. Stendhal, unable to pass up the opportunity to satirize the writing of an author whom he had revered during his formative years but whose style he soon saw as overblown, ridicules both the novel and its reader:

Enfin, de chute en chute, la sublime Mme Grandet, dont Rousseau était l'horreur, fut obligée d'avoir recours à la Nouvelle Héloïse. Tout ce qu'elle s'était fait lire dans le commencement de la nuit lui semblait froid, ennuyeux, rien ne répondait à sa pensée. Il se trouva que l'emphase un peu pédantesque qui fait fermer ce livre par les lecteurs un peu délicats était justement ce qu'il fallait pour la sensibilité bourgeoise et commençante de Mme Grandet. (LXVI)

This restless search for answers in literature is patently foolish. Those who love truly need no confirmation from external sources; they seek awareness in themselves. Furthermore, Mme Grandet's sensibility--opposed to that of Stendhal's discriminating readers, the "happy few"--is maudlin, and Stendhal's mockingly derisive attitude toward her is unchanged.

Lucien's failure to appear in her salon is met with irritation and rage. It is the fury of a woman scorned: "'Ah! je saurai le guérir de ces petites façons-là!'" se dit Mme Grandet hors d'elle-même." Then . . . unannounced, unexpected, and, what is worse, unwanted, she appears before him in his office, pursuing him. But her enmity soon fades--"Pour la première fois de sa vie, elle fut timide"--as Stendhal proceeds to make of her a contrite and ridiculous figure of a woman in love. Following the pattern established with Mathilde, pride goes before the fall.

In this final confrontation her words, her gestures, and her physical aspect are played off against Lucien's unremittingly negative reactions, for humor. At every moment we are invited to see her through his vision and to find her dramatics untouched. "Quoi! je n'aurais jamais la paix avec cette femme-là!" is his first thought as she makes her dramatic entrance. And though he is attentive to her shift in mood, her tearfulness for example, these are his thoughts: "Voilà sans doute . . . comment ces comédiennes de Paris répondent aux reproches qui n'ont pas de réponse." Perplexed to hear her confession of guilt he wonders, "Tout cela est-ce encore de l'affectation?" And when she grovels at his feet and then faints, he is still unmoved, "embarrassé, mais point touché."

There is further amusement to be derived from the juxtaposition

of their respective desires, she seeking his promise that he will not leave her, he intent upon getting her out of his office and out of his life. Lucien rebuffs her entreaties by letting her know that he does not love her, and an emotional dam bursts within her, as she gives forth with this astonishing verbal overflow:

"Tout ce que tu dis est vrai; je mourais d'ambition et d'orgueil. Me voyant extrêmement riche, le but de ma vie était de devenir une dame titrée, j'ose t'avouer ce ridicule amer. Mais ce n'est pas de cela que je rougis en ce moment. C'est par ambition uniquement que je me suis donnée à toi. Mais je meurs d'amour. Je suis une indigne, je l'avoue. Humilie-moi; je mérite tous les mépris. Je meurs d'amour et de honte. Je tombe à tes pieds, je te demande pardon, je n'ai plus d'ambition ni même d'orgueil. Dis-moi ce que tu veux que je fasse à l'avenir. Je suis à tes pieds, humilie-moi tant que tu voudras; plus tu m'humilieras, plus tu seras humain envers moi." (LXVII)

Her pride has been washed away and with it the last vestiges of self-control. Nowhere in the novel is there a comparable passage, particularly striking because her words sound like those of Mathilde to Julien, in curious imitation or parody of that self-same desire to be brow-beaten and punished. But if the master-slave theme is recurrent, it should be noted that until now Mme Grandet has not manifested the slightest inclination to be dominated or mortified. Thus, for the reader, her flamboyant submissiveness--excessive and delayed--rings a false note. And the same may be said about her newly-acquired self-awareness which, although not at variance with what the reader has long known about her, certainly comes abruptly. The transition from blindness to total illumination seems too sudden; furthermore, it is made without sympathetic or knowing comments from Stendhal. Yet it supports our view that Stendhal's feminine characters are not determined once and for all.

As we suggested earlier, Lucien is both judge and jury here, and

nothing she says, does, or feels can save her. When she is unconscious, the sight of her cold and lifeless features summons up the memory of what she was like only yesterday:

Ses traits, sans expression autre que la hauteur qui leur était naturelle, lui rappelèrent l'expression qu'ils avaient lorsqu'il lui présentait l'image des prisonniers mourant de froid et de misère sur leurs charrettes. (LXVII)

Although she was, for the first time in her life, emotionally stirred in front of a witness, and sincere as well, her dramatic performance is wasted. "Scène désagréable!" Lucien says to himself after he is rid of her. "Est-ce une comédie? A-t-elle chargé l'expression de ce qu'elle sentait?"

Mme Grandet, moved by love, comes to life ever so briefly in her moments of passion. However, Stendhal has made it virtually impossible for us to empathize with her or to find her touching or appealing. What is more, we sense that she is an insignificant accessory character who might have easily been replaced by any other minor figure (such as Mme de Vaize, or Mlle Gosseline). Doubtless she was initially intended as a foil for Mme de Chasteller. Stendhal, yielding perhaps to facility, chose to reprobate instead of infusing her with the spark of life. His own élan of empathetic understanding is lacking. And the focus is too much upon the hero, which, in our opinion, largely accounts for unsuccessful portrayals of both Mme Grandet and Mme de Chasteller, if not for the échec du roman.¹⁸

¹⁸Gilbert Durand suggests that it is "la puissance de l'or" and the lack of "inspiration mythique" which account for the échec and incompletion of Lucien Leuwen, and Lamiel too. Le Décor, pp. 38, 97. Victor Brombert, on the other hand, writes as follows: "A central character who, without any objectively serious problems or obstacles, constantly creates seemingly gratuitous difficulties will no doubt tire the reader and discourage the author." Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom, pp. 125-27; to which we would add that Lucien is too much at the center. Stendhal himself wrote in a margin that everything converges upon his hero, wondering where this would lead him as he "improvised."

Mme Grandet, ludicrous and even grotesque in her failure to elicit the hero's responsiveness is, for the reader, beyond rehabilitation; and if Stendhal would not have her admired by his reader, neither would he have her pitied at the end. Thus Stendhal has Lucien remember that she was always ungenerous, unsympathetic, false, and of course, immoral --a "catin." While love can bring a new interest into life and thereby subject a woman to some startling transformations, love cannot obliterate a woman's past. Mme Grandet is certainly one heroine whose past is not provisional. She cannot become other than what she is. This is a character who is less a woman than a vehicle for Stendhal's ideas about "la sensibilité bourgeoise."

Mme d'Hocquincourt

If, in this novel, there is a woman who is by definition and in essence active, it is Mme d'Hocquincourt. This lovely noble woman of free and easy ways is no doubt a secondary "subsidiary" heroine, for her secret thoughts are not transmitted to us; she never dominates Lucien's existence or the action of the novel, and is clearly not the object of the hero's affections. And yet, Stendhal has enlivened her more successfully than he has either Mme de Chasteller or Mme Grandet, to the extent that we find her both refreshingly unoppressed and engagingly delightful in her openheartedness. If this is not sufficient reason for discussing her character, we might add that Mme d'Hocquincourt, as a "femme du premier mouvement," follows in the footsteps of a minor figure who appeared in Stendhal's first novel and announces an outstand-

ing heroine encountered in La Chartreuse de Parme.

This woman of free spirit and energy is first described to Lucien as "la plus jolie femme de la ville et qui mène grand train." (III) And Dr. Poirier later declares that she is "the most seductive woman in Nancy" while, according to the postmaster, she is "la plus pimpante de nos dames." When Lucien finally meets her he is not disappointed. For once he has been told the truth:

Lucien fut frappé. "Il est impossible d'être plus jolie, se dit-il, et, pour la première fois, la renommée n'a pas menti." Il y avait dans ces yeux-là un vélouté, une gaiété, un naturel, qui faisaient presque un bonheur de plaisir de les regarder. (X)

Like every woman whom Stendhal would have us favor, this heroine is distinguished from her peers and gradually emerges as an "être d'exception" whose naturel is apparent in her eyes as in her unstilted manner. But while men may admire her and find her desirable, most women--out of envy, we sense--dislike her intensely:

Elle n'avait rien de cet air empesé et si admiré en province, et ses façons d'agir gaies, libres, familières, sans façon, comme d'une princesse qui s'amuse, lui avaient valu l'aversion furibonde de toutes les femmes. Les dévotes surtout ne parlaient guère d'elle qu'avec fureur. (X)

As a married woman who pursues her pleasures of the moment and never looks back with regret--"C'était un être gai qui vivait exactement au jour le jour--she bears a strong resemblance to Mme d'Aumale, the lady with whom Octave flirted briefly in Armance. Indeed, her presence in this novel seems based on similar premises: the hero plays verbal games with her and enjoys her company; but he cannot get

serious about her; and she is cause for the true heroine's jealousy:

En rentrant chez elle, Mme de Chasteller ne pensait presque plus à Leuwen; toute son imagination, enflammée par le désespoir, était occupée à se figurer les charmes et l'amabilité séduisante de Mme d'Hocquincourt. (XXXV)

By contrast, jealousy, this sentiment which Stendhal enjoys detailing in women (more than in men) as a powerful psychological force which usually overwhelms them and then brings them to their senses, sometimes spurring them to action, is virtually unknown to Mme d'Hocquincourt. She is aware of Lucien's attachment to Mme de Chasteller¹ but, instead of being consumed by impotent rage or otherwise allowing herself to be troubled about the charms of her rival, she focuses her attention and efforts upon winning Lucien's heart--with a directness that is as "shocking" to the impartial observers in the novel as it is endearing to the reader.²

Thus for us she is exemplary of the "being of passion" whom Girard has described in general terms "qui tient ses désirs de lui-même et s'efforce de les satisfaire avec la dernière énergie ... qui marche vers l'objet de son désir sans se soucier des Autres."³ Ignoring the "others"--their opinions as well as their day-to-day affairs--she has an attitude of que m'importe which, to Lucien, seems somewhat excessive ("un peu trop marquée) but which is an index to Stendhal's personal affection for her.

Like the other energetic women he would have us appreciate, this

¹See citation from Chapter XXX on page 135 ("Les voilà reconciliés, et mieux que jamais. En vérité...."). Also Mme d'Hocquincourt "s'occupait infiniment peu des affaires des autres...." XXXI.

²In Chapter XXIX the witness is an obscure person, "un autre" who is "choqué de la façon dont Mme d'Hocquincourt regardait Lucien."

³Girard, Mensonge, pp. 122, 146.

heroine is nonchalant about society's codes and dictates. "C'est ainsi qu'une femme se perd de réputation en province;" says Stendhal, adding "c'est ce dont Mme d'Hocquincourt se moquait parfaitement." (XXIX) She is free of the "vanité puérile" and the "crainte continue de manquer aux mille petites règles" by which Stendhal characterizes the French during the reign of Charles X. With ease and without qualification, he expands upon her positive qualities:

Elle ne manquait point d'esprit, et, cet esprit se trouvant tous les jours au service d'une volonté ferme et d'une passion vive, il avait acquis toutes les habitudes du bon sens. (XXIX)

The way Stendhal distinguishes her from her peers is again a mark of his own enthusiasm for nonconformism and for the naturel: "Cette jeune marquise n'avait rien du gourmé de son rang, elle était naturellement coquette, folle et gaie." (X) And should we believe that her morals are too lax, he will not hesitate to come to her defense, stating that her reputation is "bien plus mauvaise qu'elle ne le méritait."

As for her background, only her amorous past is mentioned. She has had more than one lover, and without arousing her husband's suspicions! As Dr. Du Poirier explains to Lucien, she has made her husband "amoureux d'elle à la folie ... au point de ne pouvoir devenir jaloux. C'est elle qui ouvre toutes les lettres anonymes qu'on lui écrit." (X)

Mme d'Hocquincourt's portrayal, begun by Lucien, is completed by Stendhal who makes her physical appearance the occasion for insight into her character:

Tout en écoutant la parole lente, élégante et décolorée de M. d'Hocquincourt, Lucien examinait sa femme. Mme d'Hocquincourt pouvait avoir vingt-quatre ou vingt-cinq ans. Elle était blonde avec de grands yeux bleus,

point langoureux et d'une vivacité charmante, quelquefois languissants quand on l'ennuyait; bientôt après, fous de bonheur à la première apparition d'une idée gaie ou seulement singulière. Une bouche délicieuse de fraîcheur avait des contours fins, nobles, bien arrêtés, qui donnait à toute la tête une noblesse admirable. Un nez légèrement aquilin complétait le charme de cette tête noble à la fois et cependant variant à chaque instant, comme les nuances de passion qui agitaient Mme d'Hocquincourt. Elle n'était point hypocrite; ce genre de mérite eût été impossible avec une telle figure. (X)

The physical portrait, which does not extend beyond the face, is extremely impressionistic, as usual. It is true that Stendhal mentions more than one feature and even attempts to give some shape to the mouth and nose. Yet again and again the word "noble" is interjected, as if to cover up for the imprecision of detail. No doubt it is her fun-loving, impetuous, passionate nature that Stendhal would impress upon us and, not surprisingly, the eyes give it away. But if her eyes reveal her inclinations, they are not so profoundly expressive as the eyes of Mme de Chasteller and they are incapable of sustaining dialogue. Nor, of course, does she lower them modestly--as does Mme de Chasteller in fear of revealing herself.

It is interesting that although Mme d'Hocquincourt is a minor character, she has nevertheless a major speaking part. One notices that pages of dialogue are given over to her, suggesting that Stendhal felt more comfortable with her, as a character, than with any other woman in this novel. He does not thoroughly explore her emotions, but through her words he reveals her as a witty, rather sharp, and refreshingly straightforward personality.

Her constant desire is to be amused, intellectually or otherwise. "Tâchez de me rendre folle," she says at one point to Lucien, "je ne m'y oppose pas." Apparently her quest is for the unfamiliar, the unknown. The essential element of her bonheur is "la surprise." Gay

soupers, scintillating conversation, and whatever else might break up the monotony of life in Nancy--including Lucien--are welcome. Nor does she sit by idly waiting for diversions: "elle poursuivait ... avec une activité incroyable les projets qui se présentaient à sa tête folle," says Stendhal. (XXXII) The adjective folle, far from being pejorative, has happy associations with imprudence and joie de vivre and, in the context above, "activity" . . . to further enhance Mme d'Hocquincourt's marvelous spontaneity.

It is through the author's statements and the testimony of others, as well as by her verbal flair and actions, that this heroine's energy and dynamism are conveyed. Unhesitatingly, Stendhal sets her into motion. Right before our eyes and with a boldness that startles those who are watching her, she pursues the man she desires.⁴ Her "cour marquée" (the term that Mme de Chasteller applies to her open pursuit of Lucien) is recorded in several ways: the unmistakable gesture--"elle serra le bras de Lucien"; dialogue that is in no way ambiguous--when Lucien says flatteringly that the bouquet she carries is as lovely as she, Mme d'Hocquincourt replies, "vous croyez? Eh bien! soit: il représente mon coeur et je vous le donne" (XXXIV); and finally the look in her eyes--"Il ne manquait ni de profondeur ni de passion, et à un homme sensé ne pouvait laisser aucun doute sur le sens du don du bouquet." But while Lucien is sorely tempted, he resists. For his heart--we know too well--belongs to another.

In the long run Mme d'Hocquincourt was intended as an unsuccessful rival rather than a foil for Mme de Chasteller: Stendhal does not oppose

⁴As Mme de Chasteller's cousin Blancet recounts, "Mme d'Hocquincourt s'était donnée en spectacle; le goût qu'elle commençait à prendre pour Leuwen était une vraie fureur." XXXIV. See also footnote 2 on page 141.

her to the latter. It is Lucien who, toward the end, finds her "importunate" and tiresome--a "femme légère." Stendhal, on the other hand, has no unkind words whatsoever. And, for the reader, despite Lucien's unfavorable thoughts--"Il faudra voir Mme d'Hocquincourt. Et combien je vais être excédé par ses empressements continus et sans mesure" (XXXII), despite the fact that Mme de Chasteller "seule au monde semblait une femme à ses yeux" (XXXIV), it is the secondary heroine in this novel who remains a more interesting character than the woman Lucien so ardently adores. Traced with enthusiasm and--we think--partiality, possessing "brio" and more, Mme d'Hocquincourt anticipates the winsome Sanseverina, the woman who captures our imagination in the novel that follows Lucien Leuwen.

As we have seen, in Lucien Leuwen Stendhal has opposed two forceful, outgoing, unchaste women to the modest, demure woman whom his hero worships. And in the novel that follows he again paints two exceedingly different heroines vying for the hero's affections. Clélia Conti is chaste, modest, and retiring (even more withdrawn than Mmes de Rênal and Chasteller). On the other hand the Duchess, Gina, is a socially active, energetic, immoral woman. Nevertheless the two women are not opposed to one another as were the heroines in preceding novels. Which is to say that Stendhal does not focus upon the modesty, the naturalness, the generosity of Fabrice's beloved Clélia to the detriment of Gina. Furthermore, Gina's undeniable moral laxity, far from being cause for criticism, is made to seem admirable. And Clélia Conti does

not remain forever pure.

Our author's cynicism increased as he approached old age, and is manifest in his last two novels. In regard to physical love, La Chartreuse de Parme is not weighted down by women's guilty self-re-
criminations or remorsefulness. Stendhal does not say that women ought to go after what they want, but this is what he implies. And the heroines of this novel, as well as Lamiel in the novel that follows, do just that.

CHAPTER IV

LA CHARTREUSE DE PARME

Stendhal was not really apologizing in De l'Amour when he slyly excused himself with these words:

Je prie qu'on me pardonne si je reviens trop souvent à l'Italie; dans l'état actuel des mœurs de l'Europe, c'est le seul pays où croisse en liberté la plante que je décris.
(XL)

The "plante" is nothing less significant than love. For us, however, the key word here is "liberté," and we shall return to it in our discussion of his Italian heroines. For the moment it is enough to appreciate that as far back as 1818 an unbridled freedom lay at the heart of Stendhal's conception of all that was Italian.

In writing as well as in person Stendhal was to return "often" enough to the land he loved. Italy was his "patrie," a spiritual homeland. Our author, whether writing from the perspective of a tourist, an art critic, or a lover, did not cease to heap praise upon Italy and the Italians; their cultural achievements in music, art, and literature were as commendable as their ability to enjoy life and to love.

The last chapter of La Vie de Henri Brulard testifies to Stendhal's warm memories of Italy as well as to his admiration of the Italian creative genius. And on the final page of the novel just examined, the orphaned hero travels to Italy and sees "Milan, Saranno, la Chartreuse de Pavie, etc. Bologne, Florence..."--all places which enchant

him by eliciting unexpected emotion and "sensibility." Although Leuwen, unlike his creator, is an "ignorant" in the arts, he is not indifferent to the beauties and glories of Italy. He reacts, no doubt, as Stendhal would and did in Italy. It should not surprise us that the land which immediately appealed to the hero of Stendhal's third novel, the land to which Stendhal himself was always attached--and all the more so when he was far away from it--would serve as the setting of the novel that soon followed Lucien Leuwen.

La Chartreuse de Parme, which was written in France toward the end of 1838, was composed rapidly and with assurance. Stendhal had a fine source of inspiration and a clear idea of how he wanted to proceed with it--the source being an old and brief Italian manuscript entitled "Origine delle grandezze della famiglia Farnese," which he had originally intended to develop into a short story. This hand-written history gave an unflattering account of the life of Alexandre Farnese, who eventually succeeded Clement VII as pope and owed much of his success to the intriguing of a beautiful, unprincipled aunt, Vandozza Farnese. Vandozza had been the mistress of Rodrigo Borgia (and others) and was a woman whom the author of the history qualified as a whore. Also mentioned was an obscure woman named Cleria. Farnese's mistress and companion of his old age, Cleria bore him two children.

So much for the substance of the story which Stendhal was to transform into a novel. As with the Rouge, the equally magnificent Chartreuse was initially inspired, if not guided, by historical facts and it came into being by virtue of Stendhal's invention and improvisation. Which is to say that he was not particularly faithful to the original. Stendhal added, modified, and altered the story at will, creating and developing characteristic themes of his own. The themes of jealousy and of love from

a distance are particularly promising and will be worth further exploration. And there are new subjects too. This is the only novel in which our author has broached--in his unique manner--the subject of aging from a woman's perspective. He, of course, adds his own comments to the lady's perceptions but he also allows her to speak without interruption and we feel--long before the novel has ended--that the life of the Duchess has indeed run its course.

Stendhal's approach to a historical subject was bold and even original. Instead of retaining his characters in their sixteenth-century setting, as his contemporaries or a Sir Walter Scott might have done, he updated his tale and situated the personages in an Italy of the early nineteenth-century Restoration, an Italy which, although modern, was nevertheless an imaginary Italy.¹ Stendhal's Italy retains the habits and much of the spirit that he associated with the Renaissance, just as it has something in common with the country described in De l'Amour, a land where "le danger montre souvent la main" and which was therefore capable of producing great men--unlike France, of course.²

Energetic even primitive Renaissance beings who had, he believed, lived according to their own impulses and desires were Stendhal's models--people of the historical era that was the most glorious and ideal of epochs, people with whom he felt a strong bond. At the center of the novel we find more than one "âme forte" struggling against a hostile world for his or her share of happiness. And every one of the

¹Italians tend to agree. Likewise, Hemmings observes that Stendhal's Italy, "created for his own delectation and the purposes of his art, was . . . a strange fusion of the present which he knew and the past he sentimentally admired and yearned after." Stendhal, p. 170.

²XLI. In accordance with his theories of climatology, Italy, like Corsica and Spain, has that "chaleur brûlante" which spurs men to action.

four characters directly inspired by that little anonymous history is portrayed sympathetically.

Alexandre comes to life as Fabrice del Dongo, who is certainly more dreamy and naïve than his original, and scarcely as lusty. The spirited Gina Pietranera (née del Dongo), who eventually becomes the Duchess of Sanseverina and ultimately the wife of Mosca, bears some of the traits of Henri Beyle's "sublime catin" Pietragrua, and is a nineteenth-century Vandozza. Then, behind her urbane lover Mosca, whom critics are wont to describe as one of Stendhal's personal doubles, stands the wealthy and powerful Borgia. Finally, the heroine, who, in our opinion, has the most in common with women of the earlier novels; timid, modest Clélia Conti assumes the role of Cleria. Just as the historical facts were altered and embroidered, so were the Renaissance people transformed into Stendhalian beings to suit the author's fancy.

A look at the avertissement will show that Stendhal plainly idealized the Italians, particularly as opposed to the French. Yet as a novelist he succeeded in making his individual characters warm and human, believable by the force of their feelings, their jealousies, their joys and anguish. He did not hesitate to paint their cunning and cruelty, to detail the sordid intrigues, the political games, the maneuvering for power and prestige, and, last but not least, the vengefulness which happens to be a significant aspect of the outstanding heroine of the novel. With a liberty that frequently borders on license, Stendhal's "happy few" act out their passions, committing deeds that--in Italy--seem altogether fitting if not always proper.

Without delay the familiar practice of comparing the Italians to the French appears in the foreword, where the nameless French author says:

Les coeurs de ce pays-là diffèrent assez des coeurs français: les Italiens sont sincères, bonnes gens, et, non éffarouchés, disent ce qu'ils pensent. Ce n'est que par accès qu'ils ont de la vanité; alors, elle devient passion, et prend le nom de puntiglio. Enfin, la pauvreté n'est pas un ridicule parmi eux.

Not only is the generalized Italian without vanity. He is a being who values not money but feelings--a being of passion. And yet, not everyone in the novel conforms to this ideal. A few individuals are, in fact, quite like the French, who, as Stendhal first implies and very soon states outright, value money and status above all. In the next paragraph our author dons the mask of a moralist, explaining that he has not changed the aspérités of the people he is presenting to us. (He is merely telling the story told to him by an Italian in Padua in 1830.) However, he certainly recognizes that their deeds are reprehensible: "Je le déclare hautement," says he. "Je déverse le blâme le plus moral sur leurs actions." Naturally we do not take him seriously, for his blanket condemnation soon dissolves into one of those inverted assaults upon the French. It is they, no doubt, who are moral. Yet Stendhal's use of the word "morality" is sarcastically pejorative. What, he asks, is the use of giving the Italians herein

la haute moralité et les grâces des caractères français, lesquels aiment l'argent par-dessus tout et ne font guère de péchés par haine ou par amour? Les Italiens de cette nouvelle sont à peu près le contraire.

At the expense of the French, then, the Italian character emerges endowed with the energy of passion.³ Stendhal stimulates curiosity about an alien people. Preparing us for the journey through unfamiliar territory, he suggests that we will meet individuals who may be capable of

³As Stendhal had insisted in De l'Amour, "l'Italien, toujours agité entre la haine et l'amour, vit de passions, et le Français de vanité,..." XLVIII.

exciting our indignation--and he will be quick to feign moral judgments whenever it suits him--but people who are worth knowing because they are so different. They go after what they want. In fact, they sin to better satisfy their loves and hatreds--all of which is just fine with our very objective author-historian and makes for a very interesting novel for us.

It follows from what Stendhal claimed in his foreword that the heroines in this novel are indifferent to the éclat of wealth. However, such indifference hardly distinguishes them from women such as Armance, Mme de Rênal, Mathilde, or Mme de Chasteller. What, then, separates Gina and Clélia from women who have gone before them? Surely it is the intensity with which these Italian women engage in the "chasse au bonheur," blithely disregarding Christian morality and more than one of the Ten Commandments.

Gina, in particular, displays a refreshing and sometimes frightening recklessness. Yet she does not deliberately "play with chance," as did Mathilde. "Cette âme naturellement si agissante" just improvises as she goes along, and does not stop to consider the implications of her actions. As the Count Mosca observes, "c'est une femme de premier mouvement; sa conduite est imprévue même pour elle." (VII)

Compared to the Duchess of Sanseverina, Clélia Conti is an extremely modest, almost superstitiously pious, submissive, and retiring woman--like Mmes de Rênal and Chasteller. Stendhal's tendency to oppose two (or more) different kinds of women is by now a pattern. However, character is by no means fixed in the Chartreuse. In the case of Clélia transcendancy is felt when, for her lover, she becomes mobile and courageous. And, again out of love, toward the end of the novel she becomes surprisingly willful. Furthermore, she casually commits

adultery over a prolonged period of time.

With Gina we are given a sense of decline through loss. A woman once so brilliant and youthful ages rapidly from a time that dates back to Fabrice's imprisonment. And she knows the ultimate degradation of prostituting herself to save the life of the young man she adores.

The Duchess of Sanseverina

Feeling that our bewilderment is akin to Stendhal's when he attempted to synthesize happiness--"Comment peindre le bonheur?"--we ask ourselves: how to define the chameleonlike Gina? This fervid feminine personage cannot be reduced to the several traits that Stendhal, and others, insist upon. For she is--if we may be permitted the colloquialism--a bundle of contradictions.

Amoral or immoral, she nevertheless has her own principles and a code of ethics--a high sense of loyalty and of personal honor. We are privy to her short-tempered outbursts. She can be thoughtless and inconsiderate, totally unconcerned about Mosca's feelings, or needlessly, pitilessly cruel in her torment of Fabrice (when he is despondent over Clélia's upcoming marriage to the Marquis Crescenzi). But on the other hand she is lovingly attentive, solicitous, and supportive of the men whom she favors as well as uncommonly generous and protective toward those who serve her.

Vital, sometimes overpowering, she is also tender and vulnerable. She will thrive and flourish brilliantly in courts throughout Italy, in highly socialized milieus. And yet, while opulence and life amidst the nobility suit her well, she is no less content when her funds are lim-

ited, when she is alone. Given to reverie, she has no fear of solitude. Still, a retiring life is inappropriate: "elle avait trop d'esprit pour ne pas sentir parfois l'ennui qu'il y a à ne pas échanger les idées." (II) She is sensitive to nature, and responsive to literature. However barbarous her behavior, she is a warm-hearted, poetic woman whose flair for the dramatic is impressive and, because totally unself-conscious, delightful.

Gina is oh-so-"natural." Yet she will feign emotion that she does not feel. Using her feminine wiles and the entire arsenal of coquetterie she stoops to conquer, as it were, often to assuage a temporal craving for vengeance. However disparate the elements of her character, however various the modes of her behavior, she is not made out to be a conflicted individual. Her motivation is not fuzzy and she possesses a sublime self-confidence that is rarely shaken.

Here are the first words about Gina, "vive et franche." To the French Lieutenant Robert, whose testimony follows, she seemed at age thirteen more like eighteen; he denotes her as:

Gina del Dongo,... qui fut depuis cette charmante comtesse Pietranera: personne dans la prospérité ne la surpassa par la gaieté et l'esprit aimable, comme personne ne la surpassa par le courage et la sérénité d'âme dans la fortune contraire. (I)

Stendhal uses the approach he had earlier depended upon in Lucien Leuwen: for the initial introduction of the major heroine he turns to a minor, transitory character. This time the approach is successful. Through Robert, our author builds interest in an uncommon and adaptable woman. And then, instead of subjecting us to interminable delay, Stendhal, with Robert to help him, gives a narrative account--skimpy though it is--of the young woman's past life and activities. Thus toward the end of Chapter I and in Chapter II Gina is at the center of the novel.

In the first chapter of the novel we learn that "la comtesse méprisait souverainement son frère.... Mais elle était folle de Fabrice." As Fabrice matures, Gina's semi-maternal affection develops into an affection of a different kind--in fact, an amour-passion which includes delicately nuanced physical desire and is highlighted by the very real anguish and torments of jealousy. Gina's passion struggling to the light and what that passion compels her to do are crucial elements in the novel. To the reader and to many of Gina's witnesses, impartial and adoring ones alike, the signs that she is keen on Fabrice are everywhere apparent. Yet Gina remains somehow oblivious to the nature of her feeling.⁴ That is, until she is forced by the effects of Mosca's jealousy to reflect . . . ever so briefly.

One recalls that Mme de Rênal, who was not portrayed as an introspective, lucid heroine, began to examine her heart after a few short months. For Gina it takes years! And her cecity, from which Stendhal derives a certain amount of humor, is ably, even credibly sustained.

We do not see Gina engrossed in naïve or self-protective ra-

⁴According to Jean-Pierre Richard, Gina is "le seul personnage Stendhalien auquel son créateur ait accordé la grâce d'une passion incertaine et à demi-consciente, le seul auquel il ait évité le terrible engrenage de la cristallisation." Stendhal et Flaubert: Littérature et sensation (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954), p. 97. (As we have stated elsewhere, Stendhal's heroines do not "crystallize" if the heroes do.)

tionalizations. What is interesting is that Stendahl, through interpolations and speculative phrases which he attempts to pass off as hers, creates the illusion that Gina is engaged in self-deception. In Chapter VI, for instance:

S'il eût parlé d'amour, elle l'eût aimé; n'avait-elle pas déjà une admiration passionnée et pour ainsi dire sans bornes?

Obviously her interiorized passion is to be recognized by the reader long before she herself can come to terms with it. What makes her different from Mme de Rênal, and yet akin to Mme d'Hocquincourt, is that her awareness is not at all inhibiting. She desires and she acts, as we shall see.

Clélia Conti is the first to notice that Gina's attitude toward Fabrice is other than maternal:

Clélia Conti remarqua la nuance d'enthousiasme avec laquelle une aussi belle dame que la comtesse parlait à Fabrice; certainement elle n'était pas sa mère. (V)

The suspicions of jealous Canon Borda, however, are more extreme: "La voilà qui fait l'amour avec son neveu s'était-il dit avec amertume."

(V) As for covert indications, Gina "en pensant tout haut" in the presence of her lover Mosca "ne lui parlait jamais de Fabrice qu'après avoir songé à la tournure de sa phrase," Stendhal informs us. (VI)

From several persons we learn that Gina is "frank," open, candid, etc. The following passage is often quoted by critics who would verify her outstanding trait:

Quelquefois son imagination ardente lui cachait les choses, mais jamais avec elle il n'y avait de ces illusions que donne la lâcheté. C'était surtout une femme de bonne foi avec elle-même.

This remarkable feminine lucidity, which Stendhal has underscored, suggests that she is one of those "héroïnes de transparence"--like Armance

or Mathilde. But if Stendhal is proud of her lucidity he also enjoys exploring its limitations. Her candid speech to Mosca is contained in the paragraph immediately following Stendhal's (above) assertion:

Vous jurer que j'ai pour vous une passion folle, lui disait la comtesse, un jour à Milan, ce serait mentir; je serais trop heureuse d'aimer aujourd'hui à trente ans passés, comme jadis j'aimais à vingt-deux! Mais j'ai vu tomber tant de choses que j'avais crues éternelles! J'ai pour vous la plus tendre amitié, je vous accorde une confiance sans bornes, et de tous les hommes, vous êtes celui que je préfère. (VI)

At this point Stendhal takes over, to reveal the true--though unavowed --sentiments. He accuses his heroine of telling a little fib. Yet if she has lied it is, we maintain, à son insu. Only Stendhal knows the whole truth, which he proceeds to share with us:

La comtesse se croyait parfaitement sincère, pourtant vers la fin cette déclaration contenait un petit mensonge. Peut-être si Fabrice l'eût voulu, il l'eût emporté sur tout dans son coeur. Mais Fabrice n'était qu'un enfant, aux yeux de Mosca. (VI)

While the insidious thought that Fabrice is merely a child . . . to Mosca, is intended to convince us that the speculation preceding comes from Gina, actually Gina herself has not been shown thinking consciously about loving or being loved by Fabrice. The entire speculation is made by Stendhal, who promotes the discrepancy between her conscious and unconscious.

To Mosca it is a certain unmistakable look in Gina's eyes that gives her away: "il lui trouva des yeux singuliers. Ce jeune homme fait ici une étrange impression." And Stendhal goes on to tell us:

Au moment de l'arrivée de Fabrice la duchesse fut tellement transportée de bonheur qu'elle ne songea pas du tout aux idées que ses yeux pourraient donner au comte. L'effet fut profond et sans remède. (VII)

Yet she has not admitted anything to herself. The conflicts, the impossibility of love are cogently presented from Fabrice's perspective:

La position où le hasard me place n'est pas tenable, se disait-il. Je suis bien sûr qu'elle ne parlera jamais, elle aurait horreur d'un mot trop significatif comme d'un inceste. Mais si un soir, après une journée imprudente et folle, elle vient à faire l'examen de sa conscience, si elle croit que j'ai pu deviner le goût qu'elle semble prendre pour moi, quel rôle jouerais-je à ses yeux? (VIII)

Fabrice, we know, has more love for her than for "any being in the world" but his devoted adoration is nuanced with filial overtones. His is an "amitié passionnée."

It happens that soon after Fabrice becomes aware of her "taste" for him, Gina cannot avoid thinking about the unthinkable. But one observes that in her long-delayed moment of truth she does not probe deeply.

A peine enfermée dans sa chambre, elle fondit en larmes; elle trouvait quelque chose d'horrible dans l'idée de faire l'amour avec ce Fabrice qu'elle avait vu naître; et pourtant que voulait dire sa conduite? (VIII)

It can be said that Stendhal treats the difficult subject of the love of an older woman for her nephew--a passion that is, strictly speaking, incestuous--with a certain frankness that is never offensive. Gina's thoughts are carefully filtered through the author. There is no overwhelming shock of recognition; only a small dose of self-reproach which quickly fades. And while making love with Fabrice appears to be a repellent notion, her horror does not long endure. In fact, she does a mental about-face.

Fabrice, just returned from Belgirate and visiting with Gina, is still unsure of how he ought to behave. The Duchess, on the other hand, knows no uncertainty. She is propelled into motion, if not by desire then surely by the force of her thoughts:

La duchesse le regardait avec admiration; ce n'était plus l'enfant qu'elle avait vu naître, ce n'était plus le neveu toujours prêt à l'obéir: c'était un homme grave et duquel il serait délicieux de se faire aimer. Elle se leva de

l'ottomane où elle était assise et, se jetant dans ses bras avec transport:
 --Tu veux donc me fuir? lui dit-elle.
 --Non, répondit-il de l'air d'un empereur romain, mais je voudrais être sage. (XI)

Is this not a fine demonstration of Gina acting spontaneously, according to her impulses? How easily she dispenses with irrelevancies which had earlier troubled her (that Fabrice is her nephew and she many years older). Fabrice may want to remain prudent, but reason deserts him as he impulsively responds. Let us observe that in the following passage there is wish-fulfillment. This particular hero realizes the dream that the more calculating, self-conscious Julien could only articulate:

Par un transport naturel et malgré tout raisonnement, il prit dans ses bras cette femme charmante et la couvrit de baisers.

This incident represents both the beginning and the end of their physical intimacy. Mosca fortuitously appears on the scene and passion gives way to politics.

We have noticed that in the first half of the novel Gina's long and meaningful interior discourses are rare. We have singled out the one revelatory rendering of her thoughts which cannot be overlooked. For in the second chapter of the Chartreuse appears a lengthy interior monologue in which Stendhal lends to his heroine both his tastes in literature and his ecstatic love of the Italian landscape. Then gradually, almost imperceptibly, he takes over--truly "usurping la parole" --to express what he feels about the environs of Lake Como. And in the process is revealed a strain of the romantic, subdued, and with rhythm and harmony.

Here the words, the thoughts, and vision are Gina's:

Au milieu de ces collines aux formes admirables et se précipitant vers le lac par des pentes si singulières je puis garder toutes les illusions du Tasse et de l'Arioste. Tout est noble et tendre, tout parle d'amour, rien ne rapelle les laideurs de la civilisation.

Now, although the viewing eye is clearly hers, midway in the monologue her eye becomes "l'oeil satisfait," "l'oeil étonné." Generalized, it is Stendhal's. And in rapid succession his, too, is "l'imagination" which, in such romantic terms, "is touched by the distant sound of the bells." Then, from tight description emerge immortal themes:

Ces sons portés sur les eaux qui les adoucissent prennent une teinte de douce mélancholie et de résignation, et semblent dire à l'homme: La vie s'enfuit, ne te montre point si difficile envers le bonheur qui se présente, hâte-toi de jouir. [Now he remembers his heroine:] Le langage de ces lieux ravissants, et qui n'ont point de pareils au monde, rendit à la comtesse son coeur de seize ans.

One wonders, is it quite unconsciously or deliberately that Stendhal parodies Lamartine? More to the point, however, this glimpse of Gina, enraptured by the sight and sounds of natural splendor, is unique. In retrospect our heroine here seems--dare we say it?--out of character. She is not elsewhere responsive to sights and sounds. Of the del Dongo family it is Fabrice whom Stendhal paints as sensible in regard to nature. More tellingly, four chapters later, "Son esprit [Gina's] était encore tout raidi par l'ennui de la vie champêtre." (VI) With Gina as a cover, Stendhal conveys his own sentimental attachment to Italy. And his romanticism is unbridled.

While the passages we have touched upon reflect the author's soul, on the following page in that same chapter it is Gina's nature that will be unveiled. The incident--and it is more than background--is a storm: "elles sont terribles et imprévues sur ce beau lac," observes Stendhal. Gina is shown enchanted by the storm, inspired to throw herself into the

midst of that storm. And Stendhal ends on a note of humor, as she is proven sublimely human:

La comtesse voulut débarquer au milieu de l'oragan et des coups de tonnerre; elle prétendait que, placée sur un rocher isolé au milieu du lac, et grand comme une petite chambre, elle aurait un spectacle singulier; elle se verrait assiégée de toutes parts par des vagues furieuses; mais, en sautant de la barque, elle tomba dans l'eau. (II)

Having read the novel one can state that the Gina who is revealed here as courageous, and impetuous, and--if not a wee bit crazy (an idea to be explored), then surely romanesque--this widowed Gina of the early chapters eventually proves to be startlingly similar to the storm which so allures and impassions her: forceful, awesome, unpredictable, and even "terrible." It is not by chance that Clélia Conti later describes her as "cette femme d'une activité admirable, d'un esprit supérieur, d'une volonté terrible." (XX) And in Clélia's letter to Fabrice, the epithet "cette femme terrible" suffices. (XXI)⁵

In Part I Gina is view from the outside by others. It is in the second half of the novel that her pensées intimes are in plentiful supply. Her thoughts will often convey or corroborate changes she has undergone. And thus the reader attains a strong sense of evolution of character. But if evolution is perceptible in her poignant and sometimes bitter self-awareness, we can also say that she changes because her tenderness is diminished, because a woman once so decisive vacillates,⁶ and because she loses hope. As Gina says to Mosca, "La jeune femme est

⁵Our emphases throughout.

⁶"Avilie, atterrée par ce plus grand des chagrins possibles, la duchesse se disait quelquefois: Si le ciel voulait que Ferrante fût devenu tout à fait fou ou manquât de courage, il me semble que je serais moins malheureuse. Dès ce moment ce demi-remords empoisonna l'estime que la duchesse avait pour son propre caractère. Ainsi, se disait-elle avec amertume, je me repens d'une résolution prise: je ne suis plus une del Dongo." XXII. The words we have stressed are indicative of her vacillation.

morte en moi, je ne puis plus m'exagérer rien au monde, je ne puis plus aimer." (XVI)

Undoubtedly Stendhal deliberately reserved her interior discourses for Part II where interiorized emotions, such as jealousy, or rage (against the monarch who has bested her), translate ultimately into well-calculated savagery. And these emotions take their toll upon Gina. Stendhal, who was himself often obsessed by jealousy, devoted many pages to the topic in De l'Amour. What he there conceived as "le plus grand des maux" for men was, for women, a "supplice cruel," "un mal encore plus abominable." It can be shown that there is much in Stendhal's early reflections on feminine jealousy that foreshadows what Gina experiences--right down to her own intimate thoughts about her anguish.

In the novels already examined the heroines were often, if not always, subject to this powerful sentiment. Armance in her jealousy of Mme d'Aumale is akin to Mathilde and Mme de Chasteller simply because the reader always knew that the hero was playing a part when courting a rival.⁷ Similarly we were aware that Mme de Rênal's jealousy --of the bonheur that Julien and Elisa would share, of the mysterious portrait under Julien's mattress--is based upon her own fantasies. By the time we find Mme de Chasteller wracked by her jealousy, so mentally distraught that she becomes ill, it is difficult to be moved. Indeed, one feels that there is something mechanical about the way Stendhal introduces jealousy as a theme. Although Clélia's jealousy of the Duchess is more potent in that it quickly turns to hatred, it is nevertheless of a similar ilk. For her jealousy changes nothing and, in that instance,

⁷Octave no more prefers Mme d'Aumale than Julien does Mme de Fer-vaques or Lucien Mme d'Hocquincourt.

seems gratuitous. (However, at the end of the novel Clélia's jealousy performs a vital function: it moves her to action.)

It is therefore a relief to discover that our Duchess' jealousy is not a figment of her imagination. Her anguish is well-founded. And it is depicted sparingly, yet vividly and effectively. "Une femme se sent avilie par la jalousie," said our author in De l'Amour.

Elle doit pencher à la cruauté, et cependant elle ne peut tuer légalement sa rivale. (XXXVII)

Moving from De l'Amour to Gina in painful introspection:

Le ciel l'a voulu, reprenait-elle: Fabrice est amoureux et de quel droit voudrais-je qu'il ne fût pas amoureux? Une seule parole d'amour véritable a-t-elle jamais été échangée entre nous? (XXII)

We are told that she is "avilie, atterrée par ce plus grand des chagrins possibles." And the parallel between Gina and the "vilified" woman in De l'Amour, a woman whose heart must endure "de rage impuisante et de mépris de soi-même, sans se briser," is unmistakable.

When Gina's thoughts move from Fabrice to the object of his affection-- "cette petite fille," "cette fille pieuse"--we are invited to see and sense the impact of her jealous rage:

Et jamais Fabrice ne parlait de Clélia! Mais, ajoutait la duchesse se frappant la poitrine avec désespoir, si la garnison n'eût pas été enivrée, toutes mes inventions, tous mes soins devenaient inutiles; ainsi c'est elle qui l'a sauvé! (XXII)

The risk that Clélia took confirms, for Gina, that Clélia returns Fabrice's love.

In De l'Amour Stendhal said extravagantly, "Je ne connais d'autre remède à un mal si cruel [jealousy] que la mort de qui l'inspire ou de qui l'éprouve." (XXXVII) And we discover that Gina looks upon death as a deliverance.⁸ But suicide or murder do not occur to her. Instead she

⁸Maintenant elle l'emporte sur moi. Quoi de plus simple? elle a vingt ans; et moi, changée par les soucis, malade, j'ai le double de son âge! ...Il faut mourir, il faut finir! XXIII.

seeks another "remedy," hoping thereby to render Clélia forever inaccessible.

Ma vanité a un bonheur; à l'exception du comte peut-être, personne n'aura pu deviner quel a été l'événement qui a mis fin à la vie de mon coeur.... J'aimerai Fabrice, je serai dévouée à sa fortune, mais il ne faut pas qu'il rompe le mariage de Clélia, et qu'il finisse par l'épouser.... Non, cela ne sera pas! (XXIII)

Relentless Gina will pursue her goal, until she succeeds in removing all obstacles to the marriage of Clélia and the wealthy Crescenzi.

More relevantly, our heroine's sense of shame relates to these words

in De l'Amour:

Une femme se sent avilie par la jalousie.... Les pauvres femmes n'osent pas même avouer qu'elles ont éprouvé ce cruel supplice, tant il leur donne de ridicules. Une plaie si douloureuse ne doit jamais se cicatrizer entièrement. (XXXVII)

It is as if Stendhal had written these words in anticipation. And in no novel but the Chartreuse do we sense how utterly devastating this passion can be. Stendhal's heroine never does recover from the pain of her jealousy, a jealousy that is easily and continuously revived,⁹ a jealousy that impels her to lash out at the man she loves.¹⁰ Thus Gina is the only heroine in whom jealousy has been forcefully and--to our satisfaction--convincingly depicted.

Even though there is no immediacy in the narration of the events which antedate Gina's personal appearance on the scene, we can say that Gina's character is compelling--virtually from the beginning where we

⁹"La duchesse vit que [Fabrice] était d'accord avec Clélia." This gives her extreme "malheur." XXVI.

¹⁰See citation on page 206, where her jealousy leads to cruelty.

learn that her sister-in-law "pour se donner un peu de courage" sent for Gina.

Our heroine's attitudes and interests are indicated by what she said, by what she did, and by the way she spoke: "La comtesse pleurait de joie et d'angoisse.... C'était avec l'accent de l'émotion la plus vive que la comtesse parlait à Fabrice des futures destinées de Napoléon." (II) In addition, the effect she had upon others or her successes tell us much about her: "Après le retour des Français la comtesse était devenue l'une des femmes les plus brillantes de la cour du Prince Eugène." (I) In short, the means are as diverse as the woman who is thereby portrayed.

As usual, parents and the formative years are unimportant. It is interesting that the mothers of Stendhal's women are almost always nonexistent (Armance, Mmes de Rênal and Chasteller, Gina, Clélia, Lamiel). To be without a mother is to be truly alone in the world. One must struggle against envy, repression, and incomprehension to survive and somehow fashion one's own values--without a mother's counsel. Revealingly, when there is a father-figure he is habitually a repressive, self-seeking, and wholly unsympathetic character.¹¹ No doubt these unattractive fathers Stendhal persists in painting owe much to his antipathy toward his own father. While neither of Gina's parents exist, her older brother substitutes for the doltish father. He epitomizes "tout ce qui était vieux, dévot, morose" and "les idées anciennes"--as opposed to "les idées nouvelles," of course, and "la joie folle, la gaieté, la volupté" with which Stendhal closely associates his heroine.

¹¹The exception is Mathilde, whose mother is a representative of her snobbish wealthy class and rather insignificant. M. de la Mole, on the other hand, seems to be the kind of father Stendhal would have chosen for himself. Mathilde has parents because her model did.

The marriage to Pietranera first brings out her courageous, independent spirit (to which Stendhal alluded in the beginning). Here is Stendhal speaking as a historian:

Il survint un grand événement dans cette famille. Le marquis avait arrangé un mariage de sa jeune soeur Gina avec un personnage fort riche et de la plus haute naissance; mail il portait de la poudre; à ce titre, Gina le recevait avec des éclats de rire, et bientôt elle fit la folie d'épouser le comte Pietraners. C'était à la vérité un fort bon gentilhomme, très bien fait de sa personne, mais ruiné de père en fils, et, pour comble de disgrâce, partisan fougoux des idées nouvelles. Pietranera était sous-lieutenant dans la légion italienne, surcroît de désespoir pour le marquis. (I)

It is clear enough that Stendhal has opposed brother to sister. Despite the author's surface objectivity all is weighted against the brother. The little word folie, which always has positive value, is but one index of Stendhal's partiality. And if the tone of objectivity conceals the author's enthusiasm, it is just barely.

We have grown so accustomed to Stendhal's famous intrusions, explanations, justifications, and personal comments that when they are infrequent--and they are scarce in the Chartreuse--one may perhaps conclude that Stendhal has become more objective. This appears to be the conclusion of Jean Prévost. He notes that "une grande partie des événements est contée comme par un historien, et avec plus d'objectivité que dans les grands romans précédents."¹² However, as we have suggested, if Stendhal struggles to maintain the "objectivity" of a "historian," his biases as well as his own enthusiasm for the woman whom he has created will be discernible and sometimes obvious.

If not by the ease with which Stendhal so readily sets Gina into motion then by the words with which he describes her does he betray his

¹²Prévost, La Création, p. 357.

affinity. She is "cette âme naturellement si agissante." She has a "caractère enthousiaste." Then, too, when other characters in the novel are made to convey their attitudes toward Gina their admiration seems limitless. Everywhere men find her marvelous. Mouths drop open at the sound of her name. An aide de camp comes close to fainting when she enters the room. By the time Stendhal gets around to telling us that Gina "savait se faire aimer" (XXIII), we already know it.

When our author drops the pose of historian and intrudes--seemingly to reprobate Gina's behavior--the impact of his criticism is far from pejorative. And even when he directly compares the Duchess to the beautiful younger heroine who is destined to win Fabrice's heart--thereby obliging us to recognize that Clélia has a more passionate regard, or that her beauty is rarer, finer than Gina's--he never denigrates his Duchess' character. Which is to say that although both women vie for the hero's love, they are not opposed to one another as were Mathilde and Mme de Rênal, or Mme Grandet and Mme de Chasteller--as we intend to demonstrate in our discussion of Clélia Conti.

The majority of Stendhal's intrusive observations are those of a (pseudo-) moralist. From time to time he jumps in with a "je." In Chapter II he does so somewhat arbitrarily, to shed light (or is it doubt?) upon what preceded, before entering into a flattering "objective" account of Gina's knack for dissipating boredom. First we are given a brief account of Gina's poverty--a state which she chose for herself following her husband's death; and it is appropriate to stress that she did have options. More than one man was eager to marry her. Apparently she could not live with a man she did not love. Also, as Stendhal points out, "à Milan la pauvreté n'est pas ridicule."

Soon Gina receives an offer from her brother to join his family

at the Château de Grianta. (It will be recalled that this is the same brother who earlier refused Gina her share of the inheritance, a refusal that may have put a crimp in her style but did not lessen her determination to follow her husband and the retreating French army "montée sur une charette"--brave woman that she is. This stingy brother is now ashamed of Gina's misère," afraid of what people will say.) We learn that "l'âme mobile de la comtesse embrassa avec enthousiasme l'idée de ce nouveau genre de vie." The words we have underlined are rich with positive connotations. All is movement and yet Gina's thoughts will converge on stasis. With one of those subtle contrasts which mark the writing of this novel, Stendhal shows Gina reflecting upon the beatitude of tranquillity:

Là, se disait-elle, je trouverai le repos, et, à mon âge, n'est-ce pas le bonheur? (Comme elle avait trente et un ans elle se croyait arrivée au moment de la retraite.) Sur ce lac sublime où je suis née, m'attend enfin une vie heureuse et paisible. (II)

The parenthetical comment is explanatory; it brings us up to date, for a dozen years had been skimmed in few pages. In the next paragraph our author begins to speak in the first person:

Je ne sais si elle se trompait, mais ce qu'il y a de sûr, c'est que cette âme passionnée, qui venait de refuser si lestement l'offre de deux immenses fortunes, apporta le bonheur au château. Ses deux nièces étaient folles de joie. (II)

In fact, the "je" is more bland than it is intrusive. The meaningful observation comes when Stendhal shifts to the impersonal sentence structure, which curiously frees him to denote that which exalts him. If it is by now redundant to observe that Stendhal's "âmes passionnées" are always favored and distinguished from "les autres," it is certainly worthwhile to observe that he often links Gina with "le bonheur." To Mosca, she will be the incarnation of happiness. But much more inter-

esting to us is the telling word "folles," which, like "fou" and "folie"--recurs with astonishing frequency in regard to Gina.

Our heroine is a woman liable to commit folies. Furthermore, knowingly or not, she renders others fous--not only "de joie." Count N. "devint amoureux fou de la comtesse." Likewise Limercati: "Son amour s'exalta, il devint fou." (II) The enamored Mosca, awaiting Gina's arrival at La Scala "se livrait avec bonheur à sa folie.... Le comte se donnait d'excellente raisons pour être fou." Elsewhere Gina "était tendrement attaché au comte, qui littéralement était fou de bonheur." (VI)¹³

In addition, it seems to us that Stendhal paints a trace of madness in the heroine herself. As we saw, at Lake Como during the storm she had that strange impulse to locate herself "au milieu de l'ouragan et des coups de tonnerre." (II) The narrator, the historian, never says that she is mad. But he cannot resist expressing the thought through one of his characters. Hence, many chapters and six or seven years later, Gina is found on center stage with the faithful Ludovic, to whom she entrusts her wild plans for the people of Sacca and Parma: "Du vin aux gens de Sacca et de l'eau à ceux de Parme," as Ludovic poetically expresses it, exultingly and with much laughter ("des rires fous," of course). A while ago, however, Ludovic saw her eyes ablaze and heard her thinking disjointedly aloud as she marched toward him. "Ludovic recula de quelques pas et la crut folle." And then his thoughts are directly transcribed: "Ah ma pauvre terre! le fait est qu'elle est folle." (XXII) A bit of madness, however disquieting to Ludovic or to the nineteenth-century reader, makes Gina an unusual

¹³Our emphases throughout the paragraph.

heroine of her time. And Stendhal says nary a word in confirmation or denial.

Dans ce pays fertile en beautés, elle le bat toutes;...
elle l'emporte sur toutes les femmes. (V)

Through the thoughts of Canon Borda we learn that Gina, like every Stendhalian heroine, is beautiful . . . superlatively so: "Impossible d'être plus jolie, plus adorable," Borda affirms. Assuredly no one other than Clélia Conti can compare. (And in Part II Stendhal himself will compare the beauty of his two heroines.)

Not surprisingly, Stendhal's image of Gina demands that the reader be highly imaginative. For even if we take into consideration his allusion to paintings by Leonardo (which appears in Part II) the physical portrait of Gina lacks substance. Our reading of the novel shows that Gina's beauty is to be understood in terms of the vivid impression she makes upon others. Furthermore, her beauty merges with her spiritual qualities so that her appearance and her personality seem one and the same. At the opera, Mosca examines our heroine "avec transport" through his opera glasses. How does she appear to him?

Jeune, brillante, légère comme un oiseau, se disait-il,
elle n'a pas vingt ans. Sa beauté est son moindre charme:
où trouver ailleurs cette âme toujours sincère qui jamais
n'agit avec prudence, qui se livre tout entière à l'impression
du moment, qui ne demande qu'à être entraînée par quel-
que objet nouveau? Je conçois les folies du comte Nani. (VI)

Mosca is not the only man who notices her youthful air. The ornithological analogy (above) is transitional, fusing body and soul. This capricious being is weightless, carefree, ever in motion; and it is evanescence and mobility which Stendhal superbly captures here. Soon we

shall touch upon a splendid theatrical scene in which Gina and the Prince of Parma are the players, a scene where Gina is presented as a vital unconquerable force, and where she displays the fine qualities which Mosca so admires.

The color of Gina's hair, like that of her eyes, is unknown. Her mouth? belatedly Stendhal attributes to her a "sourire voluptueux." (XV) Our author never ignores the eyes of his preferential creations.¹³ But although Gina has "de beaux yeux," those eyes are not described. Nor is her regard immoderately emphasized, as will be Clélia Conti's. Furthermore, it can be said that Gina's eyes little reveal her character and even less her thoughts. In general those eyes, with their imprecise and yet compelling éclat incroyable, signal a state of mind or an attitude: In her eyes "éclatait la plus sombre fureur." (XXII) "Elle modéra la pétulance de son regard." (XIV) And on one memorable occasion (soon to be cited) Gina's eyes manifest sudden shift of mood.

At the soirée which brings together the two rivals for Fabrice's affection, Stendhal calls attention to

une circonstance qui jusque-là ne s'était jamais présentée à l'observation de la cour: les yeux de la jeune fille [Clélia] avaient plus de feu, et même, si l'on peut ainsi dire, plus de passion que ceux de la duchess. (XV)

Now, although readers familiar with this novel probably feel that the Duchess is by far the more passionate, fiery woman, it would be pointless to dispute Stendhal's remark. After all, the circonstance is verified not only by the court, but also--in other contexts--by Fabrice. Our author, in anticipation of the all-important role that will be given to Clélia's eyes, elevates her regard to prominence. Stendhal has no

¹³On the other hand, the eyes of Mme Grandet are not mentioned.

difficulty animating his energetic Duchess. Whereas to depict the retiring Clélia he singles out and focuses upon her eyes,¹⁴ as he did with Mme de Chasteller though, fortunately, not forever.

During that soirée Gina will receive the news that Fabrice was arrested and imprisoned. Her distress is perceived by the observant Clélia, who was from the start attentive to Gina's regard:

Jamais je n'oublierai ce que je viens de voir; quel changement subit! comme les yeux de la duchesse, si beaux, si radieux, sont devenus mornes, éteints, après le mot fatal que le marquis N ... est venu lui dire!... Il faut que Fabrice soit bien digne d'être aimé. (XV)

This striking transformation from light to dark, as if from life to death, is ominous. In fact, it portends Gina's decline, a gradual decline resulting from the crushing malheurs which she must endure: the loss of Fabrice, restrictions on her own freedom, the degradation of prostituting herself and, worst of all, when Fabrice has been delivered safely to her, the knowledge that he loves another. During Fabrice's captivity our heroine ages. Stendhal denotes her vieillesse ment from the outside as well as through her own perceptions. Never before had he attempted to depict the process of aging in a woman.

First let us refer to Fabrice: in prison and in love with the young Clélia Conti he happens to think "seriously" about his aunt:

Il fut étonné, il eut peine à reconnaître son image, le souvenir qu'il conservait d'elle avait totalement changé; pour lui à cette heure, elle avait cinquante ans. (XVIII)

His memory is somewhat distorted, for in reality Gina is chronologically much younger. But nevertheless his reflection lends weight to the

¹⁴Jean Paul Weber is so impressed by the author's emphasis upon her regard that he answers his own question--"Qui est Clélia Conti?"--by reducing that heroine's presence in the novel to the role of a woman looking at the hero. Stendhal: Les Structures thématiques de l'oeuvre du destin (Paris: Sedes, 1969), pp. 476-77.

idea that Gina is now old. Gina herself is touchingly aware of her vieillesse. She tells Mosca:

Les temps sont finis;...je suis une femme de trente-sept ans, je me trouve à la porte de la vieillesse, j'en ressens déjà tous les découragements, et peut-être même suis-je voisine de la tombe. Ce moment est terrible, à ce qu'on dit, et pourtant il me semble que je le désire. J'éprouve le pire symptôme de la vieillesse; mon coeur est éteint par cet affreux malheur, je ne puis plus aimer. (XVI)

Thirty-seven hardly makes a woman old; yet if she has exaggerated about approaching the end of her time (as she had surely done in the beginning of the novel), it is undeniable that her will to live has diminished. Stendhal makes us feel that aging, old age can be a state of mind, that when hope is surrendered and life has little meaning, or when love is gone,¹⁵ then: old age is upon us.

It is not only mentally that Gina drastically changes. Her voice, her tone, are "aussi étranges que sa personne." Alteration of her physical appearance is conveyed from the perspective of her lover, Mosca:

Il fut atterré à la vue de la duchesse.... Elle a quarante ans! se dit-il, et hier si brillante! si jeune! (XVI)

Throughout the novel Mosca feels the anguish of his own age. Thus his acute perception of the woman who was, until now, always "si jeune" is particularly significant and poignant.

Stendhal provides neither graying hair nor indelible facial lines to signify the process of aging. But through Mosca's eyes, and by means of comparison (her similarity to Mosca's friend who was "sur le point de mourir," her dissimilarity to what she was yesterday) it is quite evident that Gina is less than a shadow of her former vibrant, vital self.

¹⁵Hemmings makes the point that her hope for rejuvenescence rests upon Fabrice being "restored to her . . . heart-whole as before." Stendhal, p. 196. But he ignores the Duchess' words to Mosca, "Sans vous j'aurais rencontré la vieillesse quelques années plus tôt...." (XVI)

Both her tone of voice--"dépouillé de toute passion, de tout intérêt humain, de toute colère"--and the quality of her gaze--"ses yeux restèrent éteints"--underscore her deathlike listlessness.¹⁶ However, we are impelled to remark that Mosca's view of Gina has scarcely more consistency than Fabrice's "image" of his aged aunt--the point being that, no matter what the circumstances, Stendhal fails to detail Gina's physical portrait. And shortly we shall have the opportunity to see how steadfastly he adheres to this principle, if we may call it that.

It is difficult to suppress the thought that Stendhal himself, when he wrote this novel, was no longer young, and like his heroine, had lost hope for rejuvenation--and lost so many of his illusions too--a thought which makes the theme of physical and spiritual decline all the more moving.

"Jamais la duchesse n'avait été aussi leste et aussi jolie; elle n'avait pas vingt-cinq ans," says Stendhal when Gina appears before Ragnese Ernest IV to announce her departure from Parma. The Prince is seen joyously anticipating the tears, the supplications, and the humiliation of "cette fière duchesse"--as he sees her. Preparing mentally for the audience--"Comment Louis XIV parlait-il aux princesses ses filles quand il avait lieu d'en être mécontent"--the Prince is taken by surprise to discover that Gina is dressed in traveling garments and intends to leave

¹⁶ Many chapters later Stendhal confirms that Gina's physical change is permanent. In a year's time she has aged ten years. "La duchesse n'était plus cette beauté éblouissante de l'année précédente." In lieu of specifics there is that characteristic vagueness: "Ses traits s'étaient marquées, ils avaient plus d'esprit et moins de jeunesse." XXIV.

that very night. Repeating "Comment! comment!" over and over, he tries to cover his confusion. But though he is fearful for his own dignity, our laughable despot is soon susceptible to Gina's charms:

Il admirait la duchesse; l'ensemble de sa personne atteignit en ce moment une beauté sublime. Grand Dieu! qu'elle est belle, se dit le prince; on doit passer quelque chose à une femme unique et telle qu'il n'en existe pas une seconde dans toute l'Italie.... (XIV)

Shortly we find him lusting for her. Yet she wears no revealing clothing and is not at all sexually provocative. More notably, her face, like her feminine form, is undescribed, unmentioned. What then comprises the Duchess' beauty? What makes her "person" so impressive?

It is with her lithe movements, her gestures, the sound and tonal quality of her voice, the gleam in her eyes, that Stendhal builds his portrait of Gina, stopping at intervals to note the reactions of her onlookers, thus convincing the reader that she is indeed overwhelmingly formidable. Her gait is indicated:

En voyant son petit pas léger et rapide effleurer à peine le tapis, le pauvre aide-de-camp fut sur le point de perdre tout à fait la raison.

And the sparkle in those eyes which are, to the Monarch, "si parlants," and which convey her attitude:

Ses yeux moqueurs brillèrent d'un éclat si vif que le prince ne pût le supporter.... [and so he looks up to the ceiling.]

Her voice, "sa petite voix légère et gaie," is a versatile instrument, its tone and accentuation seeming more significant than the words it utters: "L'accent admirable et surtout vrai, avec lequel fut prononcées ces paroles fit tressaillir le prince." Then there is "l'accent de l'ironie la plus amère et du mépris le moins déguisé."

Throughout this piquant scene we see Ernest IV struggling to maintain his composure, longing--despite his anger and hatred--to possess

the daring Duchess, playing as best he can the role of Louis XIV. Gina, by contrast, plays only herself--with sincerity, with depth and range.

A ces mots la duchesse se releva de toute sa hauteur; toute apparence de respect et même d'urbanité disparut en un clin d'oeil: la femme outragée parut clairement....

She is always shown from the outside. We know what she thinks and feels by her expression, by the way she carries herself, or by her words. Not until the show is over and Gina has left does she permit herself the luxury of introspection. "Quelle femme!" exclaims the Prince to Mosca. And his admiration will be seconded. For when Gina returns home to announce her change of plans she is wildly applauded by her servants, as if they had been the audience for her scene with the Prince. Yet nothing about her performance was contrived or premeditated--a point Stendhal is anxious to emphasize:

Elle voulait se trouver seule avec elle-même, et voir un peu quelle idée elle devait se former de la scène qui venait d'avoir lieu. Elle avait agi au hasard et pour se faire plaisir au moment même; mais à quelque démarche qu'elle se fût laissé entraîner elle y eût tenu avec fermeté. Elle ne se fut point blâmée en revenant au sang froid, encore moins repentie: tel était le caractère auquel elle devait d'être encore à trente-six ans la plus jolie femme de la cour.

This passage brings out more than Gina's spontaneity. It is the author who takes the liberty of expressing her state of mind. Speaking about his heroine with the serenity of omniscience--as he so often does--Stendhal zooms in closer to call attention to everything about her that he would have us appreciate. Avoiding the first-person perspective, hers or his, he finishes with a matter-of-fact observation, but it is the sort that would be exceedingly vain had it come from Gina herself.

In Chapter XVI, Gina's carefree outlook is drastically, if not permanently, altered. "Suis-je assez humiliée! s'écria-t-elle à

chaque instant; on m'outrage, et, bien plus, on expose la vie de Fabrice!" We share her feelings of anguish, remorse, anger, and despair in an exceptionally long, meandering but always interesting interior discourse. And we find that even when she is at the depths of discouragement, imagining the worst, she is somehow able to inject a note of levity--"mais quoi, toujours le roman!" she exclaims, chiding herself for her depressing, melodramatic thoughts. For us the most disturbing acknowledgement is that she is now, like Fabrice, a prisoner. This woman who was once free as a bird, who thrives on freedom to choose and to act is now inhibited and powerless.

Alors, je menaçais de partir, alors j'étais libre! Grand Dieu! suis-je assez esclave! Maintenant me voici clouée dans ce cloaque infâme, et Fabrice enchaîné dans la citadelle ... et je ne puis plus tenir ce tigre [the monarch] en respect par la crainte de me voir quitter son repaire!
(XVI)

However, her feeling of impotence does not long endure. We eventually learn that "dès que la vengeance fut résolue, elle sentit sa force, chaque pas de son esprit lui donnait du bonheur." (XXI)

Ephemeral desires for some sort of revenge upon the lover had been suggested in earlier novels, coming from other heroines (Mathilde, Mme Grandet). But in Gina vengefulness becomes a quality of soul. Lest one has forgotten, an immoderate taste for vengeance was sketched in the beginning. Because her boyfriend Limercati would not avenge the untimely death of her husband Pietranera, our heroine reduced poor Limercati to the condition of a desperate, suicidal lover. Stendhal to explain:

Pour rendre ce plan de vengeance intelligible en France, je dirai qu'à Milan, pays fort éloigné du nôtre, on est encore au désespoir par amour. (II)

Toward the end of the novel Gina's vengefulness seeks a different outlet: revenge through poisoning, which surely hearkens back to the Re-

naissance. Stendhal alludes to the vengeance itself, saying ominously that she indulges in something forever funeste for her tranquillity, something "horrible aux yeux de la morale." (XXII) But how does it appear in Stendhal's eyes? An earlier remark provides the answer:

Je croirais assez que le bonheur immoral qu'on trouve à se venger en Italie tient à la force d'imagination de ce peuple; les gens des autres pays ne pardonnent pas à proprement parler, ils oublient. (XXI)

The "bonheur immoral," which, through generalization, Stendhal has so cleverly rendered unspecific, is not Mosca's, Fabrice's, or Clélia's. For the record, then, vengeance is Gina's province. Just as Gina is representative of the typical Italian who can be happy without money, so, too, is she the character who illustrates the Italian craving for vengeance. Gina is the individual who personifies the outstanding, and the best of Stendhal's so-called "Italian" virtues.

Stendhal's preceding first-person observation may be read several ways: Italians, happy in their blood lust, are extremely imaginative. Or, more severely, Italians are certainly immoral in their pursuit of revenge; yet one must grant them imagination. But no matter how we read the first two sentences, we cannot doubt that Stendhal speaks benignly of the Italianate. Proof, if we need it, is contained in the final phrases: as always the weight of judgment is turned away from the Italians. By implication there is something rather plat and pusillanimous about forgetting, which is what the French apparently do when they are wronged. And so, again, we are obliged to concede that the Italians, or rather Gina with her fine courage, her single-mindedness, her force of will, is--despite her immorality, if not because of it--marvelous, fantastic, etc.

Is it any wonder that the very righteous Saint-Beuve was appalled

by Stendhal's "morale italienne," which he found "trop loin de la nôtre"? Whatever terms Stendhal uses--lack of morality, "immoral," "immorality,"--in the long run they lose negative impact and signal his approbation. To re-examine the passages in which Stendhal speaks as a moralist is to discover that Stendhal's blame and criticism of his protagonists is washed away with a flourish of irony that dispells the ambiguity with which he began. One final example: we learned that Gina, although she was initially hesitant ("Mais savez-vous que ce que vous me proposez là est fort immoral?" she says to Mosca), agrees to wed the aged Sanseverina-Taxis because, as Mosca justifies, "cet arrangement n'est une friponnerie envers personne." This "strange marriage" is an unconsummated marriage. It serves as a cover for our protagonists' illicit liaison. And Stendhal asks his reader:

Pourquoi l'historien qui suit fidèlement les moindres détails du récit qu'on lui a fait serait-il coupable? Est-ce sa faute si les personnages, séduits par les passions qu'il ne partage point malheureusement pour lui, tombent dans des actions profondément immorales? Il est vrai que des choses de cette sorte ne se font plus dans un pays où l'unique passion survivante à toutes est l'argent, moyen de vanité. (VI)

While in the first sentence Stendhal seems to be exculpating himself, it is soon apparent that he speaks rhetorically and is, at the most, paying lip service to convention. Who can doubt the import of his personal regret ("malheureusement pour lui...")? When it is a matter of passion anything goes--adultery, even murder. And so "immoral" comes to mean admirable." And, of course, the avaricious (French) are to be condemned.

It is interesting that when Gina's vengefulness finds expression in pure spite, when she is really bitchy, Stendhal treats her actions rather summarily and refrains from comment:

Lorsqu'elle se fut dit que tout ce changement dans l'apparence de ce beau jeune homme [Fabrice] était causé par le mariage de Clélia, elle eut des sentiments presque égaux en véhémence à ceux de l'archevêque, quoique plus habilement contenus. Elle eut la barbarie de parler longuement de certains détails pittoresques qui avaient signalé les fêtes charmantes données par le marquis Crescenzi. Fabrice ne répondait pas; mais ses yeux se fermèrent un peu par un mouvement convulsif, et il devint encore plus pâle.... (XXVI)

One will recall that in the Rouge our narrator--toward the end--made liberal use of intervention to diminish the heroine whom the hero of that novel ultimately rejected. In this novel he simply lets the harsh "facts" speak for themselves. And if the brief impersonal reference to Gina's "barbery" does much to further our impression that her tenderness diminishes to make way for a certain savagery, that is to say if the effect is more devastating we nevertheless continue to embrace her destiny. For we are by now prepared, and, like Stendhal, willing to forgive her her moments of cruelty. The weaknesses, which make her all the more human and believable, are balanced by so many other engaging attributes. And to Stendhal's credit she continues to interest us until the end; more so, we daresay, than does the hero of the novel.

One need not be of the feminist persuasion to believe that our Duchess is one of the most liberated women in modern fiction.¹⁷ Autonomy is suggested to us from the start. Despite the convent upbringing, to which Stendhal lightly alludes, and in spite of her brother's attempts to shape her life for her, Gina is untouched by formative forces. What is it about her that most rankles the Monarch? her "petits airs d'indépendance." She is, virtually by definition, her own woman. She chooses

¹⁷ It is interesting, though, that the ardent feminist critic Mme de Beauvoir has little to say about "the Sanseverina." Clélia interests her more, for that heroine goes "beyond all recognized values." Second Sex, p. 244.

for herself and does what pleases her. As for her will power, Stendhal says the following:

Il y avait deux choses dans le caractère de la duchesse, elle voulait toujours ce qu'elle avait voulu une fois; elle ne remettait jamais en délibération ce qui avait été une fois décidé. (XXI)

We have seen her unperturbed by practical or moral considerations lending herself enthusiastically to intrigue and crime. "J'exige que l'homme qui me perce le coeur soit empoisonné et non tué," she tells the adoring Ferrante Palla. And "faithfully, punctually, prudently" he will carry out her orders.

This forceful heroine displays everywhere the self-confidence of a woman born to command--and command she does: "La comtesse faisait marcher les gendarmes comme s'ils eussent été ses gens." (V) For insight into the pleasure that she derives from power there is this delightful passage: "En rentrant dans les salons, elle était folle de joie. Tout le monde se prosternait devant elle." (VI) Yet the secret of her success is not rank or fortune, but an indefinable feminine charm. In the countless examples that are given of men eager to do as Gina bids them we are impressed that she displays none of the abrasiveness of the too proud Mathilde de la Mole. For whereas Mathilde aspired to power and asserted herself in a peremptory manner, Gina just readily, and unoffensively, assumes her power. "Ferrante Palla était ravi de ce ton d'autorité que la duchesse prenait avec lui." (XXI) Perhaps the distinction between the two women can be reduced to saying that Gina is assertive whereas Mathilde is aggressive. At any rate we feel that Gina is a more subtle, more feminine creation.

Nor is she ever torn between the desire to rule or be ruled, as was Mathilde. Before we turn to Clélia Conti let us cite a revealing

passage which appears at the end of the novel:

La duchesse n'hésita un instant; le prince l'en-
nuyait, et le comte lui semblait parfaitement aimable;
il n'y avait au monde qu'on homme qu'on pût lui pré-
ferer. D'ailleurs, elle régnait sur le comte, et le
prince, dominé par les exigences de son rang, eût plus
ou moins régné sur elle. (XXVII)

What interests us here is, first of all, the way Stendhal affirms her spontaneity--she does not hesitate--and then the certainty that she values both her power and her freedom. She is and she intends to remain a free being. Indeed, the Duchess is the most powerful and free-wheeling heroine that Stendhal has yet portrayed.

Clélia Conti

When first we met the shy adolescent Clélia Conti, she accompanied her father--in Part I where her role was insignificant. Few are the details of her background. Evidently her mother does not exist. Her ambitious father controls her as best he can. Fabio Conti, "homme tout à fait commun," is in charge of the prison which Fabrice will inhabit in the second half of the novel. General Conti has nothing but his lovely young daughter to recommend him, and upon her he places all hopes for wealth, security, and prominence. Unfortunately, she has no desire to wed any of the rich suitors that he so persistently promotes. Yet she appears to be a docile, dutiful daughter, perfectly content to live a very confined and retiring existence--much to her father's dismay, for he would have her shine brilliantly in the Monarch's realm.

We learn belatedly that the relationship between Clélia and her father is not a close one:

Il sentait vaguement qu'il n'y avait nul point de contact entre elle et lui, et craignait toujours de sa part quelque coup de tête. Elle pouvait s'enfuir au couvent et il restait désarmé. (XIX)

But if they are incompatible she nevertheless strives to please him. Her blind loyalty to her father is, naturally, one of several obstacles to her love for the prisoner, Fabrice. As in the Rouge and Lucien Leuwen, the repressed and gentle heroine loves a man of the opposition, a man whom "la raison" obliges Clélia to perceive as a political adversary.

While it is undeniable that Clélia Conti's early appearances are transitory, like those of Mme de Chasteller, the reader of this novel does not doubt that the elusive heroine is destined to figure significantly. It was a case of mistaken identity which brought together Gina, Clélia, Fabrice, and Fabio Conti. And that first meeting--long remembered by both Fabrice and Clélia--was more than fortuitous. It included the delicate intimacy of an accidental embrace:

Il sourit; elle rougit profondément; ils restèrent un instant à se regarder après que la jeune fille se fut dégagée de ses bras. (V)

And in the Chartreuse, where there is no shortage of signs, omens, prophecies, and predictions, the future is foretold--here by Fabrice, who speculates:

Ce serait une charmant compagne de prison: quelle pensée profonde sous ce front! elle saurait aimer. (V)

The initial encounter between the lovers retains something of the flavor of that memorable scene between Julien and Mme de Rênal: mutual astonishment and pleasure prevail. In the Duchess' carriage:

[Clélia] regardait avec étonnement ce jeune héros dont les yeux semblaient respirer encore tout le feu de l'action. Pour lui, il était un peu interdit de la beauté si singulière de cette jeune fille de douze ans et ses regards la faisaient rougir. (V)

From the auspicious outset they look ceaselessly at one another.

Indeed, it is in the Chartreuse more than in any other of our author's novels that the visual takes precedence in the love affair. For it is through prolonged gazing, glances overt and covert that the lovers come to know each other. Furthermore, they learn to converse not by speech but by means of signs and signals, through visual perception.

We have seen previously that more than one Stendhalian heroine had remained silent when the lover first saw her. As improbable as it may sound, this particular heroine does not speak to the man she loves until months after his arrival at the citadelle, years after their first encounter. The reader can be assured that speech does not come easily to Clélia when Fabrice, in transit to his prison cell, reminds her of their meeting years ago (at which time she said nothing too):

Clélia rougit et fut tellement interdite qu'elle ne trouva aucune parole pour répondre.... Elle s'aperçut de son silence et rougit encore davantage. (XV)

But while she is doubtless the most reticent of Stendhal's women, through her blushes, her uncontrollable trembling, her meaningful glances, and finally by means of an invented alphabet, her thoughts are communicated to an ever-vigilant Fabrice.

Although this heroine does not dominate the second half of the novel, she nevertheless becomes so important to Fabrice that she changes the hapless course of his life and his character as well.

Il sentait trop bien que l'éternel bonheur de sa vie allait le forcer de compter avec la fille du gouverneur, et qu'il était en son pouvoir de faire de lui le plus malheureux des hommes. (XVIII)

When the hero is imprisoned in a tiny room which affords a splendid view

of the Alps and, more important, a view of Clélia in her aviary, the heroine becomes his all-consuming preoccupation. "L'unique objet de ses pensées fut de savoir comment il pourrait parvenir à continuer de la voir." (XVIII) And, inevitably, love--"la partie noble et intellectuelle de l'amour" which he had unsuccessfully sought during his carefree, libertine youth--is gratuitously, miraculously known to him. After three days in prison, no less:

Fabrice fut outré de colère, mais uniquement de ne pas avoir vu reparaître Clélia. Colère pour colère, j'aurais dû lui dire que je l'aimais, s'écriait-il; car il était arrivé à cette découverte.... Qui m'eût dit que je trouverais des yeux si doux en un tel lieu! (XVIII)

With nothing more than her gaze--"ce regard de douce pitié"--Clélia is able to obliterate the hero's past. And that is nothing, compared to what Fabrice experiences when her emotion is somehow "perfectly" visible to him:

Ce moment fut le plus beau de la vie de Fabrice, sans aucune comparaison. Avec quels transports il eût refusé la liberté, si on la lui eût offerte en cet instant. (XVIII)

Victor Brombert has observed that the Stendhalian prison is a happy prison which allows Stendhal's heroes to discover the self and even to recreate it.¹ Fabrice in his cell is paradoxically freer than ever before, free to contemplate the object of his affection, free to imagine her character, and free to dream: Says Fabrice:

Je conçois que Clélia Conti se plaise dans cette solitude aérienne; on est ici à mille lieux au-dessus des petites gens et des méchancetés qui nous occupent là-bas. (XVIII)

We agree with Brombert that prison liberates Fabrice "from the captivity of social existence,"² but would point out that this critic completely

¹Brombert, Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom, pp. 172-73.

²Ibid., p. 173.

ignores the heroine's role in Fabrice's search for self. For it is the "vision céleste de Clélia Conti" which permits Fabrice to know the meaning of happiness, just as it is his love for her which transforms his character into that of a dreamer.

This modest and reserved young Clélia is distant by nature as well as distant by force of circumstances. She symbolizes the inaccessible woman, as did Mathilde and Mme de Chasteller before her. But while the theme, the constant Stendhalian dream of the unapproachable woman, is recurrent, we find that in this fourth novel of love neither the author nor his hero are interested in seduction, in "conquest" per se.³ Rather it is the delicate means of wooing Clélia, the dialogue of love, and the happiness deriving from seemingly trivial incidents that receive utmost attention. And although Fabrice does indeed receive the "supreme favor," he does not seek it. Thus if victory is implicit in physical union, it is, in this novel, shared by both lovers: no one masters; no one is mastered, as we shall see.⁴

This heroine is not quite so indolent as was Mme de Chasteller. She spends time caring for her birds and playing the piano. Then, apart from the daydreaming which is apparently crucial to her existence, she engages in prayer and makes vows to the Virgin. Unlike Armance, but like Mmes de Rênal and Chasteller, Clélia is truly pious. "Fort dévôte

³Contrary to what Jean Prévost suggests, when speaking of "la conquête par les moyens les plus lointains d'une femme inaccessible." La Création, p. 353.

⁴Furthermore, there is a total absence of the warlike metaphors which appeared in previous novels.

et fort amie de la solitude" is the public opinion of Clélia which was early presented in Part I. Stendhal stresses the societal evaluation again--"on croyait qu'elle embrasserait la vie religieuse"--and again--"longtemps on avait cru qu'elle finirait par embrasser la vie religieuse"--with little variation in the wording and with the emphasis upon her religious penchant. Confirmation that her thoughts often drift to the idea of retiring to a convent comes from Clélia herself: "J'avais bien raison de songer au cloître; réellement je ne suis faite que pour la retraite!" (XV), a thought which antedates her love for Fabrice. And later, "Certes, si on le conduit à la mort, je m'enfuirai dans un couvent." (XVIII), at which point she is in love with the man whose life is in jeopardy.

The theme of withdrawal is not new. It supports our view that Clélia resembles other chaste and sensitive women whom Stendhal had earlier portrayed. Remaining close to the values of faith and tradition, constrained and, whether by father or by husband, evermore confined, these women, from Mme de Rênal on, become more noticeably confined--Clélia being, in every way, the most confined of all. Alone in her elevated apartment at the citadel, where the "visites ennuyeuses" are rare since the climb is arduous, "Clélia se trouvait heureuse ou du moins exempte de chagrins." (XV) Solitude is the unique solace for defenseless females and Clélia's love of solitude is a familiar avoidance-reaction:

Clélia ... jouissait de la liberté de couvent; c'était presque là tout l'idéal de bonheur que, dans un temps, elle avait songé à demander à la vie religieuse. Elle était saisie d'une sorte d'horreur à la seule pensée de mettre sa chère solitude et ses pensées intimes à la disposition d'un jeune homme, que le titre de mari autoriserait à troubler toute cette vie intérieure. Si par la solitude elle n'atteignait pas au bonheur, du moins elle était parvenue à éviter les sensations trop douloureuses. (XV)

In Stendhal's novels the convent symbolizes the ultimate freedom from worldly pressures. Armance ends when the heroine takes the veil.

And Clélia, like Mme de Chasteller, would willingly enter its walls. The convent becomes the commonplace solution for what troubles Stendhal's femmes douces, Armance, Mme de Rênal, Mme de Chasteller, and Clélia Conti, all of whom are thoroughly repelled by baseness, coarseness--in a word by le vulgaire. These women cherish their privacy and, removed from that which offends them, are free to dream unimaginable or at any rate undisclosed daydreams; "la rêverie" is, after all, "innotable."⁵

More than once does Stendhal intimate that although Clélia does not suffer in her solitude she is not really happy. However, it would appear that Clélia's happiness is not Stendhal's prime consideration. Her sadness, her "melancholy" is what he prefers to emphasize: "Elle ne comprenait rien à la profonde mélancolie qui s'emparait de son caractère" (XVIII); and Fabrice "la trouva d'une mélancolie tellement sombre" (XIX); her "despair" receives attention too: "Ses traits contractés exprimaient le plus violent désespoir."

When the word "happiness" itself is used in regard to Clélia, or by Clélia, it has not the strong and positive impact that it had for what the hero of the novel experiences. We observe that in the following passage Clélia's bonheur is defined both negatively and interrogatively:

La pauvre fille, pieuse et sincère avec elle-même, ne pouvait se dissimuler qu'il n'y aurait jamais de bonheur pour elle loin de Fabrice; mais elle avait fait voeu à la Madone, lors du demi-empoisonnement de son père, de faire à celui-ci le sacrifice d'épouser le marquis de Crescenzi.... Clélia regarda Fabrice, et malgré elle ce regard peignit en entier la passion qui la mâtait au désespoir.

Croyez-vous, semblait-elle dire à Fabrice, que je trouverai le bonheur dans ce palais somptueux qu'on prépare pour moi? (XXV)

⁵As Stendhal insisted more than once: "La rêverie de l'amour ne peut se noter...." And, "La rêverie ... est le vrai plaisir du roman. Cette rêverie est innotable." De l'Amour, XVI.

It is clear enough that the heroine feels she cannot be happy without Fabrice. But the occasions that Stendhal actually conveys her happiness are few and far between. Here is one example:

Comment dire son ravissement au milieu de la sombre tristesse où l'absence de Fabrice l'avait plongée, lorsqu'elle trouva sur les marges de l'ancien saint Jérôme le sonnet dont nous avons parlé, et les mémoires, jour par jour, de l'amour qu'on avait senti pour elle! (XXII)

Furthermore, the heroine's rapture habitually depends upon the reassurance that she is loved by Fabrice:

Non, il ne m'a point oubliée, se dit Clélia, avec un transport de joie. Cette belle âme n'est point inconstante! (XXVI)

It is revealing of Stendhal's own preoccupations that when Clélia and Fabrice are face to face Clélia's happiness is negligible. We are nowhere told that Clélia delights in gazing at Fabrice; whereas the pleasure of seeing Clélia was roundly described as "cette sorte de vie singulière et délicieuse que [Fabrice] trouvait auprès d'elle," and long before they have spoken. (XVIII) Similarly the hero thinks to himself, "Si je parviens seulement à la voir je suis heureux." (XVIII) Thus we believe that our author is not interested in Clélia's bonheur. Insofar as he is much more concerned with day-to-day pleasure and happiness of his hero than he is with what thrills or moves his shy, retiring heroine, Stendhal proves to be wrapped up in masculine psychology, unwilling or unable to fully lend himself to his feminine creation. For further evidence we need only direct ourselves to those occasions when his protagonists' mutual happiness is denoted.

For if our doleful, delicate heroine--torn by her curious, unfathomable remorse and conflicted by her loyalty to her father, as well as hampered by her modesty and "ce qu'une femme se doit à elle-même,"

when not worried that Fabrice will lose his life--does not experience unmitigated happiness when gazing at Fabrice in his prison cell, there are nevertheless instances and periods when happiness is known to her. And yet, we have noticed that while her bonheur is not to be doubted, this bonheur is not revealed from her perspective. Happiness is shared, or indicated from Fabrice's point of view. Thus in the final chapter Stendhal speaks of "ces trois années de bonheur divin"--the time span of the lovers' secret liaison. And earlier, when their love was first consummated, it was, significantly, the hero who spoke of "notre bonheur," just as it was the hero again who experienced "l'enthousiasme de passion et de générosité qui suit un extrême bonheur."

However, we do not mean to imply that the heroine was inert or impassive throughout that love scene. For before the act of love, "Elle le serrait dans ses bras, comme par un mouvement convulsif." Then afterwards "elle se jeta dans ses bras." (XXV) Who would deny that she was amenable?

We have noted that Armance, Mathilde, and Mme de Chasteller had been placed before our eyes and did not utter a word. But if it can be said that the pattern of the silent young heroine prevails, the pattern varies in that Clélia's thoughts are soon disclosed. And these thoughts, which are so brief, and which Stendhal does not allow us to forget, suggest that for a twelve year old the heroine is quite perceptive.⁶ At the time of the first encounter her father boasts that

⁶"Clélia remarqua la nuance d'enthousiasme avec laquelle ... la comtesse parlait à Fabrice; certainement elle n'était pas sa mère." V. And five years later: "Et cet amour pour Fabrice dure depuis longtemps. ... J'en fut frappé même alors, où tant de choses passaient inaperçues devant mes yeux d'enfant! Comme ces deux dames semblaient admirer Fabrice! XV.

people think she is much older than twelve, for she has "tant de raison." Furthermore, she is apparently physically mature as well: Fabrice saw her as "une jeune fille de quatorze ou quinze ans." Italian girls blossom at an early age . . . in Stendhal's view.⁷

Fabrice's impressions of Clélia are remarkably similar to Lucien's perceptions of Mme de Chasteller. Not only does Clélia have a "physionomie céleste," but also "Fabrice était ravi de la céleste beauté de Clélia," not to mention her "image sublime" which overwhelms him. In addition, Fabrice, like Lucien, lends to the heroine qualities which are, if not a product of his imagination, yet to be proven. She has, he thinks, "une âme pensive et sérieuse." And when first he saw her it was her "pensée profonde" that struck him. Then, years later "quelle expression de pensée profonde!" (XV) Yet she has said not a word and done nothing at all.

It is not exactly profundity of thought which impresses the reader who scans the long transcriptions of Clélia's pensées intimes. Too often they are painfully, if not tiresomely, reminiscent of those of Mme de Chasteller and Armance, both in tone and subject matter. Nor can it be said that her conversations are particularly striking.

Fundamentally Stendhal is interested in the spiritual, the emotional capacities of the heroines who win his heroes' hearts, rather than esprit or depth of intellect. This tendency to accentuate the spiritual and neglect the intellectual is, in Clélia's case, particularly noticeable when we search for the author's defensive statements or speculations. The esprit which he had claimed for Mme de Chasteller and hypothesized for Mme de Rênal is nowhere mentioned by Stendhal. Instead we hear from Mosca, who scarcely knows her, betting that she has "sufficient esprit"

⁷One will recall that Gina at age thirteen seemed more like an eighteen year old.

pour avoir honte de son père." (VII) We even find Fabrice revising his opinion (and Mosca's, too):

Mais elle a tant d'esprit, ou pour mieux dire tant d'âme, comme le suppose le comte, que peut-être à ce qu'il dit méprise-t-elle le métier de son père! de là viendrait sa mélancholie! (XVIII)⁸

Our author would convince us that Clélia is a profoundly emotional woman who lives a rich interior existence. To this end he stresses her inclination toward solitude and insists upon her predisposition to revery. In addition he unobtrusively but repeatedly lends to her a nature that exudes compassion. The subtle qualities of soul which Stendhal invariably paints in a tender loving woman are readily perceived by his hero:

Quel regard! se disait-il; que de choses il exprimait! quelle profonde pitié! Elle avait l'air de dire: la vie est un tissu de malheurs! ne vous affligez point trop de ce qui vous est arrivé! est-ce que nous ne sommes point ici-bas pour être infortunés? Comme ses yeux si beaux restaient attachés sur moi,... (XV, our emphasis)

To verify that Clélia has a great capacity to empathize Stendhal borrows the device used for Mme de Chasteller. In Leuwen it was the author who told us that the heroine was moved to tears at the sight of an unfortunate little old lady--poorly dressed and obviously suffering. In the Chartreuse General Conti informs us that the heroine commiserates with the down-trodden, grumbling to himself that only on "rare occasions" do his daughter's eyes take on a profound and magnificent expression:

Jamais dans un salon ... mais bien à la promenade, seule avec moi, ...elle se laissera attendrir, par exemple, par le malheur de quelque manant hideux. (XV)

Coming from her father, the illustration of her compassion seems unforced. A more "objective" Stendhal no longer strains to personally convey those qualities he would have us appreciate. His characters do the job for him.

⁸Our emphases throughout this paragraph.

It is significant that Clélia's "profound pity" was among the first things Fabrice noted. Always the woman who pities is the one who wins the hero's undying love. The blend of admiration and pity, felt for the hero by every tender heroine from Armance on, is undiluted, as we can see in the following passage:

Quel air noble au milieu de ces êtres grossiers! se disait-elle au moment où Fabrice lui adressa la parole. La profonde pitié, et nous dirons presque l'attendrissement où elle était plongée, lui ôtèrent la présence d'esprit nécessaire pour trouver un mot quelconque.... (XV)

Stendhal's energetic, extroverted heroines, on the other hand, will invariably admire the hero, but they are not found pitying him. The "pity principle" applies solely to Stendhal's femmes douces. It seems to heighten their ability to love unselfishly, completely. They fall in love but once--"Clélia, comme elle le sentait trop bien, n'aurait jamais qu'un attachement dans la vie." (XIX)--and their love is a very romantic love-until-death. Appropriately, then, in Stendhal's completed novels the hero invariably dies at the end, as does his faithful true love--the exception being Armance, who, like the Princesse de Clèves, refuses life by withdrawing to a convent.

Comparison, one knows, is Stendhal's habitual mode. Nor does he fail to contrast Clélia: with Gina, with others, directly and even indirectly, as when the Duchess was mistaken for Clélia, whereupon the reader is prompted to compare.⁹ Is there great physical resemblance? or

⁹That was in Chapter V. In Chapter VI Mosca tells Gina "Clélia est, ma foi, charmante, et passait encore, il y a huit jours [before Gina showed up, that is] pour la plus belle personne des états du prince."

is it that the two of them are exceptionally beautiful women? Much later a comparison which issues from Fabrice verifies that both women are extraordinarily attractive:

Il fut frappé surtout de l'expression de mélancholie de sa figure. Comme elle est embellie, pensa-t-il, depuis notre rencontre près de Côme! quelle pensée profonde! ... On a raison de la comparer à la duchesse. (XV)

Never does Fabrice think about Gina in order to recognize that he adores Clélia, or to esteem the latter over her rival. In this novel comparison is not used to elevate or to diminish either one of the heroines.¹⁰ The following comparison is presented through the impersonal pronoun. It demonstrates that Gina is not debased to make Clélia more attractive;

On remarqua ce soir-là plus d'animation que de coutume dans la figure de Clélia: or, l'animation, l'air de prendre part à ce qui l'environnait, étaient surtout ce qui manquait à cette belle personne. Quand on comparait sa beauté à celle de la duchesse, c'était surtout cet air d n'être émue par rien, cette façon d'être comme au-dessus de toutes choses qui faisait pencher la balance en faveur de sa rivale. (XV)

The differentiation, reduced to simple terms, is that Gina is ever-animated, whereas Clélia is habitually expressionless, impassive. Stendhal pursues the comparison:

Autant la duchesse était sémillante, pétillante d'esprit et de malice, s'attachant avec passion, si l'on peut parler ainsi, à tous les sujets que le courant de la conversation amenait devant les yeux de son âme, autant Clélia se montrait calme et lente à s'émouvoir, soit par mépris de ce qui l'entourait, soit par regret de quelque chimère. (XV)

Opposing Gina to Clélia our author corroborates that Gina's beauty is a function of her vitality. Although the opposition of the two women

¹⁰ Gilbert Durand tends to agree: "Jamais dans La Chartreuse le contraste entre les deux femmes n'est accentué comme dans Le Rouge et Leuven." Le Décor, p. 151. See his compelling but unconvincing thesis that interchangeable maternal roles are played by both heroines in their love for Fabrice. Ibid., pp. 151-58.

is matter-of-fact, although Stendhal makes no value judgments, he will soon oblige us to recognize that Clélia's way is not to be disparaged. The suppositions with which Stendhal terminates ("soit par mépris,... soit par regret...") are highly suggestive: her aloofness has yet to be explored.

It is revealing that Stendhal takes more time to portray Clélia physically than he had for Gina. Doubtless this is compensation for the absence of actions, of gestures, of conversation, or--in short-- as compensation for Clélia's inanimacy. And yet, true to form, no sooner does our author begin to provide the details of this heroine's physical appearance than he desists. As usual, the portrayal becomes an occasion for explication of character;

Clélia avait les cheveux blonds cendrés se détachant par un effet très doux, sur les joues d'un coloris fin, mais en général un peu trop pâle. La forme seule du front eût pu annoncer à un observateur attentif que cet air si noble, cette démarche tellement au-dessus des grâces vulgaires, tenaient à une profonde incurie pour tout ce qui est vulgaire. C'était l'absence et non pas l'impossibilité de l'intérêt pour quelque chose. (XV)

Thus we learn that she is blond (we are not told the color of Gina's hair, but assume she is a blond since she was mistaken for Clélia) and, with oxymoron, that Clélia's too pale cheeks have delicate coloring. But it is notable that the shape of her forehead is no more elucidated than is her "démarche" described. What counts, then, is that she is a very special woman--noble, distant, and subtly different from all others.

Now, in the final sentence Stendhal prepares us for the obvious, indicating with brevity, by allusion, that Clélia is not necessarily dispassionate but has yet to be moved. Interest in quelque chose we read as interest in quelqu'un, that "someone" being Fabrice, of course. The concision here stands in marked contrast to Stendhal's elaborate

efforts to convey that Mme de Chasteller, who seemed so cold, was secretly a passionate woman capable of being moved by the right man.

On the page preceding the above citation we were told that Clélia had lips "remplis de la grâce la plus touchante" and which were "un peu fortes." A superlative is used to cover up the imprecision of our author's descriptions, as usual. More interesting are the words un peu, which Stendhal continues to use. Clélia herself is a "jeune fille un peu trop svelte" and possessor of traits "un peu marqués." The reiterated un peu,¹¹ indicative of Stendhal's inveterate distaste for detailed description, is not designed to detract from Clélia's beauty but rather to suggest that she is far removed from anyone's conception of ideal beauty, and that hers is a loveliness which somehow defies description. As Stendhal phrases it, "elle ne ressemblait en aucune façon aux têtes de statues grecques" (which are apparently so common) and her beauty is "de plus rare et de la plus singulière." (XV)

The narrator directs our attention primarily to traits that are (or will be) amply displayed. For instance, the observation that "le caractère de Clélia était profondément raisonnable" immediately follows her soul-wracking reasonings about Fabrice's past love life (his attachment to Gina, his libertine reputation, etc., convince her that "la durée de ses sentiments" is doubtful (XIX)). And when elsewhere Clélia is described as "cette fille si timide à la fois et si hautaine," indications of both her timidity and her hauteur have already been given.

If Clélia is a simple woman, Stendhal does not say so. The word "naïve" does not show up until the end of the novel. Hence to indicate that Clélia lacks experience and is somewhat naïve he has the heroine

¹¹Our emphases throughout.

Speak for herself, to herself:

O ignorance et timidité! combien souvent vous ressemblez
à ce qu'il y a plus noir! Et je suis ainsi à vingt ans
passés! (XV)

Overall, the terse and frequent exclamations which early mark her thought patterns help make of Clélia a more spirited woman than her gentle predecessor Mme de Chasteller. Nor is this heroine blind or insensitive to the chicanery and the evil of the political system to which her father is devoted:

O pouvoir absolu, quand cesseras-tu de peser sur Italie!
O âmes vénales et basses! Et je suis fille d'un géolier!
(XV)

These are not trivial, idle thoughts. And if they do not epitomize the author's attitude toward the monarchy that he has thus far portrayed, her thoughts nevertheless foreshadow the dark and gloomy side of power which will be revealed to us in the second half of the novel.

"La Chartreuse a son style propre," notes Jean Prévost before discussing the evolution of style: "La phrase est plus abondante, la syntaxe (... réduite dans le Rouge ...) est plus souple."¹² There are, of course, other differences. Tendencies to which we have grown accustomed in Stendhal's depiction of the introverted heroine have diminished and even disappeared. Stendhal does not assert what he does not validate. He does not spend time justifying Clélia's behavior, defending her in order that we might better comprehend her shyness or her motives. And--important from the aspect of consistency--he makes no ex-

¹²Prévost, La Création, pp. 360-61.

travagant claims on Clélia's behalf. He does not postulate qualities which remain unproven. On the other hand, he continues to take pleasure in painting glimmers of the unexpected--a trace of "imprévu" here and there, perhaps to suggest that she is not innocuous or totally without spirit.

As for extravagant claims, let us be more specific by referring to the famous volonté ferme which had been extolled in the character of Armance. It is pleasant to discover that while Stendhal does not thus characterize the gentle Clélia, his failure to do so does not mean that her will power is deficient. Furthermore, if Clélia is to be judged on the basis of what she does, one must admit that, in the end, she proves to be firm-willed and even independent.

In retrospect, we have discerned efforts to paint in Clélia a certain determination, an urge toward the self-assertion which is--one knows--fully realized in the final chapter of the novel. As far back as the first chapter of Part II Stendhal conveys that his heroine is not totally wanting in strength of character when, at the soirée, her need for privacy (she calls it "tranquillity") is piquantly affirmed by Clélia herself:

Clélia s'aperçut que quelqu'un s'approchait...; elle en fut contrariée, quoiqu'elle se fit des reproches; les rêveries auxquelles on l'arrachait n'étaient point sans quelque douceur. Voilà un importun que je vais joliment recevoir! pensa-t-elle. Elle tournait la tête avec un regard altier.... (XV)

In fact, for a "timid" woman, she sounds downright militant about her rights.

It is belatedly that we learn, from her father, of her unpredictable nature. More than wary, her father secretly fears her (her "caractère lui faisait peur," we are told (XIX)).¹³ Next, in the fol-

¹³See citation on page 209 about her unpredictability.

lowing chapter, we are apprised of her desire to break away from her father as she confides to Fabrice: "j'espère avoir le courage un de ces jours de quitter mon père, et de m'enfuir dans quelque couvent lointain." (XX) If, to us, this seems to be a familiar, rather uninspired idea of "courage," it was, to our author, a fine way for Clélia to get rid of that undesirable suitor, Crescenzi, whom she eventually weds:

Clélia manqua de courage, elle commit la faute insigne de ne pas chercher un refuge dans un couvent, ce qui en même temps lui eût donné un moyen tout naturel de rompre avec le marquis Crescenzi. Une fois cette faute commise, comment résister à ce jeune homme si aimable, si naturel, si tendre, qui exposait sa vie à des périls affreux pour obtenir le simple bonheur de l'apercevoir.... (XX)¹⁴

The "fault"--as we rapidly shift the grounds--is Stendhal's: for he is not particularly imaginative when it comes to envisioning alternatives for his oppressed young maidens. Not only are our author's means of liberating his timorous, unmarried women limited--to one!--but also this spurious flight to freedom represents nothing more than the substitution of one form of restrictive, life-denying existence for another of its kind.

While we must acknowledge that Clélia is no more able to brave her father by standing up for her own interests than was Mme de Chasteller, we can point out that Clélia's bravery emerges splendidly when Fabrice's life is at stake. Not once but twice does Clélia extend herself to save the man she loves: the first time in accordance with Gina's plan, and with the pathetic feeling that she (Clélia) is a "fille dénaturée" who is betraying her father. She tells Fabrice:

Dussé-je m'exposer à mille morts, j'emploierai les moyens même les plus dangereux pour introduire ce paquet de cordes

¹⁴Pursuant to our discussion on page 215, we have emphasized these words.

dans la citadelle, au mépris, hélas! de tous mes devoirs.
(XX)

The second time, however, there is no conflict in her mind. She acts spontaneously. Says Stendhal:

Clélia était en ce moment animée d'une force surnaturelle, elle était hors d'elle-même. Je vais sauver mon mari, se disait-elle. (XXV)

And suddenly this passive, dreamy young woman becomes dynamically vital.

The preponderance of active verbs is positively astounding:

Clélia montait rapidement les six marches; elle se précipita contre la porte: une clef énorme était dans la serrure; elle eut besoin de toutes ses forces pour la faire tourner.... Elle entra vivement dans la chambre, renferma la porte en déchirant sa robe, et, comme le guichetier la poussait pour entrer après elle, elle la ferma avec un verrou qui se trouvait sous sa main. Elle regarda dans la chambre et vit Fabrice assis devant une petite table où était son dîner. Elle se précipita sur la table, la renversa et, saisissant le bras de Fabrice, lui dit: --As-tu mangé? (XXV)

Stendhal's firm conviction that women in love are capable of extraordinary, unpredictable, and admirable behavior had been expressed long before the Chartreuse was written. "Le courage des femmes," which he had praised in De l'Amour, seems to defy description. I have seen women, he said, who are superior to the bravest of men. And, not surprisingly, he proposes that their sublime, incongruous courage is both stimulated by and at the service of the lover:

Il faut seulement qu'elles aient un homme à aimer; comme elles ne sentent plus que par lui, le danger direct et personnel le plus atroce devient pour elles comme une rose à cueillir en sa présence. (XXIX)

And in the Chartreuse, as in the Rouge, our author effectively demonstrates that timid women are highly motivated and courageous when acting on behalf of the man they love.

Undoubtedly Clélia's allusion to Fabrice as her mari was intended to prepare the reader for the love scene which immediately follows her

display of "supernatural strength." Before we discuss that scene, which is quite unlike other Stendhalian love scenes, let us digress briefly to consider how another young heroine referred to the hero as her "husband," though she was not married to him.

In the Rouge, Mathilde finds herself pregnant and, writing to her father, calls Julien her "mari." Then, too, there are her words to the father of the child she is carrying: in essence she has proven that she is "forever" his "wife" by virtue of her pregnancy. In the Rouge--and in the nineteenth century--a pregnancy was irrevocable; whereas Mathilde's constancy was not.

The case of Clélia is altogether different. Almost from the beginning we sense that her love for Fabrice is unwavering and true. Furthermore, the word mari appears before the fact of carnal knowledge. Strictly speaking, she has yet to become the hero's mistress. And in the light of Clélia's known aversion to sharing her life with a man, her thought, "Je vais sauver mon mari," is certainly imprévu. Mari, then, signals her sudden, total commitment, a commitment of which the act of love itself is simply the natural result.

In other novels the act of love was veiled or escamoté. In the Chartreuse Stendhal momentarily puts aside his own pudeur to deal with the corporeal realities of love. And only in the Chartreuse does love-making seem pleasurable for both protagonists. The hero has not given a thought to seducing the heroine; nor does she anticipate what is about to happen. In fact, the act of love is presented as something of an accidental, though felicitous occurrence. Here the reader must pay careful attention, for all is reduced to one short paragraph, two sentences:

Elle était si belle, à demi vêtue et dans cet état d'extrême passion, que Fabrice ne put résister à un mouvement presque involontaire. Aucune résistance ne fut opposée. (XXV)

Of course the reader does not miss the import of the "movement" which meets with no "resistance." What most impresses us is the very gracefulness and the fortuity of this sexual encounter. The author's tendency to substitute mood and stylized movement for lengthy graphic accounts is evident. The lovemaking, which has been rendered with utmost brevity, is not marred by awkwardness beforehand or by humiliation, resentment, or dismay afterwards. For the first and we daresay the only time in a Stendhalian novel, physical love--unencumbered by anxiety, devoid of disappointment--becomes a shared experience, a positive experience.

With recourse to a "supernatural force" and, at the end, to the power of jealousy, Stendhal is able to animate the modest creature he created. In the essentials, until now, Clélia seems to differ little from Stendhal's other femmes douces. That which wholly distinguishes her from the chaste Armance and Mme de Chasteller is reserved for the final chapter of the novel.

Clélia, as Stendhal incessantly reminds us, has vowed never to see Fabrice again. Stendhal calls attention to an "extraordinary" change in her appearance:

Depuis sa faute, la physionomie de Clélia avait pris un caractère de noblesse et de sérieux vraiment remarquable; on eût dit qu'elle avait trente ans. (XXVI)

Turning to Fabrice and to the man Clélia marries, Stendhal underscores her innate modesty and shyness:

Fabrice connaissait la profonde modestie de Clélia; il savait combien toute entreprise extraordinaire, et pouvant faire anecdote, si elle était découverte, était assurée de lui déplaire. (XXVI)

And Crescenzi says to Clélia: "Vous serez toujours trop modeste; pourquoi marcher ainsi les yeux baissés?" (XXVI) Stendhal himself points out that "elle était restée tellement jeune et naïve au milieu de sa haute fortune." (XXVIII) And surely the emphases upon her piety, her modesty, et al., are intended to throw us off guard, so that when Clélia herself undertakes an entreprise extraordinaire the reader will be as pleasantly surprised as is Fabrice. Furthermore, the gift of love, we know full well, is indescribably enhanced when the giver is both modest and pious.

Clélia, now a married woman, has been prompted by her jealousy of "la petite Marina" (whom, rumor has it, Fabrice favors) to hear and see the "predicateur étonnant" preaching one of his eloquent sermons. No sooner does she lay eyes on him than "elle regarda comme un crime atroce d'avoir pu passer quatorze mois sans le voir." (XXVIII) Not surprisingly, it is pity that overwhelms her: "Fabrice ... était si maigre, si pâle, tellement consumé, que les yeux de Clélia se remplirent de larmes à l'instant."

As the reader may recall, Clélia summons her lover and greets him with those touching words: "Entre ice, ami de mon coeur." And at last she avows her love for him:

C'est moi, lui dit une voix chérie, qui suis venue ici
pour te dire que je t'aime, et pour te demander si tu
veux m'obéir.

There is, in her gentle request for Fabrice's submission to her will, a reverberation of love in days of old, of the amour courtois--to which Stendhal had directed attention in De l'Amour--which decreed that the lover be entirely at the disposal of his mistress.¹⁵ But

¹⁵ See the "Code d'amour du douzième siècle," in particular 25 ("L'amour véritable ne trouve rien de bien que ce qu'il sait plaire à ce qu'il aime.") and 26 ("L'amour ne peut rien refuser à l'amour."). De l'Amour, Appendix.

above all these words permit us to declare that Clélia has gained control of her own destiny. She receives Fabrice each evening, with jesuitical prudence--in the dark, thus remaining faithful to her vow "de ne jamais voir Fabrice." And moral scruples, remorse, regrets, are nonexistent.

Having suggested that our heroine has--for love--proven to be remarkably self-assertive and enterprising, we believe it pertinent to make some observations about her emancipation. It is significant that Clélia, who, in the closing chapters, is no longer under the tutelage of her father nor subject to his influence, apparently had to be married before she could pursue the inclinations of her heart; or, rather, before Stendhal would permit her to do so. Marriage, it seems, enables a woman to do what she pleases. Not only in Stendhal's fiction, but also in the letters Beyle wrote to his sister does this viewpoint emerge. "On accorde à une femme mariée une liberté qui va à la licence," he told Pauline way back in 1807. And in another letter he informs her that when she is married she will be able to do what she wishes and be happy in her own way.¹⁶ The paradox is marvelous, and it is transposed into every one of Stendhal's novels until Lamiel: the marriage bond curiously liberates a woman, giving her license to love not her husband but the man she chooses to love. Concomitantly there is, of course, no happiness possible in marriage--as Stendhal often declared in his novels, if his own reluctance to wed is not sufficient testimony.

¹⁶Correspondance I, pp. 349, 373, 377.

The heroine who figures in Stendhal's final novel, Lamiel, never marries. Nor does she bear much resemblance to Stendhal's femmes douces. Jealousy, the passion which operates on Clélia as a force mobile, upsetting her peace of mind, prompting her to pursue her inchoate desires, is not used to move Lamiel. Nor can we say that Stendhal depends upon "orgueil" or injured pride, or even the idea of devoir--which made Mathilde so resolute. For while Lamiel is--like Mathilde, Gina, and others--energetic and not particularly shy, she is nevertheless distinctively different and, in fact, a most unusual heroine, as we shall see.

CHAPTER IV

LAMIEL

To narrate his last and incompleated novel, Lamiel, Stendhal assumes the role of an urbane man from Paris who had once lived briefly in Normandy. His hostess--in the town of Carville--was one Mme de Miossens, the vain and foolish Duchess who will employ Lamiel as a reader. Stendhal's sojourn there enables him to speak freely of the town's inhabitants. They know him; he knows them. And so, in the first two chapters of the novel, in a rambling, desultory fashion, Stendhal sets the scene, portraying some minor characters who will be involved with his enfant trouvé, Lamiel, preparing us for the story of a heroine who has yet to appear. These introductory chapters are not unlike those of the Rouge, with much attention paid both to the physical setting and the moral climate. There is, however, appreciably less irony than in the Rouge, and much more cynicism in our author's tone; here, for instance, where he speaks of Carville and the Normans:

[Carville,] c'est un lieu que l'on ne trouvera pas sur la carte et dont je demande la permission de dire des horreurs, c'est à dire une partie de la vérité.

Les finesses, les calculs sordides de ces Normands ne me délassaient presque pas de la vie compliquée de Paris. (I)

Stendhal has, moreover, few kind words for any class, profession, or person in the novel (apart from Lamiel, of course).

This final novel is not the "gesture of reconciliation"¹ that

¹The phrase is borrowed from Irving Howe, who finds that Lamiel

one might expect from an aging author who has mellowed and is eager to make his peace with the world. On the contrary, Stendhal's attitudes toward society have, if anything, hardened. He continues to attack men, manners, mores, institutions, conventions. And he goes so far as to heap ridicule upon the advocates of piety and devotion as well as upon those persons who ostensibly adhere to religious convictions. Nor does he stop there. Through Lamiel, he mocks both religious practices and precepts.

As for the word "conventions," it is perhaps too broad to do justice to what Stendhal has dared to attempt on the pages of this novel. We know from other novels that Stendhal affirms the right of women to love according to their own desires, and heedless of their marital vows. In Lamiel, Stendhal deliberately calls into question the double standard of morality--by giving us the religious platitudes of a certain abbé Clément which are indirectly opposed to the trenchant declarations of one Dr. Sansfin. Moreover, he wildly reinterprets that double standard. In Lamiel, feminine modesty is all but forgotten. Through the person of Lamiel precious chastity is demolished--not for love, but for the advancement of curiosity. Furthermore, Stendhal has created a heroine who reverses the male and female roles--a woman who pays a man for the privilege of being déniassée!

"is the wildest and the most preposterous, indeed the most anarchistic of [Stendhal's] books." Politics and the Novel (New York: Horizon Press, 1957), p. 33.

At the end of Chapter II, Stendhal proposes to give an account of the events which have occurred during his absence from Carville (roughly dating from 1826 on). "Toutes ses aventures ... tournent autour de la petite Lamiel," says he, "et j'ai pris la fantaisie de les écrire afin de devenir un homme de lettres." Such is his ploy in this novel. But if our author is not a participant in the adventures--"Ainsi, ô lecteur bienveillant, vous n'entendrez plus de moi!"--he remains omniscient as usual, and highly opinionated, too.

There is an inordinate amount of conversation in this novel. The dialogues which are intended to paint mores and character are also for the sake of amusement. Even the terse "love scene" is designed to make us laugh (though many critics do not find it funny). Furthermore, Lamiel's various discussions--with the Hautemares, Dr. Sansfin, Clément, Féder--are extremely important. For her words, her repartee, her probing questions, demonstrate beyond a shadow of doubt that she is the alert, imaginative, and extremely intelligent peasant girl that Stendhal and others believe her to be.

While dialogue is unsparing there is a lack, in this novel, of the author's protective, defensive intrusions on behalf of the central protagonist he has so complacently created. Perhaps Stendhal does not bother to defend because Lamiel herself is quick to learn how to take care of herself, how to assert herself. By the same token, Stendhal never admonishes her for what she does or does not do. Nor does he exculpate himself--as he had so often done with irony in the Chartreuse. As a result Lamiel's behavior is not only bound to shock the sensitive reader; it will also offend those who believe that women ought to be chaste, docile, compliant, submissive to men, as well as those who prefer to see women remaining on the "periphery of things."²

²Adams, Stendhal, p. 93.

Confirming what we said before about diminished irony, we would point out that Stendhal begins the following observation with sarcasm:

Il y a de bonnes gens partout, même en Normandie, où ils sont à la vérité beaucoup plus rares qu'ailleurs. Les bonnes gens de Carville furent indignés de voir déshériter d'une façon aussi barbare le neveu Hautemare qui avait sept enfants, et ils appelaient Lamiel la fille du diable. (II)

Now, if there is anything vague or uncertain about Lamiel, it is her origins. Presumably she is an illegitimate child whom Mme Hautemare tries to pass off as her niece; however, "les Normands ne furent pas dupes." And, as we saw in the passage above, few take kindly to the adoption. Stendhal, who had elsewhere enjoyed giving his heroes dubious paternity, invents now a heroine whose parents are absolutely unknown. What is more, he accentuates the relationship between Lamiel and the demonic. It is the "démon" of curiosity that drives her. The name "fille du diable" owes much to a rumor begun by Dr. Sansfin. And that perverse demonic man--he even shows a "sourire méphistophélique"--has a certain amount of influence upon Lamiel's soul. Also, we discover that when the epithet "fille du diable" is hurled at Lamiel by a group of jealous peasant women she does not cringe but instead replies spiritedly:

Tant mieux si je suis fille du diable! je ne serai jamais laide et grognon comme vous; le diable mon père saura me maintenir en gaieté. (III)

As can be expected, from her words and attitude above, Lamiel's pluckiness (she is, after all, merely twelve years old here) and her joie de vivre number among her distinguishing attributes.

In Chapter III Mme Hautemare with Lamiel in tow appears on the scene and we are given our first glimpse of the heroine.

Cette femme avait un air de pédanterie et conduisait par la main une petite fille de douze à quatorze ans dont la vivacité paraissait très contrariée d'être ainsi contenue.

From the washerwomen we learn that Madame does not permit Lamiel to gambol about like other village girls. Lamiel is confined and closely guarded: "La dévote Mme Hautemare ne lui laissait jamais faire vingt pas toute seule." Thus as the constraints are disclosed the word contenance takes on significance. It is, moreover, constraint--both physical and mental--that sets the tone for Lamiel's unique rebellion.

The Hautemares are a devout couple of stodgy ways. And the reader may assume that pure altruism did not inspire Mme Hautemare to adopt Lamiel; she said to her husband:

Je ferais bien d'adopter une petite fille, toute petite, nous l'éleverons dans la crainte de Dieu; ce sera véritablement une âme que nous lui donnerons, et, dans nos vieux jours elle nous soignera. (II)

Self-interest is apparent in the last phrase--which we have underlined. As for the âme that they will try to nurture in Lamiel--the emphasis is Stendhal's--we can at least give them credit for trying. Lamiel, however, develops into a young woman who is the antithesis of their exhortations and expectations. Assuredly she does not lack "soul"--"le ciel lui avait donné l'âme qu'il faut pour mépriser la faiblesse" (VIII) --but it is a Stendhalian soul that she has inherited, not a religious one. This over-protected adopted child comes to doubt the existence of hell and has no "fear of God." Indeed, toward the end of the novel Stendhal will declare proudly, "Elle était d'une impiété effroyable," (XIII)--a remark which comes as no surprise, for by then we have had ample opportunity to hear Lamiel reflecting about religion, scrutinizing motives and behavior, and drawing her own conclusions about "virtue" and morality: "Le premier sentiment de Lamiel à la vue d'une vertu était de la croire une hypocrisie." (VI) Elsewhere, earlier, when she lived at home and was subjected to her parents' incessant preaching and admonitions:

Ne pas dire le chapelet le soir des bonnes fêtes ou ne pas jeûner un jour de quatre temps, ou aller au bois faire l'amour, parurent à Lamiel des péchés d'égale importance. (IV)

Stendhal, of cours, implies that none of the above are sinful. And his heroine, despite her youthful "naïveté" and "ignorance"--will not forever remain in the dark about these matters. She is much too intelligent to believe, to accept with scepticism all that is taught to her--whether by her parents, Mme de Miossens, Dr. Sansfin, or abbé Clément.

Lamiel is "fort éveillée, pleine d'esprit et d'imagination," Stendhal says, shortly before she begins to question the Hautemares' values and teachings. Reading is the first stimulus. A chance encounter with L'Histoire des quatre fils Aymon is so enjoyable that "elle oubliâ qu'il lui était défendu d'aller voir la danse, bientôt elle ne put penser qu'aux quatre fils Aymon." (III) From this point on she reads anything she can get her hands on--Virgil's Aeneid, the stories of the bandits Mandrin and Cartouche. Here Stendhal cannot resist intruding:

Nous avouerons avec peine que ces histoires ne sont point écrites dans cette tendance hautement morale et vertueuse que notre siècle moral place en toutes choses. On voit bien que l'Académie française et les prix Montyon n'ont point encore passé par cette littérature-là; aussi n'est-elle pas ennuyeuse. (III)

Thus with this ironic avowal that the books Lamiel reads are neither moral nor virtuous our author lambastes contemporary literary taste. And, forgetting momentarily about his heroine, he proceeds to attack the institutions that set literary standards. By implication, we surmise that those writers who have received awards and recognition have written books that are--if anything--boring. We rest assured that Stendhal does not number among that literary elite. There is, one feels, more than apparent mockery in the passage. There is some bitterness, too.

Is it not interesting that the words "immoral" and "immorality"

are virtually absent from the pages of the novel? The absence is conspicuous: not only because these words were bandied about in the Chartreuse but also because the heroine of this particular novel is readily transformed into a rather immoral girl. Yet when she steals (Féder's money) or engages in illicit sex the author stubbornly refrains from comment. In regard to vocabulary we have noticed, on the other hand, that Stendhal does not hesitate to use extremely provocative adjectives such as "criminal" or "seductive." Such suggestive words, however, little relate to vice or violence. In fact, they apply solely to Lamiel's mental awakening and are used to add color to her inner rebellion: "Une idée bien plus séduisante lui apparut" --in this case the idea is her inclination to make quick use of a few minutes of freedom by running to the champ de danse to see what is going on there. "Puis tout à coup apparut cette idée bien criminelle" --and here the criminal thought is that her uncle Hautemare is not generous, as opposed to the heroes of the marvelous books she has been reading, books which Hautemare has condemned.

It is when Lamiel begins to compare that her intellect makes great strides. Opposing her uncle to Cartouche, Renouart, and Mandrin, she finds him lacking in courage and vigor--the qualities that she will always cherish, the qualities with which she herself is endowed. Later she will compare what people profess with what they do, thus discerning much hypocrisy. She compares one man with another--Dr. Sansfin as opposed to Clément, for instance. And Stendhal to tell us that

la méchanceté trop découverte du docteur Sansfin heurtait un peu cette âme encore si jeune, et elle voulait la force incisive des idées du docteur, revêtue de la grâce parfaite que l'abbé savait donner à tout ce qu'il disait. (V)

As we have seen, the appearance of the heroine is, as usual, somewhat delayed. One waits till Chapter IV for a Stendhalian assessment of the young Lamiel. And her physical portrait is not drawn until we are half-way through the novel. Unlike Stendhal's familiar hasty, sketchy portrayals, however, this one is a bit more detailed. We know that Lamiel is large of stature and thin; blond, with eyes of blue, she has a chin that is long and thin, a face that is oval-shaped, and a mouth that turns down a bit. Still and all, Stendhal continues to use physical description as he had in other novels, to disclose character. Thus when Lamiel's forehead is described the adjectives superbe, élevé, audacieux, more aptly apply to her nature. Singling out the word "audacious," let us say now that while it is with feigned indifference that Stendhal uses it--here and elsewhere --that word succinctly summarizes Lamiel's behavior. In fact, this heroine becomes a much more forward and daring young woman than any we have yet encountered, including Mathilde de la Mole.

Liberally endowed with the traits of force, "le naturel," the spontaneity, courage, and unpredictability of other heroines, this girl, in addition, occasionally gives expression to desires that most women, when they have them, tend to keep secret. In the following passage Lamiel declares to an astonished acquaintance, Marthe:

Dieu me délivre des amoureux! j'aime mieux ma liberté que tout.... Moi, je voudrais que mon amoureux fût mon esclave, je le renverrais au bout d'un quart d'heure. (XI)

Certainly the desire to command, the capricious willfulness which we had discerned in Mathilde, is articulated here explicitly. To understand Lamiel the reader plays no guessing games.

In this novel there is notably neither hesitancy nor reluctance

to paint clearly, incisively. More specifically, Stendhal gives us the image of a spirited girl who had, throughout her youth, been subjected to confinement and repression and who--figuratively and literally, as we shall see--struggles to break away in order to run in whatever direction her inspiration of the moment carries her. We sense that Stendhal wants to emphasize the unpredictable, unorthodox manner in which she will take advantage of her freedom. For even when Lamiel runs it is with abandon. Marthe sees her "s'égarer à travers champs, suivant de petit sentiers, et quelquefois ne suivant pas de sentiers du tout. (XI, our emphases) The author has moved far astray from his delicate portrayal of Armance, whose most admirable traits were too often couched in negative phraseology, whose modesty he dared not mention, whose own strong feelings had to be repressed; and whose love and life were circumscribed by obstacles often of her own making.

The mystery which so often shrouded Stendhal's feminine creations has been abandoned in favor of clarity. Lamiel was, at age four, when the Hautemares adopted her, "dûment vaccinée et déjà tout gentille." (II) And when Stendhal places her before our eyes her vivacity is immediately mentioned. Furthermore, we are not obliged to wonder about the forces that affect and influence her.

Lamiel is the only Stendhalian heroine whose youth is not disregarded. Moreover, Lamiel is the only novel that comes close to being a kind of apprentissage if not an éducation sentimentale.³ It is a novel in which the protagonist's youth, growth, and development is de-

³Léon Blum would undoubtedly disagree, for he maintains that Stendhal "a écrit toujours le même roman, le roman de la formation, de l'apprentissage, du premier contact avec le monde où l'on se sent différent, le roman de l'émotivité méconnue et de la virginité sentimentale, gardée malgré soi." Stendhal et le beylisme (Paris: Albin Michel, 1930), pp. 97-98.

liberately traced. Stendhal, who moves from Lamiel's birth to her adoption and then presents her to us when she is on the threshold of adolescence, lingers over those teen-aged years to portray an ignorant but keen-witted young girl. Periodically he appraises the progress she has made. L'Histoire des quatre fils Aymon "fit des ravages incroyables dans l'âme de la petite fille." Due to the influence of Dr. Sansfin "le chemin était tracé dans cette âme si jeune.... La jeune fille allait acquérir l'habitude de la discrétion." (V) From her experiences in the château of Mme de Miossens Lamiel retains:

un dégoût profond de trois choses, symboles pour elle de l'ennui le plus exécrationnel: la haute noblesse, la grande opulence et les discours édifiants touchant la religion.
(VIII)

And in her boredom she rejoins Mathilde and Julien. She did, nevertheless learn something of value: "Lamiel, en vivant en bonne compagnie, acquerrait rapidement l'art de peindre ses idées par des paroles d'une façon exacte." (VI) Then in Chapter XI, after she has run off with Féder de Miossens, we are informed that:

Grâce à ses études et à ses réflexions de tous les instants, Lamiel était bien différente de la jeune fille qui six semaines auparavant avait quitté le village. Elle commençait à pouvoir donner un nom aux pensées qui l'agitaient. (XI)

The evolution of Lamiel's reasoning powers is not complete when the novel breaks off. For in the final chapter we learn that "Lamiel commençait à savoir lire dans les cœurs." And her development continues: "Elle étudiait, elle doutait, elle ne savait à quel parti s'arrêter sur toutes choses. La curiosité était toujours son unique et dévorante passion." (XIII)

Lamiel is the most intelligent and probing of Stendhal's heroines. She is not interested in acquiring knowledge in order to display her savoir. She has a mind that craves stimulation ("tout ce qui donnait

une pâture à son esprit faisait son bonheur" (VI)). She is not merely curious, like Mathilde wondering about Julien. Nor are her interrogations limited to those we often found in a heroine's interior discourse. Lamiel is unafraid to ask profoundly disturbing questions, of everyone. And when the answers are evasive, she seeks to discover the truth on her own- the truth about love, for example:

Lamiel fut très piquée de cette fin de non-recevoir. "On veut me tromper sur tout ce qui a rapport à l'amour; donc, il ne faut plus demander d'éclaircissement à personne et ne croire que ce que je verrai par moi-même." (VI)

With Lamiel the "chasse au bonheur" has been transformed into a quest for knowledge and understanding. Consistent features in her development include the desire to summon up as many experiences as life will allow, which is what Stendhal implies above; a disposition to action; the ability to learn, from positive and negative experiences alike-- for though she is bored to extreme by Féder de Miossens, "elle le regardait par curiosité et pour son instruction"; an indomitable lightheartedness or gaiety which prohibits the reader from judging her harshly, even when she behaves in an atrocious manner. Thus when she treats poor Féder with contempt and cruelty she is merely trying to discover the limits of her power, and attempting to dissipate her boredom in the process. She acts--Stendhal would have us understand-- not out of malice but to advance her education.

Féder has been carefully depicted as an insipid and all-too-predictable young man--a fine representative of the nobility, incapable of acting without first being told what to do. Because he is so fearful and lacking in energy Lamiel forces him out into the world so that he will be on his own, without his trusty guide Duval. ("Je veux vous voir agir par vous-même," she declares to him. (XI))

Although Stendhal himself tends to float from objective portrayal to light scorn and sometimes sympathy for this amorous "ducaillon," it is clear that Féder's presence in the novel is largely determined by the author's undiminished compulsion to flagellate the nobility. As for Féder's role in regard to Lamiel, he is an educator:

La fonction d'explicateur des mots était l'une de celles auxquelles Lamiel aimait le mieux employer le jeune duc, il était clair, logique.... (IX)

At her behest Féder instructs her in mathematics and in literature as well: "Elle en fit un maitre de littérature; elle se fit lire par lui et expliquer la comédie que l'on jouait le soir au spectacle." (IX)

This girl does not pass up opportunities to increase her knowledge.

Later, after Lamiel has abandoned Féder, Stendhal tells us that he served as a "point de comparaison pour juger les autres hommes." (XI)

From one of Stendhal's many notes on the characters of the novel it appears that he intended to acquaint Lamiel with numerous lovers so that he could briefly depict "des principaux caractères de jeunes gens de l'époque." As it turns out, Lamiel meets up with many kinds of people from different segments of society and she manages to pass judgment upon virtually all of them. In this respect she appears to be the foil for the professions, the classes, etc. that Stendhal wishes to disparage. It is also apparent that, near the end, Stendhal was carried away by his satirical intentions. In Paris the interest often centers less on Lamiel than upon her pleasure-seeking lover; and there her character tends to vacillate between boldness and a certain prudence. In truth, as Stendhal's plans indicate, he had trouble deciding whether or not to make of Lamiel an unprincipled libertine woman. In the novel he finally opts for making her different--naturally--from the libertine people with whom she associates--somewhat aloof, indeed a bit modest in

comparison to people of "les idées vulgaires et à la mode." Specifically Stendhal says that she refuses would-be lovers "avec modestie et sans aucune prétention à la vertu féminine." This is one of several discrepancies to be found between her character near the end and as it was portrayed throughout most of the novel. Certainly the character of Lamiel was invented or better "improvised" as Stendhal went along. Yet, although the heroine changes before our eyes--perhaps more so than any other heroine--there is nevertheless great congruity. Her energy, her courage, her intelligence and actions all serve to carry her through--as does, of course, her curiosity, the one trait which Stendhal insists upon throughout the novel, from beginning to end.

In Lamiel we continue to see the heroine through the eyes of others, but multiple perspectives--if used as extensively as they were earlier, to portray Gina or Mathilde--seem of diminished importance here. Doubtless this is because Stendhal has provided so much dialogue and has given such mobility to the heroine. She is, we feel, revealed most effectively by what she thinks, says, and does. In fact, sometimes the opinions of her observers are redundant or superfluous.

Lamiel's merits are presented simply and they are, all of them, convincingly displayed over the course of the novel, either before they are mentioned or afterward. Stendhal himself achieves a certain distance from his heroine. We do not find him stepping in to speculate about what might have occurred "if only" But he does occasionally manifest familiarity; here, for instance;

Quoique née en Normandie, Lamiel n'était guère habile dans l'art de défendre à sa figure d'exprimer les sentiments qui

l'agitaient. A vrai dire, elle n'avait point eu le temps d'acquérir de l'expérience; c'était un coeur et un esprit romanesque qui se figurait les chances de bonheur qu'elle allait trouver dans la vie. (VIII)

This is the closest Stendhal comes to sympathizing with Lamiel. Yet those who are familiar with his novels know that people who are "romanesque" are special. Similarly, inexperience, naïveté, ignorance, and the like are never faulted by Stendhal. And covertly, if not obviously, by comparing her to the Normans he gives away his bias. Nevertheless, prevalently it is the minor characters in the novel who express enthusiasm for Lamiel. When Lamiel leaves the Hautemares to become a lectrice for Mme de Miossens, the "grande dame" is absolutely wild about her, especially because Lamiel has none of those "airs de décence et de réserve que se donnent des filles de gens du peuple qui ont gagné quelque argent." (IV)

Dr. Sansfin, who proposes to teach Lamiel "le bon sens," secretly plans to seduce her--"me faire aimer de Lamiel, qui a dix-sept ans bientôt et sera charmante quand je l'aurai déniaisée," he muses. This man is astonished by the lucidity and vigor of "cet esprit si jeune," and he informs her frankly:

Ce que la nature vous a donné, c'est une grâce charmante et une sorte de gaieté qui se communique, à votre insu, aux personnes qui ont le bonheur de vous entendre. (V)

The words à votre insu bear repeating, for they bring to light Lamiel's naturel. Moreover, two pages later Sansfin speaks of Lamiel's "esprit naturel." Then, a few pages after, we find he thinks she is "une fille charmante." It will be noted, however, that he has not yet laid siege to her virtue; furthermore, he never will.

It is evident that the words "grace" and "charming" are of high priority. They are used, we believe, to convey Lamiel's essential fem-

inity. In Chapter VI abbé Clément's reactions are indicated:

Il fut frappé de la grâce qu'il y avait dans la réunion d'un esprit si vif, audacieux et de la plus grande portée, avec une ignorance à peu près complète de toutes les choses de la vie, et une âme parfaitement naïve. (VI)

As for "naïveté," applied to Lamiel it tends to mean absence de calcul, lack of hypocrisy. Stendhal illustrates her naïveté by stressing her spontaneous responses to the unappealing portrait of Fédér de Mirossens:

Après mille façons de parler qui demandaient une réponse, enfin la duchesse, impatiente, fut obligée de demander à Lamiel ce qu'il lui semblait de cette physionomie. Lamiel admirait les détails du cadre; à la demande de la duchesse, à peine considéra-t-elle d'un oeil distrait le personnage peint, puis dit simplement, et sans y entendre malice, que la physionomie de ce jeune soldat lui semblait insignifiante. (VI)

That Lamiel is utterly without falsity or pretension accounts, in a large measure, for her success with the Duchess. "Ce qui faisait surtout la conquête de la grande dame, c'est que Lamiel n'avait point l'air d'une demoiselle." (IV) In the following passage the omniscient narrator takes over, stressing the youthful exuberance of his heroine, indicating how she behaves in the depressing château environment "[où] tout devait se faire lentement, et d'une façon compassée":

Lamiel avait trop de vivacité et d'énergie pour marcher lentement et les yeux baissés, ou du moins ramenés en soi, pour ne pas laisser échapper un regard insignifiant sur le magnifique tapis de salon de la duchesse. Les avis charitables des femmes de chambre l'avait amenée à une singulière allure, elle marchait lentement, il est vrai, mais elle avait l'air d'une gazelle enchaînée; mille petits mouvements pleins de vivacité trahissaient les habitudes campagnardes. Jamais elle n'avait pu prendre cette démarche de bonne compagnie qui doit avoir l'air d'un dernier effort d'une nature qui ne demanderait qu'à ne point agir. Dès qu'elle n'était pas immédiatement surveillée par les regards sévères de quelques-unes des anciennes femmes de chambre, elle parcourait en sautant la suite des pièces qu'il fallait traverser pour arriver à celle où se trouvait la duchesse. (IV)

Opposing Lamiel to people of "la bonne compagnie" Stendhal proceeds to

illustrate the "energy" and "vivacity" he first mentioned. It is with utmost ease that Stendhal animates this heroine. Moreover, the image of Lamiel running joyously, and--to all appearances--happy to be moving without inhibition, repeats itself throughout the novel.

The analogy Stendhal has chosen, in likening Lamiel to a "gazelle" is more than incidental.⁴ In the context above she is "enchaînée"-- hindered, restrained by reprimands and prudent counsel; yet she manages to move, running "en sautant," nimbly--giving vent to a near primitive urge for freedom of movement. Gazelle connotes strength, a certain wildness that cannot be tamed--and this is Lamiel. How interesting that Stendhal, toward the end of his career, in his last two novels, turned to zoological imagery to depict his active women. It cannot, of course, be proven, but we suspect he was influenced by Balzac's physical descriptions.

Although Lamiel shares with Mathilde the desire to take her own destiny in hand, Lamiel is much more articulate about her fondness of freedom. Furthermore her emancipation can be considered more successful. She is not interested in playing a great role. Nor can it be said that she depends upon anyone else--a Julien Sorel, for example--to break away, become independent. Totally rejecting the useless conventions and idées reçues that had been so much a part of her upbringing, Lamiel embarks fearlessly on an uncharted journey that will lead her to Rouen,

⁴In fact, it recurs when Nerwinde d'Aubigné reflects "c'est une jeune gazelle que je veux mettre en cage, il ne faut pas qu'elle saute par-dessus les barrières." XII.

Paris, and who knows where after that? Guilt and remorse are sentiments unknown. She learns to think for herself, independent of Sansfin et al., and acts incisively, often bravely. One recalls her journey in the company of the traveling salesmen. "Elle en fut révoltée du ton de ces messieurs.... Bientôt elle eut grand-peur." So without a moment's hesitation Lamiel grabs up her scissors and boldly declares her intentions:

"Messieurs, leur dit-elle, je prendrai peut-être un amant un jour, mais ce ne sera pas l'un de vous, vous êtes trop laids. Ces mains qui essayent de serrer les miens sont des mains de maréchal-ferrant, et, si vous ne les retirez à l'instant, je vais les écorcher avec mes ciseaux"; ce qu'elle fit, au grand étonnement des commis voyageurs. (X)

Stendhal points out that she is much too attractive to be traveling alone. And it happens that Lamiel's beauty becomes something of an encumbrance, for she values her freedom of movement and does not appreciate the admiration she inspires ("Je n'aime pas être regardée dans la rue." (XI)). Thus she will remove her beauty at whim, almost as if it were a mask, with the famous vert de houx.

We have, as yet, said nothing about Lamiel's regard, for in this novel the author does not need it to help him animate the heroine. Those who know Lamiel are impressed by her over-all beauty, vivacity, and intellect. And it seems to us that Lamiel's eyes were not intended --by Stendhal--to be a significant feature. "Quant aux yeux, ils sont bleus et pass assez grands." (VI) Certainly they are not shown to be prominent when she is described. Nevertheless, when we see Lamiel from the perspective of the traveling salesmen, Stendhal is suddenly prompted to mention her gaze:

Tout était honnête en elle, excepté son regard. Ce regard avait tant d'esprit que, aux yeux de gens grossiers et peu clairvoyants en fait des nuances, il pouvait paraître provocateur. (X)

Let us breathe a sigh of relief. For because Stendhal has been kind enough to direct attention to her regard we are now able to proclaim that all the heroines whom he would have us admire, appreciate, and applaud possess a gaze that is alluring, when not powerful and even magical. Let it be noted that if Mme Grandet has a regard it is surely an insignificant one, for it is not mentioned. But, returning to Lamiel, no matter how "provocative" her gaze may seem, one must admit that it is not an important means of character portrayal.⁵

It cannot be denied that the invaluable lessons of Dr. Sansfin abet Lamiel's progress on the road of knowledge and rebellion. However, it is also apparent that once Lamiel is set into motion she evolves on her own. Just as she had extracted from certain readings values that are of her own making, so, too, does she select from the teachings of Dr. Sansfin that which suits her, becoming in the process an entirely autonomous individual. As Lamiel herself proposes near the end, "Ne suis-je pas maîtresse de moi?"

In Chapter XI our heroine avows that she has an esprit de contradiction, and in this respect she knows herself quite well. At length her contrariness and indocility have been impressed upon the reader. Lamiel gravitates toward precisely those activities which have been forbidden: the reading of "ces belles histoires qu'on venait de lui défendre de lire"; and going into the woods with a young man. Dr. Sans-

⁵In the interest of thoroughness we should point out that Stendhal, in an earlier chapter, did speak about her eyes: "Les yeux de Lamiel étaient superbes d'esprit et de clairvoyance tandis que renfermée dans une immobilité parfaite, elle observait du haut de son caractère ce jeune homme si élégant." IX. Here Stendhal is intent on showing her contempt for Féder.

fin, the Hautemares, abbé Clément, all warn her of the dangers of love but their words only add fuel to the fires of curiosity. Hence we find that although "elle n'avait aucune disposition à faire l'amour; ce qu'elle aimait par-dessus tout, c'était une conversation intéressante," she nevertheless rebels:

"Eh bien, j'irai me promener au bois avec un jeune homme," se dit Lamiel, tel fut le résultat des longues réflexions qui suivirent sa conversation avec abbé Clément.

"Je veux savoir absolument, se dit-elle, ce que c'est que l'amour." (VI)

Lamiel's first experience with love, or, more accurately, her first sexual experience--carefully prepared and deliberately delayed by Stendhal--proves to be devoid of pleasure . . . and not surprisingly. For Stendhal gave us an inkling that this would be the case when of l'amour he spoke so cynically, as follows:

En dépit des poètes, ces choses-là n'ont rien d'élégant au village où tout y est grossier et fondé sur l'expérience la plus claire. (XIII)

Therefore, when Lamiel, determined to satisfy her burning curiosity, chooses as her initiator into the mysteries of love a dumb peasant, Jean Berville, her disappointment is predictable.

The act itself is presented summarily, bluntly: "et alors sans transport, sans amour, le jeune Normand fit de Lamiel sa maîtresse." "Details" are given after "ce pauvre Jean" has left the scene, but they are parenthetical, "(elle essuya le sang et songea à peine à sa douleur)." The scene is comprised of dialogue and Lamiel's interior monologues: "Quoi! l'amour ce n'est que ça? se disait Lamiel étonnée; il vaut la peine de le tant défendre." With a remark such as that one Stendhal's humorous intentions cannot be denied. As for passion, apart from Jean's very obvious avarice--"Elle le rapella et lui donna encore cinq francs. Il lui fit des remerciements passionnés"--there is none.

Is that what love is all about? "Is that all it is?" One notes here the echo of Julien's disappointment: "elle éclata de rire en se répétant: 'Comment, ce fameux amour, ce n'est que ça!'" But though it is evident that the crude experience fails to measure up to all that Lamiel has managed to glean about love, it is also obvious that, unlike other heroines, she feels neither humiliated nor degraded. Undaunted, "elle s'en revenait pensive et moqueuse." In fact, she appears more amused than disappointed to discover the hiatus between hearsay and the realities of experience.

It should be pointed out that Lamiel continues to wonder about love--"suis-je insensible à l'amour?"--for she has yet to find a suitable lover. (Writing to Fédér she says, "Il me semble que j'aimerais un homme d'humeur franche, en tout simple, et surtout pas si poli." (XI)) Lamiel is like Fabrice who had yet to experience "la partie morale de l'amour." In fact, the very same phrase crops up again: "Est-ce que je l'aimerais?" she asks herself about Fédér, "Est-ce ça la partie morale de l'amour?" (X)

Critics who accuse Lamiel of frigidity neglect--it seems to us--the aspects of Stendhal's novels which we have attempted to elucidate, to wit: Stendhal's own pudeur which usually reduces women's sexual desires to admiration and pity; his reluctance, if not his inability, to deal with feminine sexuality in the context of love scenes; his reluctance to paint the details in such scenes, in preference to dialogue; his belief that the pleasure of love lies not in the act of love but in the workings of the imagination: fears, doubts, and--especially for women--inchoate rêverie about the loved one. Only in the Rouge with Mme de Rênal do we have the suggestion of a passionate woman who yearns for physical contact with the man she loves. And even there the intimacy

which she herself seeks is no greater than the contact of hands.

The advent of "amour-passion" must remain beyond the scope of the study of Lamiel. For although Lamiel's meeting with the worthy outlaw Valbayre had been outlined, in more than one uncertain version, and although Stendhal, in one plan, is convinced that "l'intérêt véritable arrivera avec l'amour," the lover does not materialize; the momentous encounter never occurs.

As for love as it is depicted in the novel itself, it is fair to say that Stendhal appears content to eschew the theme of romantic love when he intrudes as follows:

Le lecteur pense peut-être que Lamiel va prendre de l'amour pour l'aimable abbé Clément, mais le ciel lui avait donné une âme ferme, moqueuse et peu susceptible d'un sentiment tendre. (IV, our emphases.)

And, to be sure, Lamiel's various liaisons with men are hardly the kind one would qualify as tender and loving. She pays her first lover for his services; her second lover is something of a plaything that she uses and abuses; and in Paris she quickly tires of the vain voluptuary, Nerwinde. Lamiel samples lovers as one would a library of books--for knowledge, for "the liberating power to see and assess."⁶

Richard Bolster, drawing upon Stendhal's notes and plans, has confidently completed Lamiel for us, to better validate his own conviction that "Lamiel et les autres amazones de Stendhal devaient subir une sorte de défaite que leur inflige un homme fort."⁷ And yet, it is

⁶The words are Victor Brombert's, Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom, p. 177.

⁷Bolster, Stendhal, Balzac, p. 171.

difficult to imagine the carefree and indomitable Lamiel as an "esclave d'amour" reduced to worshipful, obedient servitude. Thus while it may be true that Stendhal intended to have Lamiel submit, without a murmur of protest, to the "énergie extraordinaire ... d'un Valbayre," as Bolster believes, the fact is that Stendhal's novel remains unfinished. Our belief, which is no less valid than Bolster's, is that Stendhal's personal stake in Lamiel was great and he simply could not see his way clear to the "making" of a submission that would overwhelm or dethrone her. Hence the bouleversement of love which would presumably illustrate--in Bolster's words--Stendhal's theme of "la défaite d'un certain type de femme énergique"⁸ does not take place.

As for the women who may have inspired Stendhal, critics have suggested women as far apart in time and as different as Mélanie and Giulia Rinieri. Attention also has been paid to eighteenth-century women of fiction. Here, once again, the diversity is impressive: Moll Flanders, Mme de Mertreuil, Sade's Juliette, Marivaux's Marianne.

It was Jean Prévost who uncovered a newspaper account dating from 1827 telling of one dona Concha who fell in love with her abductor--a bandit. This donnée, Prévost believed, inspired the incompleting portions of the novel. And Bardèche is quick to conclude emphatically that Stendhal always seeks his "repères dans la réalité."⁹ We, however, are unconvinced that dona Concha is the model for Lamiel.¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 175. Bolster discusses in some detail the submissions of Mathilde and Mme Grandet. But if Mathilde is a "type," her "energetic type" is hardly that of Mme Grandet, as we have shown elsewhere.

⁹Bardèche, Stendhal romancier, p. 455.

¹⁰The physical model was, according to Stendhal, a typical Norman girl. Whether or not he saw or imagined her is unclear, but he describes her in one of his notes and the description in the novel is much the same.

Closer to home is the contention that Lamiel is the woman that Stendhal had hoped his sister would be, or, as Bolster puts it, she is "une réalisation imaginaire des premiers vœux féministes [de Stendhal],"¹¹ vœux which appear in Stendhal's letters to Pauline. In essence this is what we were disposed to believe when we began to read Lamiel. The heroine has the kind of critical, analytical mind that Stendhal attempted to cultivate--if not create--in Pauline. Moreover Lamiel carefully observes and evaluates men and manners. And Stendhal had often asked Pauline to do the same.

But as we read further into the novel there appears a wide gulf between Pauline and Lamiel, that is, more pointedly, between what Stendhal thought Pauline should or should not do and the conduct of an unabashed Lamiel. Stendhal's youthful "feminism" sometimes seems equivocal. And he proves to be fairly conventional when he warns Pauline to avoid scandal, writing, "Mais songe qu'un éclat une fois fait, c'est pour toujours; tu ne peux plus trouver de mari."¹²

It is evident that Stendhal did not envision for Pauline the kind of destiny he improvises for Lamiel. Pauline is advised to marry, while Lamiel thinks nothing would be more tedious, boring, and utterly plat than a bon ménage bourgeois. This is but one of the ways Lamiel resembles Stendhal. In this line we cannot overlook the words of Jean Prévost, doubtless the first critic to suggest that our author lends himself not only to his heroes but to his heroines as well; he opines

¹¹Bolster, Stendhal, Balzac, p. 100. Bolster has undoubtedly been influenced by Prévost. See Essai sur les sources de "Lamiel," roman de Stendhal, Lyons, 1942, pp. 10-11.

¹²Letter of November 25-27, 1807. In another letter he admonishes her for her "imprudence" (apparently she has been going out dressed in pants). Letter of December 3, 1807. Correspondance I.

that Stendhal's dédoublement appears in both Lamiel and Sansfin. And yet, revealingly, he obviates examination of the relationship between the author and the heroine by telling us that she is the "incarnation féminine de Julien Sorel, et amazone de ses rêves de jeunesse," and that she is a character to whom Stendhal gives "toutes ses complaisances." Then Prévost proceeds to discuss Dr. Sansfin vis-à-vis Stendhal.¹³

Interestingly, and by comparison, André Maurois believes that Lamiel, whom he groups with Mathilde and Gina, is "la femme que Stendhal aurait été s'il avait été une femme."¹⁴ We would go one step beyond this assertion to propose that Lamiel is in many respects the youth that Stendhal had been. It is not only his complaisances that Stendhal lends to her. To begin, there is, in her, his very personal attachment to linden trees and landscape:

Ce chemin la conduisait aux tilleuls, dont elle voyait de loin la cime touffue s'élever par-dessus les maisons, et cette vue lui faisait battre le coeur. Je vais les voir de près, se disait-elle, ces arbres si beaux! Ces fameux tilleuls la faisaient pleurer le dimanche puis elle songeait à eux tout le reste de la semaine. (III)¹⁵

This is a much more specific and intense appreciation of nature than he has shown in other heroines. There is also a correlation between Lamiel's distaste for hypocrisy and Stendhal's abhorrence of it. The young Henri Beyle, or at least the Henri that Stendhal recalled in later years, had--he tells us-- une horreur pour la religion" and was, like his heroine, "témoin de bonne heure de la méchanceté et de l'hypocrisie de certaines gens."

¹³Prévost, La Création, pp. 375-76.

¹⁴André Maurois, Cinq visages de l'amour (New York: Didier, 1942), p. 106.

¹⁵In La Vie de Henri Brûlard Stendhal writes, "J'ai recherché avec une sensibilité exquise la vue des beaux paysages." II.

Like Lamiel again, he was held at bay, constrained by his father and aunt; he writes in La Vie de Henri Brûlard:

Mes tyrans me parlaient toujours avec les douces paroles de la plus tendre sollicitude, et leur plus ferme allié était la religion. J'avais à subir des homélies continuelles sur l'amour paternel et les devoirs des enfants. (IX)

The young boy who was honored "d'une attention continue" and who felt himself to be an "esclave" is not far removed from the young girl who is similarly smothered. Yet while Stendhal avows that he lacked "la gaîté et l'insouciance de l'enfance" Lamiel somehow manages to retain those qualities.

Intellectually, too, there is a close kinship. Stendhal speaks openly of "l'ardeur de savoir qui me brûlait alors," and it is precisely this "ardeur" which motivates his heroine. Then, too, he gives to her his own peculiar interest in newspaper articles about crime. But, pointedly, it is not the scabrous or violent that allures her; rather "elle était sensible à la fermeté d'âme déployée par certains scélérats." (V) And Lamiel, like Stendhal, admires the energy of the criminal. Similarly Stendhal's passion for the theater and for mathematics too find a resting place in his heroine. Math, in fact, is one of her favorite subjects. Furthermore, Stendhal's constant criticism of the novels of one Mme Genlis, "les romans les plus moraux," is echoed by Lamiel, who finds them hypocritical: "ils ne parlèrent point à son coeur, elle trouvait ridicules et sottes les choses de bon goût...." (VI)

Clearly Lamiel is a heroine who conforms closely to her creator. Somewhat boyish, to be sure, she is--by what she does, by the way she usurps the traditional male role, by her desire to command--a much more virile woman than Mathilde. And yet not one single character in the

novel finds her masculine. One cannot help but recall here Julien's final assessment of Mathilde. Still, it seems to us that Lamiel, despite her "charms" and "graces," if not because of them, is truly the most androgynous of Stendhalian women. There appears, toward the end, a revealing evaluation of Lamiel, uttered by an obscure character, Prévan, responding to a young man who is "ravi par les grâces de Lamiel" and who enthusiastically declares, "Elle est de si bonne compagnie!" The aged Baron of Prévan replies:

Elle est bien mieux que cela, ... c'est une fille d'esprit qui s'ennuie du ton de la bonne compagnie et vous donne bien mieux au risque d'être méprisée par vous. Avec son air doux et gai, elle est l'audace même; elle a le courage, plus humain que féminin, de braver votre mépris, et c'est pourquoi elle est inimitable. (XIII)

Apart from "audacious," the words that impress us here are "plus humain que féminin." True, Stendhal is referring to her courage. But in reality these words apply to the whole woman. Lamiel is Stendhal's animus. She is, of course, not a real nineteenth-century woman. Yet she is an exceedingly modern woman, a woman who, like all his heroines, seeks to know herself, yet who continues to be capable of becoming other than what she is.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Influenced by the statements which our author made in De l'Amour and elsewhere relative to "l'amour d'une rêverie, tendre, solitaire, timide," we undertook this study armed with the conviction that Stendhal's personal preferences in women were directed toward the tender, modest, shy, retiring heroines. Close examination of his novels, however, has led us to somewhat different conclusions.

It is evident that Stendhal's heroes passionately adore Les femmes douces. These women, generous and secretly passionate, are particularly conducive not only to the hero's cristallisation but also they stimulate the solitary, sentimental rêverie which Stendhal's heroes--and their author--enjoy. Worthy of amour-passion, such women promise compassion, an almost motherly concern for the hero's welfare, and calm felicity, not to mention fidelity. Often one senses that Stendhal recaptures in them the noblesse d'âme, the loving tenderness, and the understanding that he attributed to his aunt Elisabeth and his mother.

"Clearly Stendhal's sympathy for his heroines is greater the more closely they are confined," says Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex. And she may be right. It is, in any case, by his pleas for the reader's sympathy that he lends himself to his confined women, justifying their reticence, postulating their subterranean capacities, speculating about what they might do or become. Nevertheless, we have observed that Stendhal's modest, gentle women become more and more introverted and confined after the Rouge; more distant and more physically remote as well. And

their sphere of influence is limited, which is not the case for his extroverted women who roust about doing what they please, and who affect politics (surely in the case of la Sanseverina if not Mme Grandet).

Mme de Chasteller and Clélia Conti are religious women and emotionally profound. However, if their existence on the pages of the novel is impressive it is not because of their conversations, actions, or their philosophical outlooks. There is about their thoughts a sameness that may be traced back to Armance. Retiring and more reticent than Mme de Rênal or Armance, these later modest women are also hazier creatures whose inner conflicts do not affect us deeply. We are interested in them primarily because they overwhelm the hero, obsessing his waking hours, changing his thinking as well as his destiny. Hence they are important characters less in their own right than because they (unknowingly, unintentionally) dominate the very being--heart and soul--of the Stendhalian hero.

Stendhal explaining, sympathizing with Clélia or Mme de Chasteller, certainly wants us to feel for them in their anguish and despair. Nevertheless, we have come to believe that our author most closely identifies not with the women who are in the grip of modesty and unable to break away from plainly asinine fathers, but with the spontaneous, mentally alert, active women whom he paints so enthusiastically. It is to such heroines as Mathilde, Gina, and Lamiel that he lends his own admiration of energy and imprévu, his own tastes, his literary opinions, his keen love of nature, his distaste for boredom, and his preference for stimulating conversations. Also these are the women who are shown to be active and impetuous. And finally, it is through these heroines that the rest of society, men, manners, and mores are acutely attacked.

As for trends, we have observed that the first heroine of Stendhal's first novel is silent and immobile when she is introduced--without a word about her before that time---while in his last novel the heroine, though she has not much of a background, is at least mentioned before we catch sight of her. And when she does appear she is in motion, struggling to break away. We do not intend to over-emphasize the significance of these vastly different initial appearances except to say that they are indicative of changes in portrayal. From the Rouge on, the forceful heroines are first described or defined by another character in the novel rather than by Stendhal. The haughty Mathilde is seen through Julien's eyes; the very beautiful Mme Grandet is, according to Lucien's father, "éblouissante"; Gina, defined by Robert, is "vive et franche." Furthermore, the early words about the women to whom Stendhal is partial denote them as energetic beings. Gina is lively; Lamiel has "vivacity"; Mathilde's eyes sparkle with fire; Mme d'Hocquincourt is "pimpante," gay and witty.

On the other hand Stendhal tends to reveal the souls of his repressed heroines by means of their blushes, their facial expressions, and, most of all, by the regard. There is, we feel, much truth to Stendhal's belief that the eyes can betray a woman's innermost feelings and emotional reactions.

In Stendhal's later novels the tendency is to concentrate upon the heroine. Armance, we recall, was more about the hero than the heroine. In the Rouge both heroines are strongly delineated. In Leuwen it is a minor character, Mme d'Hocquincourt, who captures our imagination. Then in the Chartreuse Gina eclipses not only Clélia Conti but Fabrice as well--by virtue of the powerful impression she makes upon everyone in the novel and by what she says and does. The heroine of Stendhal's

last novel quite simply replaces the hero and is the only forceful, forward-moving character in the book. Thus it can be said that Stendhal's docile women recede evermore into the background while the women of premier mouvement and vitality are brought forward, becoming more interesting than the male figures. We would suggest that Stendhal was more comfortable depicting women who are mobile and unconventional. In the Chartreuse, and especially in Lamiel, the spirit of free energy is pushed to extremes. And Lamiel herself is exemplary of a thesis--which Stendhal does not propound but instead demonstrates--that, by force of will, women can become almost anything they desire. Stendhal's interest in the kinetic qualities of women, which can be discerned in at least one heroine in every novel, beginning with Mme d'Aumale in Armance, is undoubtedly at its height in Stendhal's final unfinished novel. There woman becomes an untamable force mobile, moving with strength and vitality for the sheer pleasure of tasting freedom.

Stendhal's physical portrayals are impressionistic. Similarly, his heroine's life story is without substance. While it is true that in the beginning we know next to nothing about these women, Stendhal would thereby stimulate our curiosity, making us eager to discover what they are like, what they will become. Furthermore, notwithstanding his own definitions--"c'était une âme simple et naïve," "c'était une âme noble," or "une âme sèche"--his heroines are not predetermined characters. The reader is probably certain that they will fall in love with the amiable hero but we do not know how they will deal with that unexpected (for them) passion. Nor do they themselves know what will happen--despite their firm resolutions which make the unexpected all the more enjoyable for the reader.

The outcome of these love affairs cannot be predicted, and although we know that love (almost) always overwhelms Stendhal's heroines (Lamiel being the exception to that rule), we cannot know what it will cause them to do. They change less because of a preconceived plan on Stendhal's part ("Faire le plan me glace") than by what strikes him from moment to moment as he writes. Is it not notable that even when Stendhal intends a heroine to be symbolic--of amour-passion, or amour-vanité--she becomes more interesting than the idea she was meant to illustrate? A marvelous quality of uncertainty envelopes his heroines. Even when the author reveals to us their hidden natures and stresses the qualities he would have us appreciate in them, they are not defined once and for all. They can and do change, retaining--all of them--not only a capacity for le bonheur but also a certain willingness to alter their ways.

Let us, in closing, insist upon a crucial aspect of exploring Stendhal's portrayals of women: the reader's active participation in the process of creation. It is the reader who must reconstruct the heroine, deciding which opinions about her are to be trusted, which to be discounted, judging her as she performs, examining her thoughts to see what they reveal about her character, and determining just what it is that Stendhal is trying to convey. For when Stendhal asks directly for our understanding there is usually no problem. But when he hides behind irony or sarcasm, when he presents qualities in negative phraseology, or by contrast or implication, we are forced to uncover the hidden meaning behind his words. He does not guide us.

Stendhal's heroines cannot be reduced to a few key words or phrases. Seen from the outside and through various, sometimes varying angles of vision and viewed, too, from within, they become often com-

plex, occasionally contradictory, but, almost always, memorable and vivid individuals. Their physical person remains sketchy in all his novels. Yet these women impress their witnesses so profoundly that the reader feels the impact of their being. Intimate thoughts, movements, gestures, and conversations also help to make them substantial characters. Add to these elements of portrayal the author's intrusions on their behalf, his explanations, his definitive statements as well as his remarks about their untested (and sometimes unproven) qualities, qualities that they themselves do not always recognize, and we have before us roundly portrayed characters. These women are often adored or worshipped from afar. Yet they are subjects in their own right, evolving before our eyes. Whether they aspire to greatness or prefer to be alone, they love, they learn, they suffer. And we are privileged to share their inner conflicts. That Stendhal's women have distinct identities and lives of their own is a measure of their modernity and of the appeal that they continue to have for us today.

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* Our bibliography is limited to the works used in this study. For a comprehensive bibliography on Stendhal the reader may refer to V. del Litto.

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