



外国文学经典

The Red
and the Black



红与黑

Stendhal (法) 著

Catherine Slater (英) 译

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

—— 外国文学经典 ——
Stendhal (法) 著 *Catherine Slater* (英) 译

THE RED AND THE BLACK

红 与 黑



外语教学与研究出版社
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS
北京 BEIJING

THE RED AND THE BLACK

STENDHAL (Henri Beyle) was born on 23 January 1783 in Grenoble, where his father was a lawyer and his maternal grandfather a doctor. He lost his mother at the age of 7. After distinguishing himself in mathematics at the Ecole Centrale in Grenoble, he moved to Paris in 1799 intending to study for admission to the Ecole Polytechnique, but preferred to make his début in the world of art and literature. He was employed at the Ministry of War, and took part in the Napoleonic campaigns in Italy, Germany, Austria, and Russia from 1800 to 1814. At the fall of the Empire he settled in Milan, where he began to write on painting and music. Returning to Paris in 1821, he lived as a dandy in high society, publishing a treatise on love in 1822, his first novel *Armance* in 1827, followed by *Le Rouge et le Noir* in 1830.

The last phase of his career was spent as a diplomat in Italy, with postings as Consul in Trieste and then Civitavecchia. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1835. The *Chartreuse de Parme*, a novel of military and romantic adventure set in Italy, appeared in 1839. Stendhal died of a stroke in 1842 during a period of leave in Paris. His remaining fictional and autobiographical works were published posthumously. His literary achievement went largely unrecognized during his lifetime, and it was left to later generations to appreciate his penetrating psychological and social insights and his ironical humour.

CATHERINE SLATER was Fellow and Tutor in French Language and Linguistics at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford from 1971 to 1987, and is now an Honorary Research Fellow. She works in Bristol at Hewlett-Packard's European research laboratories.

ROGER PEARSON is a Fellow and Praelector in French at The Queen's College, Oxford, and the author of *Stendhal's Violin: a Novelist and his Reader* (Clarendon Press, 1988).

INTRODUCTION

THE RED AND THE BLACK is a shocking novel. One of the principal shocks which it administers comes in Book II, Chapter 35, and the reader who is not already privy to the nature of this shock would be well advised to treat this introduction as a postface. For, as Stendhal himself wrote: 'the essential thing about a novel must be that the reader who begins it one evening should stay up all night to finish it: to reveal a novel's plot in advance would therefore be tantamount to robbing him of the greater part of his interest in it.'

To reveal it in the case of *The Red and the Black* would be robbery indeed. One of the principal themes of the novel concerns the value of unpredictability in an age of the only too predictable, and one of its intended delights for the Happy Few¹ to whom it is dedicated is precisely the liberating effect of surprise upon the imagination. 'The novel is like a bow,' wrote Stendhal, 'the body of the violin *which gives back the sounds* is the reader's soul.' *The Red and the Black's* status as a World's Classic depends substantially on the moral and aesthetic worth of its shockingness, and a reader coming to this novel for the first time will need to have undergone some state of shock before he or she can consult the sounds given back by their soul, the better then to decide whether its classic status is justified.

When *The Red and the Black* was first published on 13 November 1830, it was a novel ahead of its time. In a curious way this was literally so since its title-page bore the date 1831 and a reconstruction of the historical time-scale within the novel suggests that the events of the last

1 On 'the Happy Few', see note on p. 727.

few chapters take place also in 1831. But it was ahead of its time principally because it was uncomfortably topical, and topicality is the aspect of the novel which Stendhal stressed when he tried to have his own review of it published anonymously in a Florentine literary review two years later. 'The author', he writes, 'dared recount an adventure which took place in 1830.' Even more daringly the author pulled no punches in his depiction of contemporary society, and this 'Chronicle of 1830' presents a comprehensive and damning account of France at the time. Stendhal spent much of his life in Italy, but between 21 November 1821 and 6 November 1830 he had lived in Paris. His chronicle is based on first-hand experience and the information of well-placed friends.

The reader meets a wide variety of social representatives ranging from the inmates of Valenod's workhouse to the king himself, and while each level of society appears superficially different, hypocrisy, deviousness and callous self-interest are omnipresent. This is part of 'the truth, the truth in all its harshness' proclaimed by the first epigraph in the novel. Julien Sorel's mercenary father with his peasant cunning, the seminarists who wish for a quiet life and a full stomach, the counter-revolutionary aristocrats plotting the invasion of their own country, Rênal and Valenod swapping political parties for their opportunistic convenience, these are the paltry players in the sordid drama of post-Napoleonic France. Chélan, Pirard and Chas-Bernard provide honourable exceptions for the Church and, among the vapid youth of Restoration Paris, Croisenois at least is man enough to die defending Mathilde's reputation, but generally the picture is bleak. Add to this the industrialization of Verrières and the

environmental nonchalance of its mayor, the increasing power of the new money and its tasteless attempts to imitate the old, the propagandistic purpose and architectural inadequacy of the restoration of the abbey at Brayle-Haut, the feud between the Jansenists and the Jesuits, and the all-pervasive influence of the Jesuits' secret society, the Congregation, and the sheer scope of Stendhal's indictment becomes readily apparent.

One important element seems, however, to be missing: the July Revolution of 1830. Where are those three 'Glorious Days' which saw the overthrow of the reactionary Bourbon king Charles X, his replacement by the supposedly more liberal Orleanist Louis-Philippe and the advent of the so-called Bourgeois Monarchy? Nowhere, except for an ironically understated and dismissive reference in the fictional Publisher's Note with which the novel begins. And why are there two sub-titles: 'A Chronicle of the Nineteenth Century' and 'A Chronicle of 1830'? Are they perhaps satirically synonymous? Even this momentous year has changed nothing: regimes may come and go, but cant and conventionality still rule.

The marked topicality of *The Red and the Black* may not always strike a modern reader, of course, but if one substitutes the politics and personalities of one's own day and thinks what one's reaction might be then, it becomes evident that Stendhal was playing with fire. He was also breaking new ground. As Erich Auerbach has stated in his celebrated study *Mimesis*: 'in so far as the serious realism of modern times cannot represent man otherwise than as embedded in a total reality, political, social and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving—as is the case today [1946] in any novel or film — Stendhal is its founder.'

No wonder the author of *The Red and the Black* thought that his literary merits would not be recognized for another fifty years. The contemporary reader might, like Balzac, have seen the pertinence of Stendhal's 'chronicle', but he may well have been too caught up personally in the issues presented to be able to view them within the larger and less timebound context to which the novel also offers imaginative access.

Be that as it may, the contemporary reader would almost certainly have been disconcerted, not to say scandalized, by the main story which the novel has to tell—namely, how a carpenter's son attempts to murder his ex-mistress, the mayor's wife, during Mass. That was simply not what novelists should be writing about, and anyway, of course, the whole thing was quite implausible. Here, however, the laugh would have been on the reader since the story is based on, and the novel originally inspired by, two court cases which Stendhal read about in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. This publication, which appeared every week-day and contained full and largely reliable accounts of court proceedings, provided Stendhal with some of his favourite reading matter. He found it 'very entertaining' and to be both incontrovertible testimony to the power of human passion, which the decorum of polite society but thinly concealed and contained, and an invaluable source of information about the everyday lives of ordinary French men and women.

The two cases which caught the novelist's attention concerned Antoine Berthet and Adrien Lafargue, two murderers who met with remarkably different fates. Berthet was a short, thin man with a pale complexion, the son of a blacksmith in Brangues. He had spent four years in a seminary in Grenoble training to be a priest

when, at the age of 21, ill health forced him to leave; and his protector, the village priest, secured him a post as tutor to one of the children of M. and M^{me} Michoud, a well-to-do couple who lived in Brangues. Whether M^{me} Michoud became his mistress remains uncertain, but some aspect of their relationship led to Berthet's dismissal after a year. After two years in another seminary, Berthet returned to Brangues in 1825 and began to write to M^{me} Michoud accusing her of having got him the sack and of being the mistress of his successor as tutor. There followed a series of reverses: expulsion from another seminary in Grenoble after one month, dismissal—again after one year—from a post as tutor to the de Cordon family, possibly because he seduced M^{lle} de Cordon and possibly after M. de Cordon had received a letter from M^{me} Michoud. Although M. Michoud was trying behind the scenes to help Berthet and actually got him a job working for a notary, Berthet became increasingly bitter and blamed his repeated failure to be accepted by a seminary (and the consequent frustration of his ambition to become a priest) on M^{me} Michoud, whom he now repeatedly threatened to murder. On Sunday 22 July 1827, during Mass in the church at Brangues, Antonie Berthet shot M^{me} Michoud twice and then himself. Both survived. Berthet was subsequently found guilty of attempted murder 'with all aggravating circumstances' and sentenced to death. He was executed on 23 February 1828.

Adrien Lafargue was treated rather more leniently than Berthet. A cabinet-maker by trade, he was a good-looking, well-spoken young man of 25 whose work had brought him temporarily to the town of Bagnères-de-Bigorre in the Pyrenees. At his lodgings the daughter of the house,

called Thérèse, was a married woman who claimed to have been left by her husband. She took to Lafargue, and they became lovers. Though he had a fiancée in Bayonne, Lafargue became sincerely attached to Thérèse and was therefore all the more put out one morning to find her in bed with a painter. Accepting her story that this was a former lover whose sentimental appeal to their shared past had vanquished her scruples, Lafargue forgave her. On his uncle's advice he then moved out of the lodgings, but continued to see Thérèse. She, however, tired of him, particularly when he refused to lend her some money, and soon she had the police forbid him to see her or to enter her house. Embittered by what he saw as an abuse of his sincerity and tolerance and bent on ridding the world of 'a nasty piece of work', Lafargue resolved to shoot her. On 21 January 1829 he went to her in her room. He fired once and missed, fired a second time and killed her. Fearing she was not dead, he then slit her throat. After this, as he had intended, he shot himself, but there was only powder in the pistol and he survived. He was found guilty of voluntary but unpremeditated manslaughter under grave duress, and sentenced to a mere five years' imprisonment.

The Berthet case provided Stendhal with the main shape of his plot together with many incidental details, while the Lafargue case led him to speculate that energy and strength of purpose of the kind once evinced by Napoleon were now to be found only amongst the working classes, and that the great men of the future would come not from the etiolated ranks of the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie but from those whose characters were still forged on the anvil of an unsheltered existence. Such is part of the message of *The Red and the Black*, and indeed of Julien

Sorel's speech at his trial. Energy, sincerity, imagination and a certain nobility of soul: these are the qualities so lacking in the world of Verrières and Paris, yet these are the qualities which are absolutely necessary to the pursuit of happiness.

Plainly Julien Sorel has these qualities himself, and Stendhal's unflinching exposé of what, in his proposed review, he called 'a land of affectation and pretension' is illuminated by the central presence of this young and energetic hero. Julien sets out to conquer the society of his time by playing it at its own game of hypocrisy while yet remaining free from moral taint by virtue of his own lucidity. Just when it seems that he may have lost this lucidity, he rejects the false image of himself contained within M^{me} de Rênal's letter to the Marquis de la Mole and in an act of murderous passion recovers his real self. The violence of the deed stands as testimony to its integrity, and the aftermath—the willing acceptance of responsibility, the discovery of happiness, the poetic remembrance of things past—points to a form of authenticity that is the quarry of every Stendhalian hero.

More than one hundred and fifty years after *The Red and the Black* first appeared this has now become the orthodox way to read the novel, but in 1830 it would not have been an easy lesson for the reader to assimilate. Consequently he might well have been left cold by the numerous comic aspects which enliven the narrative (such as Julien's trouserless departure at the end of Book I or the various shenanigans with ladders), and which combine with its more tragic moments to provoke that blend of laughter and tears which Stendhal so treasured as an effect of the *opera buffa* of Mozart and Cimarosa. Equally the narrator's delicious sense of irony may have struck the reader as

simply irritating. For *The Red and the Black* to work, he or she has got to have some sympathy for its central character, and if a sense of moral outrage takes over, then the scandalized reader is suffering from that emotion which Stendhal repeatedly stated that he least wanted to stir: 'impotent hatred'.

Such a reader may also have been put off by another shocking aspect of the novel: its style. *The Red and the Black* may not describe the July Revolution, but it was itself a revolution. The bastions of supposed good taste and novelistic propriety are stormed with resolve. Not for Stendhal the sonorous periods of Chateaubriand and the rhetorical grand gestures of Victor Hugo. Not for him either the navel-regarding intricacies of confessional novels like Chateaubriand's *René* and their anguished portraits of pathological passivity. He had already poked fun at these in his first novel *Armance* (1827). Instead he aimed now at a narrative which would have something of the energy and directness of its lowborn protagonist. While he later felt that he might have gone too far and that his prose in *The Red and the Black* had been too angular and staccato in effect, he need not have feared, because he succeeded in producing a narrative whose lean and vigorous tone and constant forward impetus not only suggest the non-sense approach of the young man in a hurry but have also prevented the novel from dating. We may no longer have an immediate sense of the boldness of the novel's topicality, but we cannot fail to be aware of its principal stylistic hallmark: its presentness.

This presentness is apparent from the very first page of the novel. You are there walking up the main street of Verrières, you can see M. de Rênal, you can hear the dreadful din of his nail factory. The first chapter and a

half of the novel are in the present tense, but even after the narrative has moved through a series of subtly modulated changes of temporal gear into the conventional mode of a story-in-the-past, the sense of presentness remains and is constantly reinforced throughout the novel. The present tense dominates *The Red and the Black*. It is the tense of the narrator and his ubiquitous interpolations, be they geographical (about Verrières, Paris, or even the Rhine), sociological (about the behaviour patterns of provincials or Parisians or about how seminarists eat a boiled egg), sententious (life is like this, or that) or simply chatty (by the way, I forgot to tell you, I must confess that...). It is the tense also of the putative reader to whom reference is periodically made in the course of the novel (you think Julien is being silly, you don't like these reception rooms), and it is the tense of the characters themselves—in their dialogue, their interior monologues, and their letters.

The sense of urgent actuality which is so characteristic of *The Red and the Black*—and which makes it such a good read—is created in further ways. There is almost no anticipation of subsequent events in the novel, so that the narrator comes over not as someone already in the know but as one who is as eager as we are to get on with things. The future, it seems, is as unpredictable for him as for us. By the same token he takes care not to delay us with flashbacks. There are a number at the beginning, inevitably, when he has to fill us in on some of the background, but mostly the narrative obeys the rules of the chronicle, which by definition is 'a detailed and continuous register of events in order of time' (*OED*). On five occasions, however, it is almost as if the narrator has been overtaken by events, and we find him being obliged

to interrupt the onward surge of the narrative to go back and supply supplementary detail. These five occasions are five key moments in the plot: Julien's first visit to M^{me} de Rênal's bedroom, Mathilde's declaration of love to Julien by letter, the shooting of M^{me} de Rênal, the day of the trial, and the execution of Julien. In each case the shock value of a major turning-point is preserved by postponing narration of the preliminary events which immediately lead up to it.

Throughout the novel we are continually being surprised and kept on our toes in this way. The pace of the narrative is extraordinarily rapid, in places quite implausibly—and entertainingly—so, and the viewpoint from which the events are recounted varies constantly. One minute we are immersed in Julien's thoughts, the next he has already written the letter he was thinking of and we are learning of the recipient's reaction. Sometimes such a switch will occur within a single sentence, and there may be several within the shortest of paragraphs. By the sheer speed and unpredictability of its unfolding *The Red and the Black* creates that very excitement and imaginative zestfulness which it finds so deplorably absent from the world it describes.

The reader may meet with other surprises. One of the main lessons of the novel would seem to be that it is dangerous to preconceive the future. As Julien reflects in prison upon his past life, he realizes that he was distracted from the happiness and fulfilment he could have found with M^{me} de Rênal by his overriding ambition to seek fame and fortune. Because his head was filled with all sorts of fantasies, many of them derived from what he had heard and read about Napoleon, he was less able to appreciate the value of what reality was offering him. As

if to reinforce this lesson Stendhal plays on his reader's expectations within the novel in such a way as to lead him or her into similar error. Repeatedly we are inveigled into speculating about Julien's future, both by what some of the characters predict for him and by the parallels which immediately suggest themselves between his life and that of various historical and literary figures.

Thus the various references to Julien's desire to seek fame and fortune, together with the recurring possibility that he is a foundling, put one in mind—and would most certainly have put a reader of 1830 in mind—of the typical eighteenth-century novel plot which is so playfully exemplified in one of Stendhal's favourite novels, Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Is *The Red and the Black* to be another novel about the parvenu, we may wonder. Or are we reading the biography of another Napoleon, the man whom Julien so much admires? Or of another Richelieu? Or perhaps of a revolutionary hero in the mould of Danton, or Robespierre, or Mirabeau? Just before Julien shoots M^{me} de Rênal, it seems that many of these predictions may have been correct. The parvenu has arrived: money and title, an officer's rank and the most brilliant match in Paris, all are his. 'When you come to think about it,' he reflects, 'my story's ended, and all the credit goes to me alone.'

But then comes the letter from M^{me} de Rênal, written at the dictation of her confessor and describing him as another Tartuffe. This portrait is so at variance with the person he believes himself to be that he goes off to destroy the supposed purveyor of this distorted image by doing the last thing one would expect a mercenary and falsely pious hypocrite to do. While he then spends the remainder of the novel trying to sort out who he really is

(‘to see clearly into the depths of his soul’), we also have to answer the same questions: who is Julien? what does he stand for? We see that there is no substance in the idea that he is a foundling, we remember that he has been thoroughly uninterested in money all along, we note that, unlike Napoleon, he owes his commission to patronage not prowess and that he resembles him only in so far as he resembles Mathilde’s father imitating him at parties, and we recognize that, while Julien may have a chip on his shoulder, he is no political radical and has none of the idealism of a Danton. Even his speech at the trial, we are carefully informed, is an act of bravado brought on by the insolent look in the eyes of the gloating Valenod. Nor is he indeed Tartuffe. His ambition to ‘make his fortune’ is a nebulous boyish dream of somehow bettering himself, in all senses, not the project of a would-be property tycoon.

The shooting of M^{me} de Rênal explodes our preconceptions of the end of the novel just as surely as it does Julien’s, and it is for this reason that foreknowledge of it may falsify a first reading of *The Red and the Black*. Subsequent readings, on the other hand, may bring one no nearer to understanding it! Critical opinion about this crucial turn of events has varied widely in respect both of its significance and of its aesthetic merits. The notorious view expressed by Emile Faguet at the end of the last century was that the shooting was implausible and provided irrefutable evidence of novelistic amateurishness. Quite definitely not one of the Happy Few, Faguet argued that a clever schemer like Julien would be mad to throw it all away because of a bad reference from M^{me} de Rênal. What’s more, the Marquis de la Mole still had a pregnant daughter to marry off and the daughter in question had

pretty firm views as to whom she wanted for a husband. Since Faguet, a number of people have tried to defend Stendhal by saying that Julien is indeed mad, that is, that he acts in a kind of somnambulistic trance and is therefore not entirely responsible for his actions. While there is some evidence in the text for Julien being in something of a state, it is insufficient to sustain such a thesis. More persuasive are those who have argued in terms of an act of vengeance and who have noted that, because M^{me} de Rênal is a woman, Julien is denied the opportunity of clearing his name by challenging the offender to a duel. Most persuasive of all, perhaps, is the view that the very inexplicability of the act makes it true to life. It is a crime of passion and, as such, not reducible to the tidy comprehensibility of the rational. By the same token, on the level of novelistic technique, it constitutes an act of defiance, a refusal to tell the story as if it were like many other similar stories, an assertion that the central event of this novel is unique: just as its main character is not like other heroes of history and literature but is, as he is so often described in the book, someone quite out of the ordinary.

But what lessons can we draw from the experiences of this man who shoots the woman he loves? That we should not preconceive our lives, that we should live for the moment and be ready to pounce on those fleeting moments of happiness which life occasionally offers? That love, and love alone, holds the key? Yes, partly, but the rich and subtle ironies, indeed the comedy and the pathos, of *The Red and the Black* derive substantially from the ambiguity surrounding these questions. True, at the end of the novel it does seem as if imagination, that error which 'bears the mark of a superior man' as the narrator calls it, is to

be mistrusted. Imagined futures have led both Julien and the reader astray, and Mathilde's desperate determination to relive the violent romance of her sixteenth-century ancestors begins to look increasingly suspect and sterile. She alone is not surprised by the shooting, for it corresponds to so many of her fantasies, yet these bear little relation now to the increasingly authentic nature of Julien's experience. Like him we too may be 'tired of heroism'. But earlier in the novel Mathilde's energy and imagination seemed commendable, as did her disdainful rejection of easy mediocrity. Were we wrong to commend her? No, just as we may not be right to see Julien discovering any universally applicable recipe for happiness at the end of the novel.

For why in fact did Julien pass up the happiness on offer at Vergy? Because he might have been bored. He himself reflects on this question:

Could happiness be so near at hand?... A life like this doesn't involve much by way of expenditure; I can choose whether to marry M^{lle} Elisa [M^{me} de Rênal's maid] or become Fouqué's partner... But a traveller who has just climbed a steep mountain sits down at the summit and finds perfect pleasure in resting. Would he be happy if forced to rest for ever?

For all that Vergy epitomizes some cherished Stendhalian values and for all that Julien's pursuit of happiness could well have ended there, imagination says no. Energy, curiosity and exploration are as important as the trusting repose of reciprocated love. It may even be better to travel than to arrive. The pursuit may matter more than the happiness.

However perfect the view from the mountain-top, there are other peaks to climb, and Julien's wise analogy points