

# The Charterhouse of Parma

STENDHAL

PREFACED BY BALZAC'S STUDY OF STENDHAL  
AND HIS ANALYSIS OF  
'THE CHARTERHOUSE OF PARMA'

*Translated by*

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THE NEW PHOENIX

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## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

By HONORE DE BALZAC

IN our day, literature quite evidently presents three aspects; and, so far from being a symptom of decadence, this triplicity, to use an expression coined by M. Cousin in his dislike of the word *trinity*, seems to me a natural enough effect of the abundance of literary talent: it is a tribute to the nineteenth century, which does not offer one sole and invariable form, like the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which were more or less obedient to the tyranny of a man or of a system.

These three forms, aspects or systems, by whichever name you choose to call them, exist in nature and correspond to general sympathies which were bound to declare themselves at a time when literature has seen, through the spread of knowledge, the number of its appreciators increase and the practice of reading advance with unparalleled progress.

In all generations and among all peoples there are minds that are elegiac, meditative, contemplative, minds that attach themselves more especially to the great imagery, the vast spectacles of nature, and transpose these into themselves. Hence a whole school to which I should give the name: the *Literature of Imagery*, to which belong lyrical writing, the epic and everything that springs from that way of looking at things.

There are, on the other hand, other active souls who like rapidity, movement, conciseness, sudden shocks, ac-

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

tion, drama, who avoid discussion, who have little fondness for meditation, and take pleasure in results. From these, another whole system from which springs what I should call, in contrast to the former system, the *Literature of Ideas*.

Finally, certain complete beings, certain *bifrontal* intelligences embrace everything, choose both lyricism and action, drama and ode, in the belief that perfection requires a view of things as a whole. This school, which may be called *Literary Eclecticism*, demands a representation of the world as it is: imagery and ideas, the idea in the image or the image in the idea, movement and meditation. Walter Scott has entirely satisfied these eclectic natures.

Which party predominates, I do not know. I should not like anyone to infer from this natural distinction forced consequences. Thus, I do not mean to say that such and such a poet of the school of imagery is devoid of ideas, or that some other poet of the school of ideas cannot invent fine images. These three formulas apply only to the general impression left by the poets' work, to the mould into which the writer casts his thought, to the natural tendency of his mind. Every image corresponds to an idea, or, more precisely, to a *sentiment* which is a collection of ideas, and the idea does not always end in an image. The idea demands an effort in its development which does not come readily to every mind. Also the image is essentially popular, it is readily understood. Suppose that M. Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* were to appear simultaneously with *Manon Lescaut*, *Notre-Dame* would seize hold of the masses far more promptly than *Manon*, and would seem to have outrivalled it in the eyes of those who kneel before the *Vox populi*.

And yet, whatever be the kind from which a work proceeds, it will dwell in the human memory only by obeying

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

the laws of the ideal and those of form. In literature, imagery and idea correspond nearly enough to what in painting we call design and colour. Rubens and Raphael are two great painters; but he would be strangely mistaken who thought that Raphael was not a colourist; and those who would refuse to Rubens the title of draughtsman may go and kneel before the painting with which the illustrious Fleming has adorned the Church of the Jesuits at Genoa, as an act of homage to design.

M. Beyle, better known by the pseudonym Stendhal, is, in my opinion, one of the most eminent masters of the *Literature of Ideas*, a school to which belong MM. Alfred de Musset, Mérimée, Léon Gozlan, Béranger, Delavigne, Gustave Planche, Madame de Girardin, Alphonse Karr and Charles Nodier. Henry Monnier belongs to it by the truth of his proverbs, which are often lacking in a root-idea, but which are nevertheless full of that naturalness and that accurate observation which are characteristic of the school.

This school, to which we already owe much fine work, recommends itself by its abundance of facts, by the sobriety of its imagery, by conciseness, by clarity, by the *petite phrase* of Voltaire, by a way of relating a story which the eighteenth century possessed, and, above all, by a sense of comedy. M. Beyle and M. Mérimée, despite their profound seriousness, have something ironical and sly in the manner in which they state their facts. With them the comedy is kept in reserve. It is the spark in the flint.

M. Victor Hugo's is undoubtedly the most eminent talent in the *Literature of Imagery*. M. Lamartine belongs to this school, which M. de Chateaubriand held over the baptismal font, and the philosophy of which was created by M. Ballanche. *Obermann* is another. MM. Auguste Barbier, Théophile Gautier, Sainte-Beuve are others, as are

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

a number of feeble imitators. In some of the authors whom I have just named, the sentiment prevails sometimes over the image, as in M. de Sénancour and M. Sainte-Beuve. By his poetry rather than by his prose, M. de Vigny is seen to belong to this great school. All these poets have little sense of comedy, they know nothing of dialogue, with the exception of M. Gautier, who has a keen sense of it. M. Hugo's dialogue is too much his own speech, he does not transform himself sufficiently, he puts himself into his character, instead of becoming that character. But this school has, like the other, produced some fine work. It is remarkable for the poetic fulness of its language, for the wealth of its imagery, for the closeness of its union with nature; the other school is human, and this one divine in the sense that it tends to raise itself by *feeling* towards the very heart of creation. It prefers nature to man. The French language is indebted to it for a strong dose of poetry which was necessary, for it has developed the poetic feeling long resisted by the *positivism*—pardon the word—of our language, and the dryness stamped on it by the writers of the eighteenth century. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre were the instigators of this revolution, which I regard as fortunate.

The secret of the struggle between the Classics and the Romantics lies entirely in this quite natural disparity of minds. For two centuries past, the *Literature of Ideas* has held exclusive sway, and so the heirs of the eighteenth century naturally mistook the only system of literature that they knew for the whole of literature. Let us not blame them, these defenders of the classic! The Literature of Ideas, full of facts, closely knit, is part of the genius of France. The *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard*, *Candide*, the *Dialogue de Sylla et d'Eucrate*, the *Considérations sur les causes de la Grandeur et de la Déca-*

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

*dence des Romains*, the *Provinciales*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Gil Blas*, are more in the French spirit than the works of the Literature of Imagery. But we owe to this latter the poetry of which the two previous centuries had not even a suspicion, if we set aside La Fontaine, André Chénier and Racine. The Literature of Imagery is in its cradle, and already includes a number of men whose genius is incontestable; but, when I see how many the other school includes, I believe it to be at the height rather than in the decline of its dominance over our beautiful tongue. The struggle ended, one may say that the Romantics have not invented new methods, that in the theatre, for instance, those who complain of want of action have made ample use of the *tirade* and the soliloquy, and that we have not, so far, either heard the keen and compact dialogue of Beaumarchais, nor seen again the comedy of Molière, which will always be based upon reason and ideas. Comedy is the enemy of meditation and imagery. M. Hugo has gained enormously in this contest. But men of wide reading remember the war waged on M. de Chateaubriand, during the Empire; it was fully as savage, and ended sooner because M. de Chateaubriand stood alone, without the *stipante caterva* of M. Hugo, without the antagonism of the press, without the support furnished to the Romantics by the men of genius of England and Germany, better known and better appreciated.

As for the third school, which partakes of each of the other two, it has less chance than they of exciting the masses, who have little taste for the *mezzo termine*, for composite things, and see in eclecticism an arrangement that runs counter to their passions in so far as it calms them. France likes to find war in everything. In time of peace, she is still fighting. Nevertheless, Walter Scott, Madame de Staël, Cooper, George Sand seem to me to

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

have distinct genius. As for myself, I take my stand under the banner of literary eclecticism for the following reason: I do not believe the portrayal of modern society to be possible by the severe method of the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The introduction of the dramatic element, of the image, the picture, of description, of dialogue, seems to me indispensable in modern literature. Let us confess frankly that *Gil Blas* is wearisome as form: in the piling up of events and ideas there is something sterile. The idea, personified in a character, shews a finer intelligence. Plato cast his psychological ethics in the form of dialogue.

*La Chartreuse de Parme* is of our period and, up to the present, to my mind, is the masterpiece of the Literature of Ideas, while M. Beyle has made concessions in it to the two other schools, which are admissible by fair minds and satisfactory to both camps.

If I have so long delayed, in spite of its importance, in speaking of this book, you must understand that it was difficult for me to acquire a sort of impartiality. Even now I am not certain that I can retain it, so extraordinary, after a third, leisurely and thoughtful reading, do I find this work.

I can imagine all the mockery which my admiration for it will provoke. There will be an outcry, of course, at my infatuation, when I am simply still filled with enthusiasm after the point at which enthusiasm should have died. Men of imagination, it will be said, conceive as promptly as they forget their affection for certain works of which the common herd arrogantly and ironically protest that they can understand nothing. Simple-minded, or even intelligent persons who with their proud gaze sweep the surface of things, will say that I amuse myself with paradox, that I have, like M. Sainte-Beuve, my *chers*

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

*inconnus*. I am incapable of compromise with the truth, that is all.

M. Beyle has written a book in which sublimity glows from chapter after chapter. He has produced, at an age when men rarely find monumental subjects and after having written a score of extremely intelligent volumes, a work which can be appreciated only by minds and men that are truly superior. In short, he has written *The Prince up to date*, the novel that Machiavelli would write if he were living banished from Italy in the nineteenth century.

And so the chief obstacle to the renown which M. Beyle deserves lies in the fact that *La Chartreuse de Parme* can find readers fitted to enjoy it only among diplomats, ministers, observers, the leaders of society, the most distinguished artists; in a word, among the twelve or fifteen hundred persons who are at the head of things in Europe. Do not be surprised, therefore, if, in the ten months since this surprising work was published, there has not been a single journalist who has either read, or understood, or studied it, who has announced, analysed and praised it, who has even alluded to it. I, who, I think, have some understanding of the matter, I have read it for the third time in the last few days: I have found the book finer even than before, and have felt in my heart the kind of happiness that comes from the opportunity of doing a good action.

Is it not doing a good action to try to do justice to a man of immense talent, who will appear to have genius only in the eyes of a few privileged beings and whom the transcendency of his ideas deprives of that immediate but fleeting popularity which the courtiers of the public seek and which great souls despise? If the mediocre knew that they had a chance of raising themselves to the level of the sublime by understanding them, *La Chartreuse de*



## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

*Parme* would have as many readers as *Clarissa Harlowe* had on its first appearance.

There are in admiration that is made legitimate by conscience ineffable delights. Therefore all that I am going to say here I address to the pure and noble hearts which, in spite of certain pessimistic declamations, exist in every country, like undiscovered pleiads, among the families of minds devoted to the worship of art. Has not humanity, from generation to generation, has it not here below its constellations of souls, its heaven, its angels, to use the favourite expression of the great Swedish prophet, Swedenborg, a chosen people for whom true artists work and whose judgments make them ready to accept privation, the insolence of upstarts and the indifference of governments?

You will pardon me, I hope, what malevolent persons will call *longueurs*. In the first place, I am firmly convinced, the analysis of so curious and so interesting a work as this will give more pleasure to the most fastidious reader than he would derive from the unpublished novel whose place it fills. Besides, any other critic would require at least three articles of the length of this, if he sought to give an adequate explanation of this novel, which often contains a whole book in a single page, and which cannot be explained save by a man to whom the North of Italy is fairly familiar. Finally, let me assure you that, with the help of M. Beyle, I am going to try to make myself instructive enough to be read with pleasure to the end.

A sister of the Marchese del Dongo, named Gina, the abbreviation of Angelina, whose early character, as a young girl, would have a certain similarity, could an Italian woman ever resemble a Frenchwoman, to the character of Madame de Lignolle in *Faublas*, marries at Milan, against the will of her brother, who wishes to marry

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

her to an old man, noble, rich and Milanese, a certain Conte Pietranera, poor and without a penny.

The Conte and Contessa support the French party, and are the ornament of the Court of Prince Eugène. We are in the days of the Kingdom of Italy, when the story begins.

The Marchese del Dongo, a Milanese attached to Austria and her spy, spends fourteen years waiting for the fall of the Emperor Napoleon. Moreover, this Marchese, the brother of Gina Pietranera, does not live at Milan: he occupies his castle of Grianta, on the Lake of Como; he there brings up his elder son in the love of Austria and on sound principles; but he has a younger son, named Fabrizio, to whom Signora Pietranera is passionately devoted: Fabrizio is a cadet of the family; like her, he will be left without a penny in the world. Who is not familiar with the fondness of noble hearts for the disinherited? Also, she wishes to make something of him. Then, fortunately, Fabrizio is a charming boy; she obtains leave to put him to school at Milan, where, playing truant, she makes him see something of the viceregal court.

Napoleon falls for the first time. While he is on the Island of Elba, in the course of the reaction at Milan, which the Austrians have reoccupied, an insult offered to the Armies of Italy in the presence of Pietranera, who takes it up, is the cause of his death: he is killed in a duel.

A lover of the Contessa refuses to avenge her husband, Gina humiliates him by one of those acts of vengeance, magnificent south of the Alps, which would be thought stupid in Paris. This is her revenge:

Although she despises, *in petto*, this lover who has been adoring her at a distance and without reward for the last six years, she pays certain attentions to the wretch, and, when he is in a paroxysm of suspense, writes to him:

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

“Will you act for once like a man of spirit? Please to imagine that you have never known me. I am, with a touch of contempt, your servant,

GINA PIETRANERA.”

Then, to increase still further the desperation of this rich man, with his income of two hundred thousand lire, she *ginginates* (*ginginare* is a Milanese verb meaning everything that passes at a distance between a pair of lovers before they have spoken; the verb has its noun: one is a *gingino*. It is the first stage in love). Well, she *ginginates* for a moment with a fool whom she soon abandons; then she retires, with a pension of fifteen hundred francs, to a third floor apartment where all Milan of the day comes to see her and admires her.

Her brother, the Marchese, invites her to return to the ancestral castle on the Lake of Como. She goes there, to see once more and to protect her charming nephew, Fabrizio, to comfort her sister-in-law and to plan her own future amid the sublime scenery of the Lake of Como, her native soil and the native soil of this nephew whom she has made her son: she has no children. Fabrizio, who loves Napoleon, learns of his landing from the Gulf of Juan and wishes to go to serve the sovereign of his uncle Pietranera. His mother, who, the wife of a rich Marchese with an income of five hundred thousand lire, has not a penny to call her own, his aunt Gina, who has nothing, give him their diamonds: Fabrizio is in their eyes a hero.

The inspired volunteer crosses Switzerland, arrives in Paris, takes part in the battle of Waterloo, then returns to Italy, where, for having dabbled in the conspiracy of 1815 against the peace of Europe, he is disowned by his father and the Austrian government place him on their index. For him, to return to Milan would be to enter the Spielberg. From this point Fabrizio, in trouble, perse-

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

cuted for his heroism, this sublime boy becomes everything in the world to Gina.

The Contessa returns to Milan, she obtains a promise from Bubna and from the men of character whom Austria at this period has put in authority there, not to persecute Fabrizio, whom, following the advice of an extremely shrewd Canon, she keeps in concealment at Novara. Meanwhile, with all these things happening, no money. But Gina is of a sublime beauty, she is the type of that Lombard beauty (*bellezza folgorante*) which can be realised only at Milan and in the Scala when you see assembled there the thousand beautiful women of Lombardy. The events of this troubled life have developed in her the most magnificent Italian character: she has intellect, shrewdness, the Italian grace, the most charming conversation, an astonishing command of herself; in short, the Contessa is at one and the same time Madame de Montespan, Catherine de' Medici, Catherine II, too, if you like: the most audacious political genius and the most consummate feminine genius, hidden beneath a marvellous beauty. Having watched over her nephew, despite the hatred of the elder brother who is jealous of him, despite the hatred and indifference of the father, having snatched him from these perils, having been one of the queens of the court of the Viceroy Eugène, and then nothing; all these crises have enriched her natural forces, exercised her faculties and awakened the instincts numbed in the depths of her being by her early prosperity, by a marriage the joys of which have been rare, owing to the continual absence of Napoleon's devoted servant. Everyone sees or can divine in her the thousand treasures of passion, the resources and the refulgence of the most perfect feminine heart.

The old Canon, whom she has seduced, sends Fabrizio to Novara, a small town in Piedmont, under the tutelage of

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

a parish priest. This priest puts a stop to the inquiries of the police by his description of Fabrizio: "a younger son who feels wronged because he is not the eldest." When Gina, who had dreamed of Fabrizio's becoming aide-de-camp to Napoleon, sees Napoleon banished to St. Helena, she realises that Fabrizio, his name inscribed in the black book of the Milanese police, is lost to her for ever.

During the uncertainties which prevailed throughout Europe at the time of the battle of Waterloo, Gina has made the acquaintance of Conte Mosca della Rovere, the Minister of the famous Prince of Parma, Ranuccio-Ernesto IV.

Let us pause at this point.

Certainly, after having read the book, it is impossible not to recognise, in Conte Mosca, the most remarkable portrait that anyone could ever make of Prince Metternich, but of a Metternich transported from the great Chancellory of the Austrian Empire to the modest State of Parma. The State of Parma and Ernesto IV seem to me similarly to be the Duke of Modena and his Duchy. M. Beyle says of Ernesto IV that he is one of the richest Princes in Europe: the wealth of the Duke of Modena is famous. In seeking to avoid personalities the author has expended more ingenuity than Walter Scott required to construct the plot of *Kenilworth*. Indeed, these two similarities are vague enough, outwardly, to be denied, and so real inwardly that the well-informed reader cannot be mistaken. M. Beyle has so exalted the sublime character of the Prime Minister of the State of Parma that it is doubtful whether Prince Metternich be so great a man as Mosca, although the heart of that celebrated statesman does offer, to those who know his life well, one or two examples of passions of a compass at least equal to that of Mosca's. It is not slandering the Austrian Minister to believe him capable of all the secret greatnesses

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

of Mosca. As for what Mosca is throughout the book, as for the conduct of the man whom Gina regards as the greatest diplomat in Italy, it took genius to create the incidents, the events and the innumerable and recurring plots in the midst of which this immense character unfolds. All that M. de Metternich has done during his long career is not more extraordinary than what you see done by Mosca. When one comes to think that the author has invented it all, ravelled all the plot and then unravelled it, as things do ravel and unravel themselves at a court, the most daring mind, a mind to which the conception of ideas is a familiar process, is left dazed, stupefied before so huge a task. As for myself, I suspect some literary Aladdin's-lamp. To have dared to put on the stage a man of the genius and force of M. de Choiseul, Potemkin, M. de Metternich, to create him, to justify the creation by the actions of the creature himself, to make him move in an environment which is appropriate to him and in which his faculties have full play, is the work not of a man but of a fairy, a wizard. Bear in mind that the most skilfully complicated plots of Walter Scott do not arrive at the admirable simplicity which prevails in the recital of these events, so numerous, so *thickly foliaged*, to borrow the famous expression of Diderot.

Here is the portrait of Mosca. We are in 1816, remember.

"He might have been forty or forty-five; he had strongly marked features, with no trace of self-importance, and a simple and light-hearted manner which told in his favour; he would have looked very well indeed, if a whim on the part of his Prince had not obliged him to wear powder on his hair as a proof of his soundness in politics."

And so the powder which M. de Metternich wears, and which softens a face already so gentle, is justified in Mosca by the will of his master. In spite of the prodigious

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

efforts of M. Beyle, who, on page after page, naturalises in this State marvellous inventions to deceive his reader and blunt the point of his allusions, the mind is at Modena and will on no account consent to remain at Parma. Whoever has seen, known, met M. de Metternich, thinks that he hears him speaking through the mouth of Mosca, lends Mosca his voice and clothes him in his manners. Although, in the book, Ernesto IV dies, and the Duke of Modena is still living, one is often reminded of that Prince *so notorious for his severities, which the Liberals of Milan called cruelties*. Such are the expressions used by the author in speaking of the Prince of Parma.

In these two portraits, begun with a satirical intention, there is, however, nothing that can wound, nothing that reeks of vengeance. Although M. Beyle has no cause to thank M. de Metternich, who refused him his *exequatur* for the Trieste Consulate, and although the Duke of Modena has never been able to look with pleasure on the author of *Rome, Naples et Florence*, of the *Promenades en Rome*, and of certain other works, these two figures are portrayed with great taste and the utmost propriety.

This is what, no doubt, occurred during the actual work of these two creations. Carried away by the enthusiasm necessary to him who handles clay and scalpel, the brush and colours, the pen and the treasures of man's moral nature, M. Beyle, who had started out to depict a little court in Italy and a diplomat, ended with the type PRINCE and the type PRIME MINISTER. The resemblance, begun with the fantasy of a satirical mind, ceased where the genius of the arts appeared to the artist.

This convention of masks once admitted, the reader, keenly interested, accepts the admirable Italian scene which the author paints, the town and all the buildings necessary to his story, which, in many places, has the magical quality of an Oriental tale.

## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

This long parenthesis was indispensable. Let us continue.

Mosca is smitten with love, but with a love immense, eternal, boundless, for Gina, absolutely like M. de Metternich and his Leykam. He lets her, at the risk of compromising himself, have the latest diplomatic news before anyone else. The presence at Milan of this Minister of the State of Parma is perfectly accounted for later on.

To give you an idea of this famous Italian love, I must relate to you a distinctly curious incident. On their departure, in 1799, the Austrians saw as they left Milan, on the Bastion, a certain Contessa B——nini who was driving with a Canon, both heedless of revolutions and war: they were in love. The Bastion is a magnificent avenue which starts from the Eastern Gate (Porta Renza) and corresponds to the Champs-Élysées in Paris, with this slight difference that on the left extends the Duomo, "that mountain of gold transmuted into marble," as Francis II, who had a gift of expression, called it; and on the right the snowy fringe, the sublime chasms of the Alps. On their return in 1814 the first thing the Austrians saw was the Contessa and the Canon, sitting in the same carriage and saying, perhaps, the same things, at the same point on the Bastion. I have seen, in that city, a young man who became ill if he went more than a certain number of streets away from the house of his mistress. When a woman gives an Italian sensations, he never leaves her.

"In spite of his frivolous air and his polished manners, Mosca," says M. Beyle, "was not blessed with a soul of the French type; he could not *forget* the things that annoyed him. When there was a thorn in his pillow, he would blunt it by repeated stabbings of his throbbing limbs." This superior man guesses the superior mind of the Contessa, he falls in love with her to the point of behaving like a schoolboy.



## A STUDY OF M. BEYLE

"After all," the Minister said to himself, "old age is only being incapable of indulging in these delicious timidities."

The Contessa one evening remarks the fine, benevolent gaze of Mosca. (The gaze with which M. de Metternich would deceive the Deity.)

"At Parma," she says to him, "if you were to look like that, you would give *them* the hope that they might escape hanging."

In the end the diplomat, having realised how essential this woman is to his happiness, and after three months of inward struggle, arrives with three different plans, devised to secure his happiness, and makes her agree to the wisest of them.

In Mosca's eyes, Fabrizio is a child: the excessive interest which the Contessa takes in her nephew seems to him one of those *elective maternities* which, until love comes to reign there, beguile the hearts of noble-hearted women.

Mosca, unfortunately, is married. Accordingly he brings to Milan the Duca Sanseverina-Taxis. Let me, in this analysis, introduce a few quotations which will give you examples of the vivid, free, sometimes faulty style of M. Beyle, and will enable me to make myself be read with pleasure.

The Duca is a handsome little old man of sixty-eight, dapple-grey, very polished, very neat, immensely rich, but not quite as noble as he ought to have been. Apart from this, the Duca is by no means an absolute idiot, says the Conte; "he gets his clothes and wigs from Paris. He is not the sort of man who would do anything *deliberately* mean, he seriously believes that honour consists in having a Grand Cordon, and he is ashamed of his riches. He wants an Embassy. Marry him, he will give you a hundred thousand scudi, a magnificent jointure, his *palazzo* and the most superb existence in Parma. On these conditions, I