

STENDHAL: CONTEMPORARY THEMES IN

LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR

by

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a revaluation of Stendhal's work on the part of many critics, who have come to regard him as as great a novelist as Balzac. It would seem that Stendhal's work has a certain relevance in today's world. In this thesis, we shall concern ourselves with Le Rouge et le Noir, and shall attempt to establish why this novel, written at the end of the 1820's, is of interest to people in the second half of the twentieth century.

Although many traces can be found in Le Rouge of the great literary movements of the nineteenth century, and although it is true that the roots of this novel are deeply embedded in the France of the 1820's, yet it is impossible to fit Stendhal into any particular group of his day, or to see in his novel a mere reproduction of the French society of the time, to be read out of historical interest, but with no particular relevance today.

A careful reading of the novel will reveal to the reader the origins of much that is to be found in contemporary French novels, and many critics have not failed to notice this, drawing special attention to the striking similarities between Le Rouge and l'Etranger, by Albert Camus. It seems incontestable that Camus was directly inspired for his novel by Le Rouge. This comment on l'Etranger could equally well be a judgement of Le Rouge, and contains the theme common to both novels:

It is not the man who has killed another man... that society condemns, but indeed this kind of monster who refuses with unequalled firmness to enter into the game of their illusions, lies and

hypocrisies. Society wants a reassuring attitude from him and he does nothing but denounce, by his tranquil stubbornness in speaking the truth, the real and miserable aspect of man's fate. In short, the murder he has committed is taken as being a pretext to destroy the truth he embodies.¹

In his novel, then, Stendhal is concerned with the mortal struggle of an individual against a hostile, hypocritical society. It may at first appear that it is the individual in Le Rouge who loses the battle, for it is with the greatest satisfaction that the members of the jury declare Julien to be guilty. However, careful consideration forces the reader to conclude that it is, in fact, the individual who is victorious. For it is Julien who chooses to die, refusing to plead extenuating circumstances for his crime, and speaking out against society at his trial, at the very point when his acquittal seems certain. Julien utterly rejects the society of his time, in which he has always been a stranger, and in which he can no longer bear to live.

It is in his fundamentally rebellious attitude to society, and in his concern for the fate of the individual, which Stendhal expresses in Le Rouge, that he joins forces with contemporary French authors, leaving the other writers of his time far behind him.

Stendhal's conception of his art is also curiously similar to that of serious contemporary French writers. These words, spoken by Albert Camus on the subject of artistic creation, might also have been spoken by Stendhal:

... Car je me fais, de l'art, l'idée la plus élevée. Je le mets trop haut pour consentir à le soumettre à rien ... cependant, ne défendons pas des conceptions esthétiques et des formes d'art périmées. L'écrivain qui se laisse fasciner par la Gorgone politique commet sans doute une erreur. C'en

¹ Albert Maquet, Camus: The Invincible Summer. (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1958), p. 55.

est une autre d'ignorer les problèmes sociaux du siècle ... Et, du reste, cette fuite serait parfaitement vaine: tournez le dos à la Gorgone, elle se met en marche ... Quel est, en somme, l'objet de tout artiste créateur? Peindre les passions de son temps. Au XVII^e siècle, les passions de l'amour étaient au premier plan des préoccupations des gens. Mais aujourd'hui, les passions du siècle sont les passions collectives parce que la société est en désordre.

La création artistique, loin de nous éloigner du drame de notre époque, est un des moyens de l'approcher qui nous sont donnés. Les régimes totalitaires le savent bien, puisqu'ils nous considèrent comme leurs premiers ennemis ...²

We shall devote the first chapter of the thesis to society, attempting to determine, first of all, why it was that Stendhal felt such hostility towards Restoration society, and then proceeding to an examination of his portrayal of that society in Le Rouge. The second chapter we shall devote to the individual, examining the four major characters in Le Rouge, and the close relationship that exists between them and the society in which they live.

²Gabriel D'Aubarède, "Rencontre avec Albert Camus", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 10 mai 1951, quoted in Albert Camus Essais. Introduction par R. Quilliot, textes établis et annotés par R. Quilliot et L. Faucon (Bruges: Editions Gallimard et Calmann-Levy, 1965).

CHAPTER I

STENDHAL'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIETY IN

LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR

It was during the Restoration period in France, beginning in 1814, that Stendhal first seems to have become aware of the close relationship that exists between society and the individual. He came to realize that: "No individual destiny can be detached from the events and currents that victimize it."¹ He realized that an individual is necessarily influenced by his environment and he thought that, if a man's character is not wholly formed by environment, on the other hand, environment is entirely responsible for a man's fate.

This is not to say, however, that in Le Rouge Stendhal considered himself the spokesman of any particular group. Stendhal was an individualist and a "solitaire" and did not belong to any group, literary or otherwise. His novel is a very personal one, written out of his own experience, and expressing his own thoughts and feelings. He was writing, for example, at the time of a great movement in the history of French literature, Romanticism; and it is true that many traits of this school are to be found in his work. But on the whole he despised the Romantics for their spinelessness, for the way they gave in to

¹Stendhal, A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by V. Brombert (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1962), p. 2.

"le mal du siècle", this feeling of despair they all experienced before life in general. Stendhal, too, was overcome by a feeling of despair when he contemplated the contemporary situation, but he was not content merely to bewail his lot, like the Romantics, and his novel, Le Rouge, is Stendhal's protest against the society which produced in him feelings of anger, contempt and hopelessness.

It would seem as if Stendhal was perfectly content with the way things were going in France and had no quarrel at all with society before 1814. Born in 1783, six years before the outbreak of the Revolution, he died in 1842, six years before the revolution of 1848. He therefore lived through a period in French history of intense upheaval and instability, and great social change. The Revolution period was a chaotic time, when all the values and bases of French society were overturned. The work begun at this time towards the reorganisation of French society was completed by Napoleon, who became First Consul in 1799 when he and his fellow-conspirators replaced the Directory with the Consulate by a coup d'état, and who had himself crowned Emperor of the French in 1804.

Under Napoleon, and with the help of his influential cousin Daru, Stendhal was able to secure a good position, which he lost when Napoleon was forced to abdicate, and the Bourbons were reinstated to the throne by the Allies in 1814. However, Stendhal was not so staunch a Bonapartist that he was unable to see the faults of this man, who was both a great general and a great administrator, but who had gone too far by becoming a dictator. Under the new regime, though Stendhal no longer had the protection of Daru, he was nevertheless not without

influential friends, and could doubtless have secured another good position. However, he was so disillusioned by, and disappointed in, the new regime, that he left France in disgust and went into voluntary exile in Italy, where he found "la bonhomie et la simplicité" which were so lacking in France at the time, in Stendhal's eyes at least.

Maurice Bardèche comments:

Comment n'a-t-on pas vu le mépris et le dégoût qu'il a mis dans cette dernière ligne de Rome, Naples et Florence, cette signature énigmatique et cinglante de l'édition de 1817 . . . : "L'auteur, qui n'est plus Français depuis 1814, est à un service étranger."

Stendhal realized that the reactionary regime of the Restoration was in no way equipped to deal with the reality of what was happening to French society. He saw with horror that the class which had been struggling for centuries to impose itself on society as a force to be reckoned with, was finally reaching the zenith of its power. This was the bourgeoisie, composed of "les nouveaux riches", who were, on the whole, industrialists and businessmen. "La passion de l'argent" was the motivating force of this class, who were ruthless and unscrupulous in their desire for material gain. The final triumph of the bourgeoisie came, in fact, in 1830, when the regime of Charles X was overthrown and the bourgeois monarchy of Louis-Philippe was established.

The nobility were powerless, Stendhal realized, to combat this usurpation of power by the bourgeoisie. Their position was weak, partly because they were hemmed in by convention, partly because they were not united. In their terror that the situation of 1793 might

²M. Bardèche, Stendhal romancier (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1947), p. 78.

repeat itself, they were divided as to how to prevent this. The Church in France during the Restoration was Jesuit-controlled and powerful. However, Stendhal was aware that the Church, which felt insecure during the Restoration, would readily change its allegiance to support the strongest party and thus strengthen its own position. So it is that we see M. Valenod, the representative of the bourgeoisie in Le Rouge, under the protection of the local Jesuit party. The lower classes during the Restoration were oppressed. They were kept firmly in their place and inculcated, as Stendhal tells us in his novel, with a deep respect for the order of things in society, and for money and property and "les gros" who possessed these things.

Stendhal, then, found the regime in France during the Restoration oppressive, and he was concerned for the fate of the individual in such an unstable, fear-controlled situation. For he saw that such a regime deprived the individual of his freedom, which Stendhal considered so precious. His conception of the future state of society in France was no brighter, for he realized society would soon be controlled by the bourgeoisie, who gave no thought to personal, individual values, obsessed as they were by an all-embracing desire for material gain. In his novel he thus expresses his strongly critical views on French society, his fears for the future, and his conception of the effect such a society has on the individual.

We feel it is pertinent at this point, before proceeding to a detailed analysis of Stendhal's portrayal of society in Le Rouge, to consider the major techniques he employs in his novel to depict society and, indeed, reality as a whole and which seem to us to rank him among writers of today.

Stendhal reveals his conception of the particular form of artistic creation, which is the novel, in the following passage:

Et, monsieur, un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route. Tantôt il reflète a vos yeux l'azur des cieux, tantôt la fange des bourniers de la route. Et l'homme qui porte le miroir dans sa hotte sera par vous accusé d'être immoral! Accusez bien plutôt le grand chemin ou est le bournier, et plus encore l'inspecteur des routes qui laisse l'eau croupir et le bournier se former. ³

The first two sentences would lead us to conclude that Stendhal thought of the novel as an objective, impartial art form. However, what he says next leads us to a very different conclusion, for he talks of "l'homme qui porte le miroir" and we realize that Stendhal sees the novel in the hands of the author as a mirror in the hands of a man. As the mirror will reflect what it is pointed at, so the novel will reflect those aspects of reality the author wishes it to reflect. The personal element becomes apparent here, and it is true that subjectivity is indeed the main feature of Stendhal's style in Le Rouge.

Never, in Le Rouge, is reality presented to the reader objectively, but always from a subjective viewpoint. The author is ever-present behind the irony which is the dominant tone of the whole novel. At times, he intervenes openly in the first person, to register a comment. Mostly, however, Stendhal uses his characters, especially Julien, as masks in order to express his views and convey reality to the reader. This last technique has many advantages, for it enables the reader to get right inside the character through whose eyes reality is being presented to

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Stendhal, Le Rouge et le Noir (France: Editions Gallimard et Librairie Générale Française, 1958), p. 363.

him at any one time, and as well as learning about the situation in which the character finds himself, the reader also learns something of the personality of that particular character. An example of this is to be found in the scene when Julien first meets the young bishop of Agde at Verrières. As Julien enters the room at the far end of which a young man is practising giving the benediction, he stops short, moved by the sombre magnificence of the architecture. The reader shares Julien's feeling of intimidation and bewilderment as he advances to where the young man is standing, and his surprised reaction when the young man turns to reveal that he is wearing the pectoral cross of a bishop, and that he is, in fact, the bishop of Agde.

The subjective technique has the advantage, we feel, of leading to greater involvement on the part of the reader than does objectivity, for the reader identifies with the subject through whose eyes reality is being presented to him, whereas the objective style keeps the reader at a distance. Subjectivity thus results in better communication between author and reader, and is far more suited to the author's purpose when the latter is dealing with a controversial topic. Stendhal must have been aware that Le Rouge would have a mixed, if not cool, reception from the public.

Subjectivity demands the cooperation of the reader's mental faculties more than does the objective technique, we feel, and for this reason, leads once again to greater involvement on the part of the reader. We think immediately of the lengthy, factual, objective descriptions of reality which are to be found in the novels of Balzac

and Zola, for example. These writers were concerned with a photographic representation of reality, missing out no details. Nothing is left to the reader's imagination. The subjective technique, however, evokes rather than describes, giving the reader impressions from which he can build up a picture of reality in his own imagination.

Balzac and Zola considered the objective description of reality to be an essential part of their art, and it held a place of its own in their works. Stendhal, however, would have considered such description to be superfluous to his purpose. Rather than engage in the lengthy, objective description of reality, Stendhal is more concerned to evoke for the reader a certain atmosphere, in order to convey to the reader the feelings of the individual through whose eyes the reader is seeing reality at that particular stage in the novel. By evoking in the reader the very same feelings experienced by one of the characters in the novel, in a certain situation, Stendhal's purpose of social criticism and of gaining the reader's sympathy for that individual, is better served than if he had attempted to achieve the same ends through objective explanation and analysis. To illustrate this point we shall consider the case of the salon of L'Hôtel de la Mole. Stendhal could well have given us a detailed description of the salon and its visitors, stating explicitly the deadness of the atmosphere and the fatuity of the people. Instead, however, he acquaints us with these facts through the inner monologues of Julien and Mathilde. The reader experiences the boredom felt by these two characters, and sees the fatuity and lack of individuality of the other people in the salon, who are mere reflections in the eyes of Julien and Mathilde. At the same time the

reader makes fresh discoveries as to the personalities of Julien and Mathilde, which he would not have done had he learned about the salon through objective description on the part of the author.

We feel that subjectivity was essential to Stendhal's purpose. Apart from the fact that Stendhal felt so strongly about the contemporary situation in France, and the plight of the individual, that it would have been impossible for him to remain objective, there remains the incontrovertible fact that objectivity would have detracted considerably both from his criticism of society and his treatment of the individual. For Stendhal wished his indictment of society to be complete, not merely partial, and by adopting a subjective technique in his novel this indictment becomes implicit as well as explicit, and therefore more convincing. The subjective technique also gains more sympathy on the reader's part for the individual, with whom the reader readily identifies.

Stendhal was aware that the subjective style effects, as we noted earlier, better communication between author and reader. Therefore, if an author is writing because he has certain personal ideas and experiences he wishes to communicate to others, he will be more certain of helping his reader to understand these ideas and experiences more fully if he adopts the subjective technique. Stendhal, in writing Le Rouge, was not attempting to create a literary masterpiece, nor was he pandering to the tastes of the public in order to ensure his success and future prosperity. He wrote the novel because he wished to express and communicate his views on the society of the time and its effect on the individual. We feel we are justified in stating that, in general,

contemporary writers write not primarily for aesthetic reasons, but because they have certain personal ideas and experiences to communicate. They see the novel as one effective means of communication, and the subjective technique as a necessity, if the reader is to achieve a full understanding of what the novel is conveying. Subjectivity is therefore one indication of Stendhal's affinity with contemporary authors.

Stendhal's style in Le Rouge can be compared to that of Albert Camus in L'Etranger, the novel which contains so many striking resemblances to Le Rouge. In his novel, Camus communicates to the reader, through Meursault, who relates the story in the first person, an experience of the absurdity of existence, and an indictment of society. The tone is unemotional, the prose clear and concise. Camus expressed in his second novel, La Peste, a suspicious attitude towards words, which he saw as frequently meaningless in themselves.⁴ This hyper-consciousness of words is evident in L'Etranger. Stendhal also wished to achieve clarity in his prose, possibly as a reaction to the flowery imprecise prose of the Romantics, and he apparently sought inspiration in repeated study of the Civil Code. However, the main point of comparison between the style of both authors is its subjectivity, which gives implicit meaning to what the authors are saying in their novels, and reinforces their purpose.

⁴In plague-stricken Oran, the people are reduced to communicating with the outside world by telegrams and letters, to which they never receive a reply:

"Pendant des semaines, nous fumes réduits alors à recommencer sans cesse la même lettre, à recopier les mêmes renseignements et les mêmes appels, si bien qu'au bout d'un certain temps, les mots qui d'abord étaient sortis tout saignants de notre cœur se vidaient de leur sens. Nous les recopions alors machinalement, essayant de donner

Having discussed the contemporary nature of the techniques Stendhal uses in his portrayal of reality in Le Rouge, we shall now proceed to a detailed consideration of his portrayal of the society of the time in his novel, pointing out also elements in his conception of society which show an affinity with the way contemporary writers envisage society. Stendhal's portrayal of society can be divided into three parts. In the first, Stendhal depicts for his reader, everyday life in the provinces in France during the Restoration. In this section he is particularly concerned with demonstrating the rise in power of the bourgeoisie. He then takes the reader inside the seminary in Besancon, and this section contains the main body of Stendhal's criticism of the Church in France at the time. Finally, the author takes the reader into Parisian high society, to depict the position of the aristocracy during the Restoration.

It is mostly through Julien's eyes that the reader becomes aware of the state of affairs in the little town of Verrières, which is representative of the provinces as a whole in Le Rouge. Julien, a naive young peasant lad, is taken on as tutor to the mayor's children and therefore comes into direct contact with the ruling faction in Verrières. The reader therefore gains knowledge of the ways and means of these people, who are responsible for the smooth running of things in Verrières, through Julien's first-hand impressions, for Julien is in a privileged position. However, in the first three and a half chapters of the novel, before Julien is introduced, the reader is

au moyen de ces phrases mortes des signes de notre vie difficile"
Camus, La Peste (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 83.

acquainted by the author with the basic truths concerning life in Verrières. It is through Julien's relations with the influential people in the town that the reader becomes aware of the validity of these truths.

The reader sees Verrières first of all through the eyes of a visitor from Paris. There is subtlety on Stendhal's part here, for a Parisian, coming from a capital city and, presumably, being more worldly than someone who has lived all his life in the provinces, will be more inclined to see things in perspective, and it is true that after only a very short while he becomes aware of: "... l'atmosphère empestée des petits intérêts d'argent dont il commence à être asphyxié."⁵ For what, asks Stendhal, is the principal motivating force, and the main preoccupation of the majority of the inhabitants of Verrières? The answer, he says, is quite simply material gain: "Voilà le grand mot qui décide de tout à Verrières: RAPPORTER DU REVENU."⁶ It is the pettiness of provincial life that Stendhal is particularly eager to emphasize in his depiction of life in Verrières, and this aim is clearly demonstrated by the number of times he employs the adjective "petit" in the first short chapter.

We are made aware by the author, in the very first chapter, of the great power exercised in the town by the mayor, who owes his position to his nobility and to the wealth he has accumulated from his nail-making factory. Such is his authority that he was even able to have the "ruisseau public" diverted, for his own ends, and Stendhal

⁵Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 11.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 14.

has written the word "public" in italics for fear the reader miss the meaning contained here. However, Stendhal hints that M. de R  nal, for all his authority, is not entirely free to do as he pleases, and insinuates that it was the government in Paris which allowed him to make this move, for services rendered.

As M. de R  nal, even though he is mayor of Verri  res, is not a free agent, neither are the ordinary townsfolk free to do as they please. Stendhal does not fail to make mention, and in no uncertain terms, of the hold which public opinion has over the people of Verri  res. Stendhal does not spare his words in this context and talks boldly of "la tyrannie de l'opinion".⁷ In order to be well regarded by the: "... gens sages et mod  r  s qui distribuent la consid  ration en Franche-Comt  ,"⁸ and we note the irony of the author's words, a person must take care never to do anything in the least out of the ordinary run of things, but to live entirely according to convention. In Stendhal's own words: "Malheur    qui se distingue!"⁹

Stendhal underlines the great importance attributed to property by the people of Verri  res. Even the mayor, with all his self-importance and his high social position, will lower himself to bargaining with a peasant when it comes to the matter of property. We are referring here to the deal he made with Julien's father, to move his saw-mill to a different site so that the mayor could extend his property. Obsessed with "la manie de propri  taire",¹⁰ he even allowed himself to be outdone

⁷ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 12.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

in the bargaining by the wily peasant. We see the spirit of "one-upmanship" which motivates the people of Verrières in the attitude of Julien's father towards the mayor after the bargain had been concluded to his advantage:

Une fois, c'était un jour de dimanche, il y a quatre ans de cela, M. de Rênal, revenant de l'église en costume de maire, vit de loin le vieux Sorel, entouré de ses trois fils, sourire en le regardant. Ce sourire a porté un jour fatal dans l'âme de M. le maire, il pense depuis lors qu'il eût pu obtenir l'échange à meilleur marché. ¹¹

This same spirit is seen where M. de Rênal is deliberating as to whether to engage Julien as tutor to his children. The mayor is motivated by entirely wrong reasons -- not by the desire to have his children well educated, but by the wish to go one better than M. Valenod. The mayor explains:

Cet arrangement convient de plus d'une façon ... le Valenod est tout fier des deux beaux normands qu'il vient d'acheter pour sa calèche. Mais il n'a pas de précepteur pour ses enfants. ¹²

The inhuman ruthlessness of the administration of Verrières, whose members act at all times, not for the good of the townspeople, but through self-interest only, is demonstrated in the affair of the dismissal from his post of M. Chélan, the old curate of Verrières. M. Chélan had dared to act as his conscience, and not the authorities of the town, dictated, by taking M. Appert on an inspection of the prison and the poor-house of Verrières. It is obvious that the administration of these two institutions leaves much to be desired, and the authorities of the town, fearing the possible consequences of

¹¹Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 12.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 19.

M. Appert's visit, had ordered that the latter be refused admittance to these institutions. M. Chélan chose to ignore these orders and for this he is ruined. He says:

Eh bien, messieurs! Je serai le troisième curé, de quatre-vingts ans d'âge, que l'on destituera dans ce voisinage. Il y a cinquante-six ans que je suis ici; j'ai baptisé presque tous les habitants de la ville, qui n'était qu'un bourg quand j'arrivai. Je marie tous les jours des jeunes gens dont jadis j'ai marié les grands-pères. Verrières est ma famille; mais je me suis dit, en voyant l'étranger: 'cet homme venu de Paris peut être à la vérité un libéral, il n'y en a que trop; mais quel mal peut-il faire à nos pauvres et à nos prisonniers?' ¹³

In the affair of M. Chélan's dismissal, another important factor comes into play. M. Chélan, we learn, is a Jansenist and as such, "n'était protégé par personne".¹⁴ Throughout his portrayal of provincial life, Stendhal makes references to the immense power exercised by the Jesuits in the provinces, and their persecution of "les Français ennemis des jésuites".¹⁵ Stendhal's first reference to the Jesuits comes early in the novel when he is discussing the matter of the pruning of the plane trees on the promenade at Verrières. He tells us: "Les libéraux de l'endroit prétendent, mais ils exagèrent, que la main du jardinier officiel est devenue bien plus sévère depuis que M. le vicaire Maslon a pris l'habitude de s'emparer des produits de la tonte."¹⁶ M. Maslon is thus introduced into the background of the action by an allusion which is hardly flattering for him.

Stendhal's next reference to the Jesuits comes in one of the passages he devotes to describing Mme. de Rênal. His opinion of the

¹³Stendhal, Le Rouge, pp. 17, 18.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 14.

education she received at the Jesuit convent she attended is implicit in the following sentence: "Madame de Rênal s'était trouvé assez de sens pour oublier bientôt, comme absurde, tout ce qu'elle avait appris au couvent"¹⁷ The author talks, too, of: "Les flatteries précoces dont elle avait été l'objet, en sa qualité d'héritière d'une grande fortune"¹⁸ Not only does Stendhal introduce the Church into his novel early, for his portrayal of the provinces would not be complete if this element were lacking, but he immediately makes his attitude towards the Church clear, as we have seen in the examples already quoted. It is evident from the start that Stendhal's attitude is hostile.

Julien realized, while still in his early youth, that the road to power and success lay now in the Church. He talks of: "... ce bel état de prêtre qui mène à tout."¹⁹ This realization came to him when a new church was being constructed in Verrières, and a dispute arose between the town magistrate and the priest: "... qui passait pour être l'espion de la congrégation."²⁰ The magistrate was in danger of losing his job, and because of his family responsibilities, he was finally forced to give in to the young priest. Julien made the following comment: "Voilà ce juge de paix, si bonne tête, si honnête homme, jusqu'ici, si vieux, qui se déshonore par crainte de déplaire à un

¹⁷ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 43.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

jeune vicaire de trente ans. Il faut être prêtre."²¹ Julien now knew, from personal experience, that, in the provinces at least, power lay in the hands of the clergy, that is, the Jesuit clergy.

It is towards the end of his portrayal of provincial life that Stendhal first mentions the all-powerful M. le grand vicaire de Frilair. It is this man, we learn, who reigns supreme in Besançon and the surrounding area. For although M. de Frilair's office puts him in a subordinate position to the bishop of Besançon, the latter, a worldly old gentleman, takes no part in the running of Church affairs in the area; the administration of his diocese is entirely in the hands of M. de Frilair. The tight control of the Church over lay affairs is seen first of all in M. de Frilair's protection of M. Valenod, who later takes over from M. de Rênal as mayor of Verrières. The principal incident, however, which demonstrates the power of the Church, is the auctioning of a house belonging to the commune of Verrières. The affair had been pre-arranged so that the house would fall, for a ridiculously low sum, to a certain Saint-Giraud, a minor government official, protected by the "congrégation", the local Jesuit party. M. de Rênal, who is, we feel, a little more honest at heart than M. Valenod, had dared to protest about the matter and had promptly been summoned to the bishop's palace at Besançon, by M. de Frilair, from where he returned, subdued, to put up notices announcing the auction for the following day. It is obvious to everyone that the whole affair has been illegally conducted, but no one will risk raising a protesting voice about it. Julien overhears a conversation between two of the

²¹ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 31.

townsfolk present at the auction. One man is so outraged at this scandalous affair that he is ready to make a higher bid for the property, but his companion warns him: "C'est cracher en l'air. Que gagneras-tu à te mettre à dos M. Maslon, M. Valenod, l'évêque, son terrible grand vicaire de Frilair, et toute la clique?"²²

However, we feel that Stendhal's main purpose in the section of Le Rouge dealing with provincial affairs, as far as society is concerned, is to depict for the reader the gradual rise in power of the bourgeoisie in France. At the beginning of the novel Stendhal makes it clear that it is M. de Rênal, the mayor of Verrières, who is in full control of the affairs of the town. This man is a member of the provincial nobility. However, as the novel proceeds, we see a gradual tightening of their hold on the affairs of the town by the Jesuits, and a gradual increase of power on the part of M. Valenod. At the same time we observe a decrease of power on the part of M. de Rênal.

It is M. Valenod who represents the bourgeoisie in Le Rouge. He is the type of the parvenu and Stendhal describes him thus: "M. Valenod était ce qu'on appelle à cent lieues de Paris, un 'faraud'; c'est une espèce d'un naturel effronté et grossier."²³ This man, Stendhal tells us, will stoop to anything in order to get on. He has no scruples at all, even lowering himself as far as to write an anonymous letter to M. de Rênal. When Julien is invited to dinner at the Valenod household he is disgusted at the behaviour of these people. He cannot help comparing their ways to those of the Rênals. For although M. de Rênal is also totally preoccupied with social position

²² Stendhal, Le Rouge, pp. 156, 157.

²³ Ibid., p. 152.

and making money, yet there is more dignity about him than about M. Valenod, who appears to be completely ignorant of the meaning of this word.

We learn later in the novel that M. Valenod has taken over from M. de Rênal as mayor of Verrières, and that he has been honoured with a barony. At the end of the novel, having been nominated to the post of prefect, M. Valenod dares to flout even the all-powerful M. de Frilair, by condemning Julien to death. This action is, we feel, symbolic of the final triumph of the bourgeoisie in France.

In the next section of the novel, Stendhal describes for us Julien's stay in the seminary at Besançon. As in the first section of the novel, it is through Julien's eyes that we see the functioning of the seminary. As we stated earlier, it is this section which contains the body of Stendhal's criticism of the Church in France at the time. There are, however, references to the Church and to religion by the author throughout the whole novel.

Stendhal expresses in Le Rouge a sceptical attitude towards the existence of God. His final remark on this subject comes to us from Julien's mouth when the latter is in prison awaiting execution. Julien has meditated at some length on the nature of God and the possibility of His existence and his conclusion is: "Mais comment, dès qu'on sera trois ensemble, croire à ce grand nom: DIEU, après l'abus effroyable qu'en font nos prêtres?"²⁴ Stendhal considers that the Church in France has rendered the idea of God odious, in its representation of Him as: "... ce Dieu tout-puissant et terrible."²⁵

²⁴ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 504.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 115.

However, it is not only the Church that is to blame for this, but the Bible, which, Julien says, represents God as: "... petit despote cruel et plein de la soif de se venger" ²⁶ The Christian religion has, in Stendhal's view, violated the name of God by reducing Him to human terms. In fact, the section of the novel devoted to depicting life in the seminary at Besançon serves mainly to show the reader that the Church in France during the Restoration had become almost entirely worldly in outlook.

It does not take Julien long to discover that God has been forgotten in the seminary: "Julien voyait apparaître l'idée d'un second Dieu, mais d'un Dieu bien plus à craindre et bien plus puissant que l'autre; ce second Dieu était le pape." ²⁷ It is the Pope, and not God, whom the seminarists are taught to respect and obey. L'abbé Castanède tells them: "Rendez-vous dignes des bontés du pape par la sainteté de votre vie, par votre obéissance, soyez comme un bâton entre ses mains ... et vous allez obtenir une place superbe" ²⁸ Stendhal suggests that the Church is at the present time unsure of itself because it is uncertain of God. It thus clings to the Pope like a sinking man to a piece of driftwood, and discourages free thought. As far as Stendhal is concerned, the only way organized religion in its present form can continue to exist in France, is if the people continue to accept unquestioningly the teachings of the Church. We see that in the seminary the young candidates for the priesthood are taught above

²⁶ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 504.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 195.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 194.

all "la soumission du coeur".²⁹ Julien is the only one in the seminary who is not deceived by what the author considers to be the dupery of organized religion in France, and try as he may to assume an external appearance which expresses with every movement: "... la foi implicite et prête à tout croire et à tout soutenir, même par le martyre",³⁰ he sees himself surpassed in this respect by the coarsest of his companions. Julien's main fault in the eyes of everyone else in the seminary is that: "... il pensait, il jugeait par lui-même, au lieu de suivre aveuglément l'autorité et l'exemple."³¹

Materialistic values, we learn, have completely replaced spiritual values in the seminary. In the first place, most of the young men in the seminary are not there because of a vocation. They simply see in the post of "curé de village", which is as far as their aspirations carry most of them, a promise of material comfort and well-being. For most of the seminarists are the uneducated sons of peasants, who, if they had remained at home, would have had to work hard for a living and would not even then have always been certain of a good dinner. The author says of these young men: "Julien ne lisait jamais dans leur oeil morne que le besoin physique satisfait après le dîner, et le plaisir physique attendu avant le repas."³² Nor are the ingenuous young seminarists the only ones with purely material aspirations.

²⁹Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 184.

³⁰Ibid., p. 189.

³¹Ibid., p. 187.

³²Ibid., p. 184.

Julien overhears l'abbé Castanède, the deputy director of the seminary, talking to a group of seminarists one day in the following manner:

J'ai connu, moi qui vous parle, des paroisses de montagne dont le casuel valait mieux que celui de bien des curés de ville. Il y avait autant d'argent. Sans compter les chapons gras, les oeufs, le beurre frais et mille agréments de détail; et là le curé est le premier sans contredit: point de bon repas où il ne soit invité, fêté, etc. ³³

L'abbé Pirard is the only truly virtuous man in the whole seminary. He has a deep respect for the spiritual aspects of Christianity. However, he is a Jansenist, and as such is finally forced to resign from his post as director of the seminary after suffering for many years the petty spitefulness of the Jesuits. This very persecution by the Jesuits of anyone who opposes them in any way serves only to demonstrate the petty worldliness of the Church in France during the Restoration.

The hypocrisy of religion as it existed officially in France in Stendhal's day, is evident in the everyday life of the seminarists in this supposedly holy institution. We see Julien denounced to l'abbé Pirard by a sort of secret police which operates in the seminary under the leadership of l'abbé Castanède. When Julien's friend, Fouqué, visits him in the seminary, he is only able to gain admittance by bribery. A great reverence for money is apparent throughout the whole episode devoted to the seminary, and we see this, for example, when Fouqué sends a gift of a deer and a wild boar he has shot on a hunting expedition, to the seminary. It is generally supposed in the seminary that the animals have been sent by Julien's family. The author tells us:

³³ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 194.

"Ce don, qui classait la famille de Julien dans la partie de la société qu'il faut respecter, porta un coup mortel à l'envie. Il fut une supériorité consacrée par la fortune. Chazel et les plus distingués des séminaristes lui firent des avances, et se seraient presque plaints à lui de ce qu'il ne les avait pas avertis de la fortune de ses parents, et les avait ainsi exposés à manquer de respect à l'argent."³⁴

In the episode in which Julien helps to decorate the cathedral of Besançon for a religious festival, we see the importance attributed by the Church to pomp and ceremony, the material earthly manifestations of the Christian religion, and we note the way l'abbé Chas-Bernard's horizons stretch no further than the quantity of gold to be found in the treasures of the cathedral.

Stendhal makes several more references during the seminary episode to the great power exercised in France by M. de Frilair, telling us, too, how the latter had risen from obscurity to his present position in the space of twelve years, being now one of the richest landowners in the area. His power is demonstrated, too, by the fact that he is presently engaged in a law-suit against M. de la Mole, one of the most influential nobles in France and has, at the moment, the upper hand in the affair.

It is during the section of the novel devoted to a portrayal of the seminary that we are first introduced to M. de Frilair when Julien goes to the bishop's palace with l'abbé Pirard's letter of resignation. We are struck immediately by the worldly, most unpriestlike appearance of M. de Frilair. The author draws our attention to the cunning visible in every trait of the latter's face, and points

³⁴Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 205.

out M. de Frilair's continual efforts to disguise this. The author also comments on the elegance of the clergyman's dress. This continual preoccupation with external appearances denotes nothing but concern for the things of this world whereas in reality a priest's main concern should be for the inner being. We think of the contrast which springs to mind between M. de Frilair and l'abbé Pirard. The latter has no concern at all for outward appearance and his face expresses at all times what is going on in his heart. Yet, strangely enough, this is to his disadvantage. Mathilde de la Mole exclaims at one point, for instance: "Quelle figure a cet abbé Pirard!"³⁵ which irritates Julien intensely. The author continues:

"M. Pirard était sans contredit le plus honnête homme du salon, mais sa figure couperosée, qui s'agitait des bourrelements de sa conscience, le rendait hideux en ce moment. Croyez après cela aux physionomies, pensa Julien; c'est dans le moment où la délicatesse de l'abbé Pirard se reproche quelque peccadille, qu'il a l'air atroce; tandis que sur la figure de ce Napier, espion connu de tous, on lit un bonheur pur et tranquille."³⁶

We see how the bishop of Besançon is merely a pawn in the hands of M. de Frilair. The bishop is represented by the author as an amiable old man, worldly, and even a little flippant. We note the irony of the situation when he discusses Virgil, Horace and Cicero with Julien, for it was knowledge of these authors which earned Julien such a mediocre mark in the recent examinations.

From the seminary in Besancon we are next taken by the author into high society in Paris to complete his portrayal of contemporary society. In this section of his novel Stendhal is concerned with

³⁵ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 265.

³⁶ Ibid.

depicting for us the withering effect on the aristocracy of a mode of life which had been reintroduced by the Bourbon regime in an effort to counteract recent events, and which, in Stendhal's eyes, was completely outdated and had no rapports at all with the reality of what was happening in France at the time. To Stendhal, the Bourbon regime was behaving in such a way as to bring about its own downfall, by encouraging its partisans to live in an atmosphere of complete artificiality and thereby disregard the harsh truth of reality.

It is, once again, through Julien that the reader gradually becomes aware of the situation of the upper classes in France, and in particular, in Paris. Julien arrives in the capital city with his head full of illusions as to what he will find in that great city. Though he obviously considers himself very much a man of the world after his experiences in the seminary at Besançon, to the Parisian aristocrats with whom he comes into contact, he is still a naïve, gauche, country lad. Julien is at first awestruck by all he sees, and filled with admiration for everything. There is ironic humour in the contrast between Julien's exclamation when he first sees l'Hôtel de la Mole, and the grim truth of reality: "Quelle architecture magnifique! dit-il à son ami. Il s'agissait d'un de ces hôtels à façade si plate du faubourg Saint-Germain, bâtis vers le temps de la mort de Voltaire. Jamais la mode et le beau n'ont été si loin l'un de l'autre."³⁷ Similarly, Julien is enchanted by the salons he and l'abbé Pirard pass through in order to reach the marquis de la Mole's study. He

³⁷Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 245.

being in very bad taste. Julien observes that in the salon people are condemned by necessity to talk of trivialities. They therefore engage in gossip and backbiting. Mathilde and her clique relieve the boredom with the game of "portraits" employing caustic salon wit against the people who frequent the salon. We recall that Célimène and her circle engaged in the same past-time in Molière's Le Misanthrope, showing that this game was also a way of reducing the boredom for the aristocracy of the 17th century. This detail demonstrates only too well for the reader the fact that the aristocracy of the early 19th century were indeed living in the past.

Julien is well aware of the haughty arrogance with which the La Mole family treat those people whom they consider to occupy a lower place in the ranks of the nobility than they do. Especially cruel is their attitude towards people who have acquired access to the La Mole salon on account of their wealth. Here Julien observes a difference between values in Paris and in the provinces. In the capital it is caste that counts, not money. The only real respect shown by the La Mole family is for people whose ancestors took part in the crusades. Julien wonders why it is that people continue to frequent the La Mole salon only to be humiliated again and again by the family. He realizes that they come for one of two reasons, either in the hope that their assiduous attendance will one day be rewarded by a better post than the one they hold at present, or simply for the pleasure of saying at the next salon they visit, that they have just come from l'Hôtel de la Mole. Although the salon is an activity which gives little pleasure either to the hosts or to the guests, it is an established institution in aristo-

cratic circles and forms one of the "convenances" which must be strictly adhered to.

In fact, life for the aristocracy is nothing but one long suite of "convenances". Count Altamira, condemned to death in his own country for taking part in a conspiracy, and whom Julien meets one night at a ball, says to Julien: "C'est que votre société vieillie prise avant tout les convenances ... vous ne vous élèverez jamais au-dessus de la bravoure militaire; vous aurez des Murat, et jamais de Washington."⁴¹ This strict adherence to the proprieties deprives the aristocracy of all initiative or will-power. Time and again Stendhal refers to the perfect politeness of the young men who form Mathilde's circle, and which only serves to underline their lack of vitality and individuality. For these young men all conform to a set pattern, and any deviation from this pattern is for them a mark of ridicule. In fact, members of the aristocracy are brought up to be little more than insignificant puppets, with no existence of their own. Mathilde, whose tragedy is that she does not share the values of the society she has been born into, remarks to a cousin one day: "Ils sont tous le même homme parfait, prêt à partir pour la Palestine ... Connaissez-vous quelque chose de plus insipide?"⁴² A little later she asks: "Lequel d'entre eux a l'idée de faire quelque chose d'extraordinaire?"⁴³

Stendhal particularly reproached the aristocracy their affectation and fatuity. Julien asks himself at one point: "... et qu'est-ce que je trouve ici? de la vanité sèche et hautaine, toutes les nuances

⁴¹ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 303.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 315.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

de l'amour-propre et rien de plus."⁴⁴ M. le chevalier de Beauvoisis, with whom Julien fights his first and last duel, is perhaps the best example of a young aristocrat that the author gives us. Beautifully groomed and dressed, this young man has attained what Stendhal describes as: "... la perfection et l'insignifiance de la beauté grecque."⁴⁵ The author tells us that: "Sa physionomie, noble et vide, annonçait des idées convenables et rares: l'idéal de l'homme aimable, l'horreur de l'imprévu et de la plaisanterie, beaucoup de gravité."⁴⁶ We are told, too, that M. de Beauvoisis has affected a stammer because he spends much of his time in the company of "un grand seigneur" who happens to be afflicted with this disability.

As for the women Julien meets in Paris, it is Mme de Fervaques who is for him: "... un exemple à peu près parfait de ce 'calme patricien' qui respire une politesse exacte et encore plus l'impossibilité d'aucune vive emotion."⁴⁷ This lady cannot forget that she is the daughter of an industrialist, and in order to gain a reputation for herself, she has become a prude, affecting a life of the very highest virtue. She is also the most powerful lady in France, for she is, as M. de Frilair later tells us: "... nièce toute-puissante de monseigneur l'évêque de * * *, par qui l'on est évêque en France."⁴⁸

Stendhal does not fail to insert in his portrayal of Parisian high society, an outline of the political situation of the time from the point of view of the nobility. This the author does in the episode of

⁴⁴ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 307.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 274.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 410.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 470.

"la note secrète". The marquis de la Mole takes Julien with him, as scribe, to a secret meeting between several members of the nobility and several members of the higher clergy. As we take part in the proceedings at the meeting we become aware of the insecurity felt by the nobility, and their great fear of the liberals. We see the close link between the throne, the Church, and the nobility, in France, and M. de la Mole says during his speech: "Le trône, l'autel, la noblesse peuvent périr demain, Messieurs, tant que vous n'aurez pas créé dans chaque département une force de cinq cents hommes dévoués"⁴⁹ We understand that M. de la Mole and his fellow-conspirators wish to bring about civil war in France, with outside help, precisely in order to strengthen the position of the throne, the Church and the nobility.

In Stendhal's eyes, as the Church in France, for reasons of insecurity, was clinging desperately to the authority of the Pope, similarly the nobility, also through insecurity, were clinging to values that had long since become outmoded. In the section of the novel devoted to portraying high society life in Paris, we feel that Stendhal has admirably evoked the atmosphere of boredom and constraint in which the nobility were forced to live out their lives, and the annihilating effect this mode of living had on them.

Three important factors emerge from Stendhal's portrayal of society in Le Rouge. Firstly, there is his realization that it will not be long before the bourgeoisie are in full control of the state. He depicts the gradual rise to power of this class in his novel. Secondly, he rejects the religion offered by the Church in France, as

⁴⁹ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 387.

being mere dupery, for the Church, he sees, is now nothing more than a profession for men wishing to reach positions of power in society, and in which spiritual values have been forgotten. Thirdly, there is Stendhal's awareness that the aristocracy is a declining force in society.

What is it that interests readers today in Stendhal's depiction of society in Restoration France? The answer, we suggest, lies in the fact that the shape of future society in France and, indeed, in Western capitalist states as a whole, can be deduced from Stendhal's portrayal of the society of his time. For it is true, to start with, that the aristocracy no longer exists in France today as a force to be reckoned with. Even in a country such as Britain, where there still exists a marked class system and a large number of titled people, the House of Lords has only limited power in the government of the country. The aristocracy does not exist in Britain as a united, powerful force. On the American continent this is even less so, and it is here that we have the prime example of wealth being the means to power, the truth of which we see clearly, for example, in the powerful Kennedy family, whose founder member emigrated from Ireland, and built up a fortune from nothing.

Today, therefore, it is with the middle classes in France and the rest of the capitalist West, that the control of society lies, for it is these classes that possess the country's wealth. Stendhal, in Le Rouge, questions the reasoning behind the control of society by people who have reached power simply because of their wealth, which in many cases has been earned by unscrupulous means. In prison Julien says:

Il n'y a point de droit naturel: ce mot n'est qu'une antique niaiserie bien digne de l'avocat général qui m'a donné chasse l'autre jour, et dont l'aïeul fut enrichi par une confiscation de Louis XIV. Il n'y a de droit que lorsqu'il y a une loi pour défendre de faire telle chose, sous peine de punition. Avant la loi, il n'y a de naturel que la force du lion, ou le besoin de l'être qui a faim, qui a froid, le besoin en un mot ... non, les gens qu'on honore ne sont que des fripons qui ont eu le bonheur de n'être pas pris en flagrant délit. L'accusateur que la société lance après moi a été enrichi par une infamie ... J'ai commis un assassinat, et je suis justement condamné, mais, à cette seule action près, le Valenod qui m'a condamné est cent fois plus nuisible à la société. ⁵⁰

Julien in no way attempts to excuse his crime here, he simply asks by what right he is judged by M. Valenod, who is no better a man than he. It is at his trial that he speaks out against the bourgeoisie, who consider that their wealth puts them in a privileged position and entitles them to judge those who have the misfortune to be poor. His crime, he says, is not the murder he has committed, but the fact that he, a poor peasant lad, has dared to try to better himself, and has in fact, almost succeeded. He says:

... Mais quand je serais moins coupable, je vois des hommes qui, sans s'arrêter à ce que ma jeunesse peut mériter de pitié, voudront punir en moi et décourager à jamais cette classe de jeunes gens qui, nés dans une classe inférieure et en quelque sorte opprimés par la pauvreté, ont le bonheur de se procurer une bonne éducation, et l'audace de se mêler à ce que l'orgueil des gens riches appelle la société.

Voilà mon crime, messieurs, et il sera puni avec d'autant plus de sévérité, que, dans le fait, je ne suis point jugé par mes pairs. Je ne vois point sur les bancs des jurés quelque paysan enrichi, mais uniquement des bourgeois indignés.... ⁵¹

We see contemporary writers, in their criticism of society, naturally directing their criticism towards the bourgeoisie, as being

⁵⁰ Stendahl, Le Rouge, p. 502.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 486.

the class in control and the class, therefore, which is responsible for establishing the values of society. Like Stendhal, we find them rejecting society in their works. We think, for example, of Michel in L'Immoraliste, by André Gide, who throws off the values imposed upon him by society throughout his youth, in an attempt to find his "authentic being". Similarly, Meursault, in Camus' L'Etranger, condemned to death by society for being different, is content to die and says: "Pour que tout soit consommé, pour que je me sente moins seul, il me restait à souhaiter qu'il y ait beaucoup de spectateurs le jour de mon exécution et qu'ils m'accueillent avec des cris de haine."⁵²

For Meursault knows he is not wrong in rejecting the values of the society in which he lives, and hopes he will be greeted by an angry crowd at his execution, for this will justify him.

The Church and religion remain controversial topics today, and excite intense personal reactions from people. The Church remains one of the pillars of the state in modern Western society, is still a political force, and reigns supreme over moral issues. It is impossible to generalize about contemporary thinking on matters concerning the Church and religion. However, we feel that parallels can be drawn between Stendhal and those existentialist writers who reject the existence of God as being uncertain, and cling to the individual's personal existence as the only truly sacred thing in the world, being the one reality of which a man can be certain. To the existentialists, it is up to a man to forge his own being and his own destiny. Those who reject God and Christianity do so because Christianity sets down absolutes to live by,

⁵²Camus, L'Etranger (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 172.

and proposes a model to follow. This would appear to be Stendhal's attitude, too, for throughout Le Rouge he condemns those who play roles and live up to models.

In the following chapter we shall deal with Stendhal's conception of the individual in society, better able to understand his attitude for having dealt in this first chapter with his attitude towards, and portrayal of, the society of his time.

CHAPTER II

STENDHAL'S TREATMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN

LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR.

The close relationship between the individual and society is nowhere more explicitly stated in the novel than in the mail-coach episode, when Julien is on his way from Besancon to Paris, though it is implicit throughout the whole novel. In this episode, we are introduced to a man who is abandoning his country home to return to Paris. He tells his companion: "Je fuis l'abominable vie que l'on mène en province."¹ This man had simply wished to be left in peace to live his life as he pleased. He had therefore bought a house in the provinces where he quietly intended to live out the remaining years of his life. He explains:

A Paris, j'étais las de cette comédie perpétuelle, à laquelle oblige ce que vous appelez la civilisation du XIX^e siècle. J'avais soif de bonhomie et de simplicité. J'achète une terre dans les montagnes près du Rhône, rien d'aussi beau sous le ciel.²

However, the society in which he lived in the provinces did not allow him to keep peacefully to himself. He was importuned by the leading men in the district for one reason or another, though he made it clear that he did not wish to become involved in the affairs of the province. He says: "Sur le vaisseau de l'Etat, tout le monde voudra s'occuper de la manœuvre, car elle est bien pavée. N'y aura-t-il donc jamais une

¹Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 235.

²Ibid., p. 236.

pauvre petite place pour le simple passager?"³ Because of his refusal to become involved in the workings of society, and act as the society in which he lived would have had him act, he was persecuted by that society, with the following result, as he explains to his companion: "Je vais chercher la solitude et la paix champêtre au seul lieu ou elles existent en France, dans un quatrième etage donnant sur les Champs-Élysées."⁴ The only workable solution this man could discover for his problem was to lose himself in insignificance in the crowd in Paris where he hoped he would find the peace he required.

There is nothing original in Stendhal's realization that society insidiously imposes upon the individual, and that the latter, whether he likes it or not, is forced to come to terms with society, and choose either to fully accept its values, or reject them. Where he differs from other nineteenth century writers, however, and joins the ranks of contemporary intellectuals, is in his rebellion against the deprivation by society of the individual's freedom. In Le Rouge it is clear that Stendhal considers a person should be allowed to live exactly as he pleases, to be his own master over himself and his own existence. Society does not have the right, he thinks, to dictate to a man what he can or cannot do. This is not to say that Stendhal was advocating crime or immorality, or that the individual assert himself and impose his own views upon society. The individuals Stendhal presents to us in support of his views, Julien and Mme. de Rênal, and in a more limited way, Mathilde, wish only to live their lives as they please,

³Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 236.

⁴Ibid., p. 238.

with no interference from anyone, and without harming anyone. However, society condemns them because they do not conform to the accepted values of society, and makes victims of them.

Camus, in L'Etranger, expresses a similar attitude to the value of the individual life, as does Stendhal in Le Rouge. Meursault is a simple man who takes pleasure in simple things. He lives an uneventful, ordinary life, and refuses the offer of promotion as he sees no point in moving to Paris where life would be fundamentally no different for him than in Alger. After his crime has brought this ordinary, harmless individual to the notice of the public, he is looked upon as a sort of monster when he refuses to be hypocritical and play the game society would have him play. He does not play the role of a heart-broken son when his mother dies, and when the lawyer asks him if he was upset at the funeral, he says: "Ce que je pouvais dire à coup sûr, c'est que j'aurai préféré que maman ne mourût pas. Mais mon avocat n'avait pas l'air content. Il m'a dit: 'Ceci n'est pas assez'."⁵ Meursault freely admits to the examining magistrate that he does not believe in God. The magistrate's reaction is of horror: "Il s'est assis avec indignation. Il m'a dit que c'était impossible, que tous les hommes croyaient en Dieu, même ceux qui se détournent de son visage."⁶ Meursault is indeed condemned for being a criminal, but not on account of the crime he has committed. This is forgotten, for his guiltiness lies, in society's eyes, in the fact that he has dared to be himself instead of the hypocrite society would have him be.

⁵Camus, L'Etranger, p. 94.

⁶Ibid., p. 99.

Hypocrites are indeed what both Stendhal and Camus consider society forces people to be. In the preceding chapter, we showed that many parallels can be drawn between French society during the Restoration and French society today. This accounts for the similarity of attitude between Stendhal and Camus. As Stendhal envisaged society as corrupt and hypocritical, so did Camus, and both feared for the fate of the individual in such a society, which would have the individual suppress his own personality in order to adopt an artificial one which is acceptable to society. The principal character of both Le Rouge and L'Etranger is an ordinary young man belonging to the working class. As such, we feel that Julien and Meursault take on greater proportions, and represent the ordinary people as a whole, at least in the capitalist West, people who would find happiness in simple things, as Julien finds his greatest happiness in his love for Mme. de R  nal, but who are prevented from doing so by social pressures.

In Le Rouge it is M. de R  nal who furnishes us with the best example of what Stendhal considered happened to the individual who was concerned with making his way in society, and maintaining a certain social position. We first see M. de R  nal through the eyes of a visitor from Paris, whose immediate impression is of: "... un grand homme    l'air affair   et important."⁷ The adjective "important" is applied by the author to M. de R  nal as soon as he introduces him, and with good reason, for "l'importance" is this man's sole concern in life. It is of prime importance to him that he be well thought of by the people of Verri  res and by his superiors in Paris. The visitor is

⁷Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 10.

soon shocked, however, by: "... un certain air de contentement de soi et de suffisance mêlée à je ne sais quoi de borné et de peu inventif."⁸ The adjectives "borné" and "peu inventif" have been expressly chosen by the author to convey to the reader at the outset M. de Rênal's mediocrity and utter lack of imagination or initiative.

We soon come to realize that M. de Rênal has no independent existence. Even the jokes to which he owes a certain reputation as a wit and a good social mixer were handed down to him by an uncle. His values are those of the society in which he lives. Never does he consider questioning those values; he is entirely dominated by them and his whole life is composed of one long effort to live up to them, to play the role that is expected of him.

M. de Rênal constantly thinks of other people, and of the impression he is producing upon them. Thus he can never allow himself to relax even for one moment, and enjoy the present. When Julien first comes to his house as tutor to his children, and spends the evening reciting excerpts from the New Testament in Latin, to the delight and admiration of everyone, the mayor is unable to join in the general feeling. All that concerns him is that he thinks he will lose face in front of his family and servants if he too does not display his knowledge of Latin. He hires a tutor for his children merely for appearance sake, for the added prestige this move will give his family in the eyes of the people of Verrières, and considers this project: "... comme une dépense nécessaire pour soutenir notre rang."⁹

⁸ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19

When the mayor is discussing the conditions of employment of Julien, with the latter's father, Stendhal tells us that, seeing that the cunning peasant was getting the better of him: "M. de Rênal vint à penser qu'il serait obligé de raconter à sa femme le rôle qu'il avait joué dans toute cette négociation".¹⁰ Another time, when Mme. de Rênal, her friend Mme. Derville, Julien and the mayor are sitting talking in the garden at Vergy one summer evening, the author tells us: "Cette soirée fut charmante pour tout le monde excepté pour le maire de Verrières, qui ne pouvait oublier ses industriels enrichis."¹¹ The reason that M. de Rênal and his family move to their country home at Vergy for the summer is that the mayor is: "Attentif à copier les habitudes des gens de cour...."¹² We could quote many more occasions which show only too clearly the mayor's constant awareness of other people and his continual desire to make a good impression on them, for it would be no exaggeration to state that in every sentence the mayor utters it is apparent that his mind is always occupied with thoughts of this nature.

Julien describes the mayor at one point as: "Cet automate de mari...."¹³ and it is true that M. de Rênal's puppet-like existence has stripped him of all humanity. He is insensitive to the natural beauty and charm of his wife, and to her feelings. Mme. de Rênal is such a sensitive person that the author tells us that if one of her children falls ill, she becomes nearly as distraught as if the child

¹⁰ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

were dead. She felt the need, in the early years of her marriage, to talk of this to someone and naturally she confided in her husband. But: "Un éclat de rire grossier, un haussement d'épaules, accompagné de quelque maxime triviale sur la folie des femmes, avaient constamment accueilli les confidences de ce genre de chagrins"¹⁴ Similarly, when Mme. de Rênal tells her husband of the meagreness of Julien's wardrobe, and of the latter's refusal to accept a gift of money from Mme. de Rênal so that he might buy some of the items of which he is in need, M. de Rênal is scandalized to think that Julien, a "domestique"¹⁵ had refused his wife's offer. He resolves to have done with the matter by giving Julien a hundred francs, but Mme. de Rênal begs her husband not to give the money to Julien in front of the servants. Her husband replies: "Oui, ils pourraient être jaloux et avec raison."¹⁶ Never for a moment does the thought that in this affair Julien's dignity has suffered, enter the mayor's head.

M. de Rênal's attitude towards his wife is that she is a useful possession. Julien is merely an impoverished peasant lad, and as such, deserves no consideration. For the mayor everything, objects and people alike, must serve a purpose — in some way or another they must "rapporter du revenu".¹⁷ It is because the mayor treats people as objects that he has no friends in the deeper sense of the word. Indeed, he is incapable of forming any deep personal relationship, for with his thoughts con-

¹⁴Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 43.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 14.

tinually on other people and on gaining consideration, his time has been wholly spent cultivating his public self. He has had no time to devote to his private self which, through neglect, has withered away. M. de R  nal communicates with people only "par int  r  t" and never simply for the pure pleasure of establishing personal relationships.

The strains and tensions imposed upon a man who is continually occupied with his public image and with maintaining his position, are apparent in M. de R  nal's deep-seated, obsessive fear of the liberals, by whom he feels his position threatened. He makes repeated references to the liberals throughout the section of the novel devoted to the provinces. For example, when M. Appert comes from Paris to inspect the prison, the hospital and the poor-house, he answers his wife, who innocently wonders what harm M. Appert can cause the authorities of Verri  res: "Il ne vient que pour d  verser le bl  me, et ensuite il fera ins  rer des articles dans les journaux du lib  ralisme."¹⁸ A little later, when M. de R  nal tells his wife of his intention of employing Julien as tutor to their children, he expresses doubts as to the political inclinations of this young man, who had spent much of his youth in the company of an old ex-army surgeon, of whom the mayor says: "Cet homme pouvait fort bien n'  tre au fond qu'un agent secret des lib  raux."¹⁹ Further on in the same conversation, he says to his wife: "Ne dissimulons rien, nous sommes environn  s de lib  raux ici."²⁰ When the authorities are making the necessary arrangements for the king's visit to Verri  res, the mayor is adamant that M. Ch  lan, the

¹⁸ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

old curate who was relieved of his post after daring to act against the wishes of the town authorities, shall figure among the members of the clergy taking part in the ceremony at the abbey of Bray-le-Haut.

The mayor explains:

... je n'exposerai pas l'administration de Verrières à recevoir un affront de M. de La Mole. Vous ne le connaissez pas, il pense bien à la cour; mais ici, en province, c'est un mauvais plaisant satirique, moqueur, ne cherchant qu'à embarrasser les gens. Il est capable, uniquement pour s'amuser, de nous couvrir de ridicule aux yeux des libéraux.²¹

However, it is in the chapter depicting the mayor's torments as he tries to decide on a course of action after receiving the anonymous letter informing him of his wife's infidelity, that we gain the most insight into the state of anxiety in which the mayor lives, pre-occupied as he is with the figure he is cutting in society. For such a man, the ultimate tragedy is to lose the consideration he has won from people, and which means more than anything else to him. It is neither in his love, nor his pride, that the mayor suffers. What causes his suffering is the thought of the scandal and ridicule that will ensue if the matter becomes known to the people of Verrières. He even goes as far as to exclaim: "Dieu! que ma femme n'est-elle morte! alors je serais inattaquable au ridicule."²²

We see, in this episode, how completely dependent upon others the mayor is. He has no resources at all within himself, to cope with this situation. Any affair to do with his public self he is fully capable of coping with, but in the case of private matters, he is

²¹ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, pp. 105, 106.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

helpless. He has no friends to turn to, and his wife, with whom he is accustomed to discussing things, is his worst enemy at this time. Nevertheless, it is Mme. de Rênal who helps her husband find a solution to the situation. She knows her husband well, and is thus able to steer him skilfully and steadily in the direction of a workable solution.

From the French provinces we move now into Parisian high society to consider the case of Mathilde de La Mole. Mathilde is a girl of spirit and determination, qualities which differentiate her from the other members of her society. We dealt in the preceding chapter with the withering effect the mode of life imposed on the aristocracy during the Restoration period had on the members of this class, reducing them to mere puppets. Mathilde provides a sharp contrast with the young men who form her circle, and who are all the epitome of the perfect young gentleman, and lack any kind of individuality. The academician, talking to Julien one day at the Hôtel de La Mole, remarks: "... mais, entre nous, ce n'est pas précisément par la force du caractère qu'on brille dans cette maison. Mademoiselle Mathilde en a pour eux tous, et les mène."²³ Mathilde is isolated in the midst of the society in which she lives, and we see here similarities with the feeling of isolation Meursault experiences in L'Etranger, especially at his trial, when he senses a great difference between himself and the people in the courtroom, who are there to judge him. Meursault's isolation, however, has metaphysical aspects also, which are lacking in the

²³Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 307.

case of Mathilde. She nevertheless joins forces with Meursault on the level of social isolation.

Mathilde despises the other members of her society for the way they adhere rigidly and meekly to "les convenances" and show no originality or will. She shows her contempt for these people quite openly, in the salon at the Hôtel de La Mole, for example, where she alleviates the boredom she feels, by exercising her caustic wit on the salon-goers. We think, too, of her behaviour at the ball at the Hôtel de Retz, when, bored by the company, and displeased at Julien's barely disguised contempt for her, she dances with le comte de Fervaques, in order to distract herself from her thoughts. The author tells us:

Bientôt tout le reste de la contredanse ne dansa que par contenance. On ne voulait pas perdre une des reparties piquantes de Mathilde. M. de Fervaques se troublait, et, ne trouvant que des paroles élégantes, au lieu d'idées, faisait des mines; Mathilde, qui avait de l'humeur, fut cruelle pour lui et s'en fit un ennemi. ²⁴

The society in which she lives affords Mathilde no outlet for the characteristics she possesses, and she despairs when she contemplates the stereotyped, predictable life she will lead if she agrees to marry M. de Croisenois, as her father wishes. She says:

Voilà Croisenois qui prétend m'épouser; il est doux, poli, il a des manières parfaites comme M. de Rouvray. Sans l'ennui qu'ils donnent, ces messieurs seraient fort aimables. Lui aussi me suivra au bal avec cet air borné et content. Un an après le mariage, ma voiture, mes chevaux, mes robes, mon château a vingt lieues de Paris, tout cela sera aussi bien que possible, tout a fait ce qu'il faut pour faire périr d'envie une parvenue, une comtesse de Roiville par exemple; et après?... Mathilde s'ennuyait en espoir. ²⁵

²⁴ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 302.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 292, 293.

We see that Mathilde does not share her father's dream that she become a duchess, by marrying M. de Croisenois. Thus it is, that in order to bring a little challenge and excitement into her life, Mathilde flouts "les convenances" in many ways, small at first. She replies, for example, to letters written to her by the young men in her circle in terms which, if discovered, would severely compromise her. At the ball at the Hôtel de Retz she, the daughter of a distinguished nobleman, who is necessarily a staunch supporter of the throne, thinks nothing of engaging in conversation with Count Altamira, a liberal who has been sentenced to death in his own country for taking part in a conspiracy.

However, it is her relationship with Julien that is the prime example of Mathilde's disregard of "les convenances". Unable to bear the thought of what the future holds in store for her if she marries one of the unimaginative young dandies of her society, she singles out Julien as being the only young man who is worthy of her, regardless of the fact that in the eyes of the rest of her class, Julien is merely a servant in the employment of her father. For in Mathilde's eyes, Julien possesses qualities which distinguish him from, and indeed, place him above the young aristocrats who surround her. All that he lacks, she feels, is noble birth and a fortune. She foresees a distinguished future for Julien and says:

Compagne d'un homme tel que Julien, auquel il ne manque que de la fortune que j'ai, j'exciterai continuellement l'attention, je ne passerai point inaperçue dans la vie. Bien loin de redouter sans cesse une révolution comme mes cousines, qui de peur du peuple n'osent pas gronder un postillon qui les mène mal, 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. ²⁶

²⁶ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 360.

In this passage, we see another important factor concerning Mathilde's character coming into play. This is her great wish to make her mark on the world in some outstanding fashion. Soon after Stendhal introduced her into the novel, he told us that she wears mourning once a year, in memory of her ancestor, Boniface de La Mole, who was executed in 1574. She admires this man, who lost his life because he dared to attempt a courageous act, and she idolizes his mistress, Margeurite de Navarre, who showed the strength of character to demand his head after the execution, and bury it herself. Mathilde thinks she possesses qualities which fit her for a destiny as heroic as that of Margeurite de Navarre, in fact, a heroic destiny is the only one she considers worthy of her. Her affair with Julien is an attempt on Mathilde's part to reconstruct the relationship of Boniface de La Mole and Margeurite. The supreme proof of this comes at the end of the novel, when Mathilde, too, buries Julien's head herself.

It is in dreams of a heroic past and of playing glorious roles that we feel Mathilde liberates herself from the society of her own time, which affords her no opportunity, especially as she is a woman, of leading her life as she would please. Her dreams are also her means of escaping from the dismal truth of reality, which she expresses in the following sentence: "Siècle dégénéré et ennuyeux!"²⁷ and save her from certain despair, for she can envisage no remedy to the situation. Mathilde, however, does not stop at dreams, she also dares to put them into action, as we see in her relationship with Julien.

²⁷Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 334.

We feel that Stendhal has great admiration for many of Mathilde's qualities, mainly for the courage she shows in going against "les convenances" and acting in a positive, individualistic way, in contrast to the passivity of the other members of her society. However, at the same time Stendhal shows us that Mathilde has not remained entirely immune to the values imposed on her by her aristocratic upbringing. This shows especially in Mathilde's extreme pride, both in the position of her family, which occupies one of the highest places in the ranks of the nobility, and in herself, for she has continually been told, throughout her early youth, of all her many advantages, physical, mental and material. Her pride makes her think that she is a girl who is destined for greater things than other young women of her position. She says: "Tout doit être singulier dans le sort d'une fille comme moi..."²⁸

Although in one sense Mathilde dominates her pride in choosing to have a relationship with the son of a provincial peasant, on the other hand her very choice of Julien springs directly from her pride, for she sees him to be different from the other young men around her, and thinks the future holds great things in store for him.

Her pride is the reason, too, that Mathilde continually wishes to impress other people by her actions, and thus prove her superiority. We see this especially when Julien is in prison and she risks her reputation by coming to Besançon and making no secret of her identity, but making as much show of her love as possible. Stendhal says of her: "... il fallait toujours l'idée d'un public et des autres à l'âme hautaine de Mathilde."²⁹ This desire for show is nowhere more explicit

²⁸ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 336.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

than in Mathilde's behaviour after Julien's execution, when she arranges an elaborate funeral service, and later has the cave in which he is buried, decorated with ornate sculptures.

Though Mathilde has certain qualities of character which her environment has imposed upon her, yet she possesses other characteristics which make her rebel against the society in which she lives. This society has deprived her of the freedom to live as she pleases, and she feels trapped in it. Her behaviour springs directly from her desire to liberate herself and show her independence. This she does in the only way possible for a woman at that time -- by risking her reputation. We would suggest that women in many societies today may feel an affinity with Mathilde, and sympathize with her predicament. For although women in modern Western society now have the opportunity to express themselves as individuals in various careers, yet they still occupy a subordinate position in society.

From Mathilde, we turn to Julien, the young man she singled out as being the only one worthy of her, and whom she loved so much in her own fashion. Julien's case is complicated, and has often been misunderstood, as by the critic who described him as an "ambitious and monstrous egotist", who:

... by dint of patience and daemonic energy becomes private secretary to a great nobleman ... in the end he dies on the scaffold for having, in an outburst of ferocity, attempted to murder his first mistress. The whole elaborately constructed edifice of lies and hypocrisy which compose his existence collapses then because for one fatal moment he was his true self, the vindictive and envious peasant lad whose imagination was corrupted by the "Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène".³⁰

³⁰F. C. Green, French Novelists from the Revolution to Proust (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 128.

Had Julien in fact been the ruthless "ambitieux" Mr. Green sees him to be, we are in no doubt that he would have succeeded in his ambitions, for in Paris, he becomes friendly with that influential lady, Mme. de Fervaques, and thus comes within easy reach of a bishopric. Nor would he have risked his future by shooting Mme. de Rênal. Had his ambition to succeed in the Church been sincere, he would not have compromised himself, in a Jesuit-controlled religion, by associating with the Jansenist, l'abbé Pirard, and by going with him, in Paris, to Jansenist gatherings. In order to further his interests, he might also have betrayed his employer, M. de La Mole, after the episode of the "note secrète".

The key to Julien's behaviour is given to us early by the author. He says: "Objet des mépris de tous à la maison, il haïssait ses frères et son père; dans les jeux du dimanche, sur la place publique, il était toujours battu."³¹ Throughout his childhood and early youth, Julien has been humiliated, both publicly and at home. He therefore suffers from an acute sense of inferiority. Because he is: "Méprisé de tout le monde, comme un être faible...."³² Julien feels a great need to prove himself, both to himself and to others. For a long time Julien's pride has suffered - we see in fact that it remains hypersensitive throughout the whole novel - and he wishes to regain his own self-respect and the admiration of other people. Stendhal tells us:

Dès sa première enfance, il avait eu des moments d'exaltation. Alors il songeait avec délices qu'un jour il serait présenté aux jolies femmes de Paris, il saurait attirer leur attention par quelque action d'éclat.³³

³¹ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 24.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 30.

It is from his romantic nature as much as his feeling of inferiority that Julien's "ambition" springs. For he has spent much time reading the Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène, and talking to a retired army surgeon who served in one of Napoleon's campaigns, and he dreams of a future as glorious as that of Bonaparte, like all young men of spirit and imagination. He feels he possesses the necessary qualities, but is unsure of himself and wants to prove himself. However, the author soon tells us that Julien's "ambition" is, in fact, little more than the desire to leave Verrières, which holds nothing but unhappy memories for him. We become gradually more aware, too, during the course of the novel, that Julien is entirely unsuited to making his way in society. He is far from being a ruthless "ambitieux", in fact this is merely a role he is playing.

We see Julien playing many roles throughout the novel. However, these spring as much from his feeling of inferiority as does his "ambition". While he is under the illusion that the way to happiness lies, for him, in the fulfillment of his "ambition", Julien knows that he must reckon with other people, for it is with them that his future success lies. Preoccupied then with the effect he is having on others, he plays roles, for he is as yet unsure of himself, and fears ridicule. None of the roles he plays becomes natural to him, and takes over his own personality, however, as we saw that M. de Rênal's role as a public figure had entirely usurped his personality.

When Julien goes into employment in the Rênal household, he is young and inexperienced. To protect himself from possible ridicule, he follows the model set by Napoleon and makes careful plans of campaign

for all his actions. The first night he spends with Mme. de Rênal, he attempts to play the role of an accomplished seducer, for in reality he is terrified at the prospect, and unsure of himself. We also see him playing the role of a hypocrite for the greater part of the novel, seeing this as necessary if he is to make his way in a hypocritical society. But he never becomes a consummated hypocrite, like so many of the other members of society. We learn early in the novel that Julien has understood the protective possibilities of hypocrisy, for when we first meet him, he uses it in an attempt to ward off his father's anger, and we see that hypocrisy remains, for Julien, a defensive measure throughout his life. If Julien pays great attention to his personal appearance, this, too, springs from his feeling of insecurity. For example, at the home of the Rênals', he hears one of the servants call him "ce précepteur crasseux"³⁴ one day, and as a result takes all the more care for his appearance. When he goes to Strasbourg towards the end of the novel to take up a position as a cavalry lieutenant, he is eager to make a good impression and sees the importance of an impressive outward appearance for gaining the respect of the men.

Julien's feeling of inferiority stems not only from the way he has been treated by his family, and the society in which he grew up, but also from the class-system which existed at the time. He is always conscious, as he rises to the uppermost circles of French society, that he is merely the son of a carpenter, and he makes several bitter allusions to his humble status at various times in the novel. For example,

³⁴Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 42.

when he is employed as tutor in the Rênal household, M. de Rênal insults him one day for spending the morning alone, and neglecting the children. Julien thinks: "Quoi! ..., pas même cinq cents francs de rente pour terminer mes études! Ah! Comme je l'enverrais promener!"³⁵ When he is in the service of M. de La Mole, and has received a letter from Mathilde in which she declares her love for him, Julien has a few pangs of conscience when he thinks of the hopes M. de La Mole has for the future of his daughter, and of this man's kindness to himself. However, his thoughts soon take on another direction and he exclaims:

Que je suis bon, ...; moi, plébéien, avoir pitié d'une famille de ce rang! Moi, que le duc de Chaulnes appelle un domestique! Comment le marquis augmente-t-il son immense fortune? En vendant de la rente quand il apprend au château qu'il y aura le lendemain apparence de coup d'Etat. Eh moi, jeté au dernier rang par une Providence marâtre, moi à qui elle a donné un cœur noble et pas mille francs de rente, c'est-à-dire pas de pain, exactement parlant pas de pain; moi, refuser un plaisir qui s'offre! ³⁶

In the first chapter we dealt with Stendhal's views on the injustices of a social system which is controlled by people with wealth, to the detriment of those who for one reason or another, are poor. Contemporary writers too, we noted, are concerned with this problem, which still prevails today, though the lower classes have considerably more rights nowadays than they did in Stendhal's day. However, we must add here that Julien is far from being a pioneer in society for his class, in fact, he is just as much an outsider in his own class as in the rest of society, and Stendhal describes him at one point as: "... l'homme malheureux en guerre avec toute la société."³⁷

³⁵ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

In spite of Julien's desire to be other than he is, in order to fulfill his "ambition", so that at one point he goes as far as to exclaim: "Grand Dieu! Pourquoi suis-je moi?"³⁸ yet we see that Julien remains himself at heart. Though he tries to suppress his true feelings, these are nevertheless revealed whenever Julien is not consciously surveying himself, or whenever he is with someone with whom he instinctively feels he can be natural without seeming ridiculous, for example, M. Chélan, l'abbé Pirard and Mme. de Rênal. By behaving in a way which is not natural to him, Julien gains little pleasure from life. He is under constant strain and is unable to relax for the most part and enjoy the very process of living, for fear of destroying the image he is trying to present of himself to other people. At Verrières, he is blind to the happiness which is within his grasp and his mind is filled with thoughts of the future. He abhors his existence in the seminary at Besançon, yet he endures it for the sake of his "ambition". He is unhappy in Paris and even more so in his relationship with Mathilde, which continually forces him to be inauthentic. It is only when he is in prison, and his "ambition" has been irremediably thwarted, that Julien finally achieves lucidity, and realizes the hollowness of ambition and worldly glory. The author tells us: "La vie n'était point ennuyeuse pour lui, il considèrait toutes choses sous un nouvel aspect. Il n'avait plus d'ambition."³⁹

It is when he is in prison and is isolated from other people and no longer needs to occupy himself with worldly concerns, that Julien

³⁸ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 421.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

finally has the opportunity to come to terms with himself and with the meaning of existence. He realizes now that the happiest hours in his life were those he spent at Vergy with Mme. de Rênal, and that it was his empty ambition which had blinded him to this simple truth. He achieves true happiness for the first time in his life when Mme. de Rênal comes to visit him in prison and he can devote all his attention to enjoying the present, unoccupied by any thoughts of the future, or of making an impression on others.

Various truths, to which he has been blind before, dawn on Julien slowly but surely during his time in prison. He suddenly realizes the supreme value of true friendship when Fouqué visits him and says that he is ready to sacrifice all to save his friend. Julien now realizes that he does not love Mathilde and feels a great sense of guilt because of this: "Plus honnête homme à l'approche de la mort qu'il ne l'avait été durant sa vie, il avait des remords non seulement envers M. de La Mole, mais aussi pour Mathilde."⁴⁰ He feels a sense of responsibility towards Mathilde and makes plans for her future. He now comes, too, to a complete understanding of Mathilde's character, and of her desire for heroism. On the other hand, it is only now that he realizes how much he loves Mme. de Rênal, and when she comes to visit him, for the first time in their relationship he is fully appreciative of her and realizes the great sacrifices she has made for him.

It is in prison that Julien refuses once and for all to find consolation in religion. This he would consider a sign of weakness on

⁴⁰ Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 473.

his part. He asks:

Et que me restera-t-il ... si je me méprise moi-même?
J'ai été ambitieux, je ne veux point me blâmer; alors j'ai
agi suivant les convenances du temps. Maintenant, je vis
au jour le jour. Mais à vue de pays, je me ferais fort
malheureux, si je me livrais à quelque lâcheté.⁴¹

Julien also rejects, finally, the conventional morality accepted by society, when he is in prison, realizing that the law is on the side of the strong, who are strong only because of their wealth, and who condemn, without thought, the weak, whose crimes are no worse than their own. Contemplating the fact that even his hero, Napoleon, was guilty of falseness at the end of his life, Julien comes to the pessimistic conclusion: "Non, l'homme ne peut pas se fier à l'homme."⁴²

If the existence of God is uncertain, and the possibility of an after-life is minimal, and if the social set-up is illogical and unjust and most men are not to be trusted, what certainty remains for a man to cling to? The answer, Stendhal seems to be saying in Le Rouge, is one's own existence, which is precious, and ought not to be abused. We cannot help but call to mind at this point the similarities between Stendhal's attitude, and that of Camus, as expressed in L'Etranger. It is in prison that Meursault, too, achieves lucidity and is finally able to put into words what he has felt for so long. It is when he is being visited by the prison chaplain that Meursault suddenly becomes eloquent. He says:

Il avait l'air si certain, n'est-ce pas? Pourtant, aucune de ses certitudes ne valait un cheveu de femme. Il n'était même pas sûr d'être en vie puisqu'il vivait comme un mort. Moi, j'avais l'air d'avoir les mains vides. Mais j'étais

⁴¹Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 473.

⁴²Ibid., p. 503.

sûr de moi, sûr de tout, plus sûr que lui, sûr de ma vie et de cette mort qui allait venir. Oui, je n'avais que cela. Mais du moins, je tenais cette vérité autant qu'elle me tenait.⁴³

Both Stendhal and Camus show, however, in their novels, through the examples of Julien and Meursault, that society denies the individual the freedom to live as he please, and will condemn him if he shows the courage to differ from the accepted norm. Yet on the other hand, we see that it is in fact society which is responsible for the behaviour of both these people whose characters are such that they are unable to let society take their individuality from them.

We come finally to the last of the major characters in Le Rouge, Mme. de Rênal. She is the character for whom the reader will feel the most sympathy, we feel. Almost the first thing the author tells us about Mme. de Rênal is: "Elle avait un certain air de simplicité ..."⁴⁴ As "importance" was the key word to the character of M. de Rênal, so "simplicité" is the key word to that of his wife. There is no affectation at all in Mme. de Rênal. She has remained untouched by the "flatteries précoces" she received at the Jesuit convent she attended in her youth, nor has her marriage to M. de Rênal, now mayor of Verrières, given her any cause for presumption or vanity.

Mme. de Rênal has no concern to impress people, or to be other than she is. Indeed, she lives withdrawn from society as much as possible. She has no interests in common with the society women of Verrières, and the behaviour of M. Valenod, and, we conclude, of the

⁴³ A. Camus, L'Etranger, p. 169.

⁴⁴ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 19.

entire class of people of whom he is the chief representative in the novel, offends her. Stendhal tells us when he first introduces her into the novel: "Pourvu qu'on la laissât seule errer dans son beau jardin, elle ne se plaignait jamais."⁴⁵ Far from considering it a mark of disgrace as the number of people who come to call on her diminishes, as would most women of her social position, Mme. de Rênal is only too thankful to be relieved of the task of entertaining people with whom she feels no particular affinity.

Mme. de Rênal's lack of affectation springs, then, firstly from the fact that she lives, on the whole "loin des regards des hommes"⁴⁶ and is therefore not continually preoccupied with the effect she is having on others. She is, however, as conscious of other people as the other characters in the novel. Like Julien, she is timid and fears ridicule and has no desire to make a public spectacle of herself. When the word "adultery" first comes into her mind in connection with her relationship with Julien, the author tells us:

Tantôt elle craignait de n'être pas aimée, tantôt l'affreuse idée du crime la torturait comme si le lendemain elle eût dû être exposée au pilori sur la place publique de Verrières⁴⁷ avec un écriteau expliquant son adultère à la populace.

The second reason for Mme. de Rênal's naturalness is that she had received little education of any value at the Jesuit convent she attended, she does not read, nor does she spend much time in discussion with others. She therefore has no preconceived notions about things, and no models to follow, but reacts instinctively and spontaneously to life.

⁴⁵Stendhal, *Le Rouge*, p. 20

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 74.

Unpretentious and unworldly, Mme. de Rênal is a simple, ordinary, rather self-effacing character, with no particularly outstanding qualities. Before the arrival of Julien in her household, she has been content with her lot, for the simple reason that she is unaware that life for her could be any different or any better. She has been a devoted wife and mother. However, when Julien arrives, she feels an immediate affinity with him and begins to notice the reality of her life, and to compare Julien to the other people around her.

Mme. de Rênal's lack of affectation is best seen in her relationship with Julien, which evolves slowly and naturally, and in which she is guided entirely by her heart. We think of the difference between her love for Julien, and that of Mathilde, who was guided entirely by reason. Mme. de Rênal is unaware of the fact that she is falling in love. Love takes control of her heart through no design on her part, and if she begins to take a greater interest in her appearance, the author remarks: "Une chose singulière, qui trouvera peu de croyance parmi nous, c'était sans intention directe que madame de Rênal se livrait à tant de soins."⁴⁸ We think once again of the difference between Mme. de Rênal and Mathilde, whose feelings for Julien are described by the author at one point as "un peu voulus."⁴⁹

In her love for Julien, Mme. de Rênal finds genuine happiness, such as she has never experienced before. She is, however, aware that in the eyes of society and the Church, her relationship with Julien is wrong. A sincerely religious person, she thought that this relationship

⁴⁸Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 57.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 349.

is a sin in the eyes of God causes her extreme suffering, especially when her youngest child falls seriously ill, for she sees in this a mark of God's anger. On the other hand, she shows no genuine desire to suppress her love and says at one point: "Mais au fond, je ne me repens point. Je commettrais de nouveau ma faute si elle était à commettre."⁵⁰

There is nothing egotistical about Mme. de Rênal's love for Julien. Once she has given herself to him, she thinks only of him, and is completely selfless. When she is absent from Julien, her life loses all meaning, and we learn at the end of the novel, that, believing after Julien left the provinces to go to Paris, that she would never see him again, she has often wished for death. She has no real desire, either, to recover from the gun-shot wound inflicted on her by Julien, and, in fact, would have been only too happy to die by his hand.

Mme. de Rênal is presented by Stendhal as a perfect example of womanhood. Gentle, unassuming and selfless, she cannot but excite the reader's sympathy. She is not, however, seen to be weak in any way, and throughout the novel we see examples of her courage and quiet determination. So unlike Mathilde, yet she possesses as much spirit as the latter, and is just as much a rebel against society as is Mathilde, but in her own quiet way.

Like Mathilde and Julien, Mme. de Rênal is an outsider in her society, whose values she does not share. Until Julien's arrival in household, she has lived in isolation, and her children have been her only comfort in life. Like other women of similar social status, she

⁵⁰ Stendhal, Le Rouge, p. 122.

has made what is considered by society to be a good marriage, but it is obvious to the reader that this is a sterile relationship, from which Mme. de Rênal gains nothing. It is her relationship with Julien that brings meaning to her life. Society and religion, however, have dictated that this relationship is wrong. Like Mathilde and Julien, Mme. de Rênal is deprived by society of the freedom to do as she pleases, without interference. Yet we see that her love for Julien is too strong for her to suppress, and her relationship with Julien thus becomes her way of rebelling against society.

In this chapter we have thought it necessary to consider at length the four major characters in Le Rouge, in order to show to the fullest possible extent Stendhal's view, which is identical to that of present-day intellectuals, that an authentic life is of supreme value to the individual, and his condemnation, which is also identical to that of intellectuals today, of a society which prevents the individual from living an authentic life. For in a hypocritical, corrupt and unjust society, in a world beset with doubts and uncertainties, Stendhal sees, in common with contemporary intellectuals, that a man has one certainty in life, and this is his own existence. A man's sole means of happiness in his life lies, thinks Stendhal, in enjoying his existence to the full, and society has no right to deprive him of the freedom to do so.

M. de Rênal, in Le Rouge, is an example of the dehumanizing effect on a man of a too-rigid conformity to the values of society. He is seen as a basically unhappy man, insecure, and fearful of the future. He is contrasted by Stendhal to the other three major characters

in his novel, whom, as we have shown in this chapter, Stendhal develops into fully rounded characters, so that the reader can more readily sympathize with them. These three characters show the courage to live, not as society dictates, but in accordance with their own inclinations. All three come to a tragic end. Julien and Mme. de Rênal end in death, and Mathilde, we are led to suppose, resumes her life in Paris, which for her, is no less tragic a fate. All three characters are, however, victorious over society, for they have dared to disregard its values and its restrictions and follow their own inclinations, and from this, they have gained supreme happiness.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to show, in this thesis, that Stendhal's attitude towards Restoration Society, as expressed in his novel, Le Rouge et le Noir, differs little from the attitude of contemporary intellectuals towards society today, in France and indeed in the modern capitalistic West as a whole. We have drawn frequent parallels between the attitude of Stendhal, as seen in Le Rouge, and that of Camus, as expressed in his novel, L'Etranger. From Stendhal's novel we gain a picture of a reactionary, highly materialistic society, which was in no way facing up to the reality of the situation at the time in France, by attempting to ignore the events of the previous twenty years, and which tended to disregard simple human values. Contemporary writers also represent modern society as upholding values which are very much to be questioned, and indeed we see that these values are being questioned by an increasing number of people, especially young people, who form minority groups which continue to be persecuted by society as a whole.

There are many comparisons which may be made between Le Rouge and the works of contemporary writers. We have dealt in this thesis with the most obvious point of comparison, which is the way Stendhal, like contemporary authors, pits one individual alone against society, and shows the individual to be right and society to be wrong. Mme. de Renal and Mathilde rebel alone against their immediate surroundings,

and Julien rebels alone against society as a whole. It is this isolated rebellion which links Stendhal especially to writers of today, and we end with the words of a perceptive critic:

Psychologists ... would doubtless speak of maladjustment. But is it not rather a unique adjustment, when a writer faces his frustrations and misadventures with an insight and a gaiety which illumine his books and exhilarate his readers? Should one not rather speak of a society which was maladjusted, a time which was out of joint? If we talk of failure, let us talk of the failure of the Revolution to live up to its promise.¹

¹H. Levin, The Gates of Horn. A Study of Five French Realists. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 97.

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