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## DECISION IN THE CHARTREUSE: STENDHAL ON STAGE

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### Abstract

Stendhal's composition of the *Chartreuse de parme* takes us through an operatic scenario where all is stage effect, the excitation of the audience through conventional devices. We have a political novel acted out for emotional logic, a historical romance following Scott but subjected to classical irony. The subject disappears in the fireworks of words, and we have through exciting actions an example of the text digesting itself, a game, a novel (shockingly!) about nothing. It is a different direction for the novel craft, a novel acting the part of a novel. It is Stendhal.

### Keywords

Chartreuse, Stendhal's Composition, Stage, Novel

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The *Chartreuse* shows Stendhal anticipating, again, the indecision and nullity of politics as theater. Mosca and Sanseverina are actors, improvising roles which have no play to perform in, characters in search of a stage, a government to practice in. The interest for Stendhal is not the plot, which he often dismisses at his convenience, but insecure, indecisive mental state of the characters, especially Fabrice, facing shadows, ghosts. In the initial climax of the book, Waterloo, Napoleon, the puppet master, the controller of destinies, is absent, not in control. The novel follows from that premise, the emptiness of leadership, in fact the unbridgeable gap between what is supposedly happening, what is intended, and what really takes place. Stendhal understands politics; Stendhal understands theater. Stendhal, Chef d'orchestre, presents his opera. Poses, gestures and emotions are the language here; we go to see the virtuosi. The Chef draws the expected and dramatic emotional performance from them, from passion to comic duet. The pattern comes from the Renaissance Farnese manuscripts Stendhal read in the Papal libraries—the burlesque style is of the comic operas Stendhal loved.

The contrast between politics and Fabrice's adolescent narcissism is a sort of magic realism. It is impossible to know what is happening in Parma—the world—because the powers and goals are indistinct. There is no economic basis for this geographic entity. Italy is a stage, a construct for gestures and emotions as a . . . “Stories are suspended between rival impossibilities, between two sets of explanations for a puzzling event, neither of which will do. . . . In every case the story escapes toward mystery, into a dimension of its own.” Wood, *Stendhal*, 175.

Moreover there is a hiatus, an aporia between thought and act—and between act and effect. One does not know where one is in this world, what the language and topography are. All is corrupt—but corruption means uncertainty, guesswork. What do you have to do to find out what you should do? Intention disappears as an active state. The words of political expression don't have quantifiable meaning. Politics here is a language game with no rules, the rules yet to be invented, assembled, like tiles on a Scrabble board, scabbled.

Stendhal has written the novel Flaubert dreamed of, a novel about nothing, since all meaning melts away. Meaning is a process, a pose. More, the subject, the interest is in the nothing, the disappearance of cause and effect, at Waterloo and at Parma. But there is interest in the “nothing”, things happen, almost at random; ideas are tossed around, we are told there are love affairs though we find them hard to believe. There is novelistic invention—but it goes nowhere. There is nowhere to go, that is the essence, the lesson of the novels; and Fabrice like Julien tires of the game. The sarcasm, the bon mot is the point: “La premiere qualité chez un jeune homme aujourd'hui, c'est-à-dire pendant cinquante ans peut-être, tant que nous aurons peur et que la religion ne sera point rétablie, c'est de n'être pas susceptible d'enthousiasme et de n'avoir pas d'esprit.” (Gutenberg E-book Chapter six, 126-7) The cynicism is so overwhelming the words do not connect:

Fabrice rejeta d'abord bien loin le parti de l'Eglise; il parlait d'aller à New York, de se faire citoyen et soldat républicain en Amérique.

\_ Quelle erreur est la tienne! Tu n'auras pas la guerre, et tu retombes dans la vie de café, seulement sans élégance, sans musique, sans amours répliqua la duchesse. Crois-moi, pour toi comme pour moi, ce serait une triste vie que celle d'Amérique.

Elle lui expliqua le culte du dieu dollar, et ce respect qu'il faut avoir pour les artisans de la rue, qui par leurs votes décident de tout. On revint au parti de l'Eglise. (chapter six; Paris: Garnier 1973, 130)

The words disassociate, they decompose, and the rich chemical agents, the amino acids, lie around for us to pick up. Politics, what breeds in this polis, is a breakup of the city into competing agents each claiming ideological dominance. The definition of politics is thus multiplicity, lack of clarity, a field of not-knowing; so politics is no politics, no polity, not just competition but a state of exclusion of meaning for the individual. Stendhal's various novelistic attempts end at this point, taking apart society's language and leaving us fascinated by the picaresque void... .. Why does Fabrice have to hide so much? Hide from himself, hide from the author? Hide because there is nothing to show openly, the emperor is not wearing clothes. There is no inside to the outside adventuring: Fabrice is elsewhere. Fabrice's cell is his freedom—at least there the walls define him. But that is still a hollow, and he like Julien puts down the dice. Perhaps all great novelists have a negative conclusion—language comes to an end. Here the word becomes distasteful. If we follow the character, we don't wish these colliding tastes, we don't want more of this meal, we wish to leave the table. We have reached the meaning of not-meaning, the empty words. Let the others play. Though young, the heroes retire. ... Life is exhausting, freedom is death. What message is the author as gourmet offering? On the one hand Italy is an opera; on the other that artificial world is what we live for, what we long for. The disconnect is the real. Fabrice receives messages in his tower, but he doesn't want messages important only to those down below. He doesn't respond to that frequency. He is overloaded with mental fragments. He has taken them apart. He knows the words have unscrambled themselves into a straight line graph. The language patient is dead—let's try something else. We can be happy in the non-existent Charterhouse. We can have a conversation with ourselves, all those brilliant things we never got around or remembered to say.

De tout ceci, on peut tirer cette morale, que l'homme qui approche de la cour compromet son bonheur, s'il est heureux, et, dans tous les cas, fait dépendre son avenir des intrigues d'une femme de chambre.

D'un autre côté, en Amérique, dans la république, il faut s'ennuyer toute la journée à faire une cour sérieuse aux boutiquiers de la rue, et devenir aussi bête qu'eux; et là, pas d'Opéra.

. . . il était allé reprendre son ancienne chambre à la citadelle, trop heureux d'habiter à quelques pas de Clélia. (Chapter 6)

The court or the prison? In the end both are lives to be escaped. We know too much to wish to communicate, here, the words repeat too many selfish lusts. Where is there a purer language?

Waterloo, and Lodi at one time, seemed a page on which one could write honestly; but we are soon disabused of that, at the beginning of the novel: the emperor has fled and corruption is now more plebian: "One could be informed on for less" (Rouge et Noir). The characters seem not to know their own minds, swaying with the verbal currents. They speak for the sake of responding to whatever sarcasm last spoken. It is a society too sophisticated to want to communicate—only in America, with no opera, do they do that—man was given the power of speech in order to hide his true thoughts, as the Eighteenth century said. As has often been noted, Stendhal is presenting and understanding the Nineteenth century in the words and mental habits of the previous one. A break, an empty space exists right there—and that is the lure of Stendhal, a sort of temporal intertextuality.

Fabrice's relations with women seem to repeat those of the Rouge. There is the loving relation with the older woman, here his aunt, and the enticement of the younger one, here his jailor's daughter. In both cases the relationship seems to satisfy some perceived mental weakness; but then Italy is the land of indirect, hidden motives for this author. A country not one's own allows exotic motivations. Why Parma, after all, with no monastery? Parma is the space between character and character, between sign and meaning. There is something else in Parma, understood by readers, or perhaps something about fictional reality not understood, the life inside the print. It's too much; one needs to retire to one's tower to think it over for a year. There is a Hegelian search for self-consciousness, an opposition between the object and the desire for knowledge or possession of the object: "Self-consciousness presents itself here as the process in which this opposition is removed, and oneness or identity with itself is established." (Hegel: The Essential Writings, 65) ...

Some people look for virtue, morality in politics; but the personalities here are not possessed by the urge to "do good":

Le comte n'avait pas de vertu; l'on peut même ajouter que ce que les libéraux entendent par vertu (chercher le bonheur du plus grand nombre) lui semblait une duperie; il se croyait obligé à chercher avant tout le bonheur du comte Mosca della Rovere; mais il était plein d'honneur . . .  
 .(Chapter sixteen)

The Conte is not a Puritan, he does not owe the world salvation. He is natural, honest, straightforward, selfish yet generous. This obvious in Parma, but hard to understand in the strange land of America. Why? Why don't the words seem correct? It may be because the Conte and his readers have heard so many words, experienced so many revolutions, that any moral force passes them by. "The greatest number" doesn't exist as a moral problem, they are simply a population statistic.

It is of course an Aristocratic society Stendhal favored, the elite of "carriers ouvertes aux talents". He is as amazed by democracy as Tocqueville. Italy is of course a relief, if imaginary, from any Liberalism in France. It is a war of centuries again: between Eighteenth and Nineteenth century lexemes are the Napoleonic decades, now lost. An intertext, a social mood, would explain both, but it no longer exists. So there is nothing to believe in but—oneself, as the Conte says. Is there a sense of fear, democracy ruining civilized discourse? The *Chartreuse* is almost a handbook of the previous century's cynicism, a continuation of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. It's nostalgic, in that sense, therefore romantic. *Madame Bovary* is not nostalgic; it is at one with its century, for all its contempt therefore. The *Chartreuse* fights with its world, or imagined world, then turns on itself, ends. (Apparently the editor, Colombe, wanted no continuation, had enough and wished it shortened.) The novelistic world does not continue on after the book closes; there is no epilogue. The point has been made, admitted, suffered. The curtain closes.

It is a Mozartian opera buffa, basically comic, a little serious, but not to trouble us. Conte Mosca, in love with the Duchessa Sanseverina, stumbles, recovers,

Le comte, qui avait pris tout à fait le ton d'un homme d'affaires, essaya de découvrir, en discutant avec la duchesse, quel pouvait avoir été le jour de l'enlèvement à Bologne. Il s'aperçut alors seulement, lui qui avait ordinairement tant de tact, que c'était là le ton qu'il fallait prendre. Ces détails intéressaient la malheureuse femme et semblaient la distraire un peu.

For the Duchessa, in love with Fabrice, all is business with the Conte. It is not the relationship he would wish, but he must accept it. Is this Stendhal's relation to his century, business for lack of passion? But the novel is a love story. Stendhal is both Mosca and Fabrice. Relations are emptied so that structure remains, triangular desire which becomes desire for nothing, sleep. Fabrice cannot have Sanseveria or Clelia; he is condemned to be in between, to give messages at a distance but never to touch. The women are text, reduced to desire, and the context evaporates. There is nothing in between the two extremes. There is nothing outside the text, and no connection within it. But it takes hundreds of pages to find this out.

Fabrice était tellement amoureux, la plus simple expression de la volonté de Clélia le plongeait dans une telle crainte, que même cette étrange communication ne fut point pour lui la certitude d'être aimé. (Chapter twenty)  
 Politics are always in the shadow of the Napoleonic past,

\_ En Espagne, sous le général Saint-Cyr, j'affrontais des coups de fusil pour arriver à la croix et ensuite à un peu de gloire, maintenant je m'habille comme un personnage de comédie pour gagner un grand état de maison et quelques milliers de francs. Une fois entré dans cette sorte de jeu d'échecs, choqué des insolences de mes supérieurs, j'ai voulu occuper une des premières places; j'y suis arrive...

*The present is emotionally drained, empty of ambition or purpose. There are uniforms, representing no glory.* By 1838 small states like Parma (or Modena, Stendhal's model) are clearly about to be swallowed in a larger union. Frenetic court activity takes place to avoid this process. Parma is an excuse for performing an Eighteenth century opera. The two fields of battle, love and politics, conflict with each other, success in one is failure in the other: this is what arriving consists of. The fortunes of one in both fields swing widely, like the stock market. What a career! Hard to make a satisfying success when the ground is shifting under your feet. You are playing two games at once, from one board to another. It has something of Hesse's *Glasperlenspiel*, but here the games cause interference, cancel each other. There are too many dimensions. Talk talk talk and nothing of consequence happens. Socially also: in the *Rouge* there is a progression of settings, lower to upper class. Here there is no class development. Fabrice is an aristocrat from start to finish. Though we may say he matures psychologically in his tower, in terms of power he does not, cannot grow. Perhaps his class has always imprisoned him. His son: Julien's child will surely be protected; Sandrino here dies aged one. There are no more installments. The show is cancelled. .. The jail: why do the heroes embrace the jail? Why do they end there? Not for crimes, but as self-punishment—

also as an authorial convenience. Jail is protection, liberty, not punishment. One befriends the jailer Grillo, one sequin per day, and life and love proceed calmly. The jail is the interesting part of the city. It's a living room, a study, a refuge for sensitive souls. It's where the good people find themselves. Prisons are made for escaping, and the signals and escape plans seem formulaic: "Je n'étais nullement troublé, ajoutait-il, il me semblait que j'accomplissais une cérémonie." (Chapter 22) The details of the escape are too obvious,

Le fidèle Bruno, avec une escouade de gens de police dévoués au comte, était en réserve à deux cents pas; le comte lui-même était caché dans une petite maison tout près du lieu où la duchesse attendait. (Chapter twenty-two)

But Fabrice regrets leaving, and wants to escape back to the tower (three hundred feet high—descended with a cord smuggled in!). The outside is the inside, in his mental state. The signs do not signify.

Movement around Italy seems to be juggling names, toys taken from a box. Stendhal reinvents Italy to his own convenience, writing in Paris and pouring out Italy as an exotic sauce. Ferrante Palla, poet and highwayman, and the loyal Ludovico arrange everything. It is a satire on the picaresque, several steps removed from reality. The realism is in the author's attitude, his claim that no one in this dream world believes there is any other world, and so allows the true cynicism to show through. In a backhanded way this lie, this dissociation, is the truth. That's what the readers had to wait a hundred years to recognize. Real politics is a burlesque, a comedy of the elite.

... Despotism, perhaps worse in a small state, becomes a family matter: The Duchessa says, "De loin nous ne nous faisons pas d'idée de ce que c'est que l'autorité d'un despote qui connaît de vue tous ses sujets." (Chapter sixteen) She as Fabrice's mother—more than mother—Conte Mosca as his father, both looking after him. Clelia is the unattainable beloved—he in the high tower, not she. Gina also mothers the young Prince Ernesto V as he acts in a play within the play. They all talk of a constitution as a catastrophe. It would propel them from the Eighteenth century to the Nineteenth. And these very gymnastics, acted on a stage of thin air, are what lead the characters into the Twentieth century, the Theater of the Absurd. The more talk the less communication; they talk past each other, monologues of self-appreciation. It is quite a frenzy, alight-hearted *commedia dell'arte*, a Frenchman's view of Italy. This is the other, alien country, strange manners among the natives. What an escape from bourgeois France! "Je croirais assez que le bonheur immoral qu'on trouve à se venger en Italie tient à la force d'imagination de ce peuple; les gens des autres pays ne pardonnent pas à proprement parler, ils oublient." (Chapter twenty-one) Is this what Julien dreamed of, aristocratic birth, no crass, grasping bourgeoisie. Politics with no press to apologize and lie to, a tempest in a teapot. "Comme tous les partis qui ne sont point au pouvoir, le parti Raversi n'était pas fort uni. Le chevalier Riscara détestait le fiscal Rassi qu'il accusait de lui avoir fait perdre un procès important dans lequel, à la vérité, lui Riscara avait tort. ... le prince ne pouvait se passer d'un jurisconsulte habile, et Rassi avait fait exiler comme libéraux un juge et un avocat, les seuls hommes du pays qui eussent pu prendre sa place." (Chapter 20) It is precisely in this artificiality, because this is no real nation and no real people, that the novel's greatness lies. We need not seek footnoted data. We are free and clear of reference and can follow the *jouissance* of word and relationship. The interest is in lack of connection to any indicated, limiting signifier. We are in the realm of pure grammar, with no illocutionary consequence.

After the Empire ends, politics is trivial. Revolutions just stir up the pot of courtiers; the working class as class is not part of Stendhal's world. There are no groups, only exotic, corrupt individuals, Rassis, Gilettis. This is not the observed world of Balzac or the engineered one of Flaubert; this is the world of the serious romance, the adult fairy tale, a pastoral, a product of late civilization. The Happy Few can take it in. Happiness here perhaps consists in being above the battle, *nil admirari*, and of course being somewhat rich. The audience is socially disembodied, floating over the world, not tied down to time and place, mentally. The Happy Few are not bothered by events, neither annoyed nor involved. They read about the world, and shrug it off. The characters here are so well connected and privileged! But the reader can identify with them and be one of them, not limited by money-centered ties for the moment, sensible, free. The novel defines that freedom—but it is too free—one cannot live on air forever. The character have "passions" which are roles, depending on fashion. The narrator, a "historian", does not share them.

Pourquoi l'historien qui suit fidèlement les moindres détails du récit qu'on lui a fait serait-il coupable? Est-ce sa faute si les personnages, séduits par des passions qu'il ne partage point, malheureusement pour lui, tombent dans des actions profondément immorales? Il est vrai que des choses de cette sorte ne se font plus dans un pays où l'unique passion survivante à toutes les autres est l'argent, moyen de vanité. (Chapter six)

The author has warned us in a Preface that we must make allowance for the characters being Italian, and for the fact that he has not altered their sins of passion, unlike those of the French. (Signet, vii) But it is an imagined Italy, Oz, the utopia of Arrigo Beyle, Milanese. What we want of Italy is loyal servants, brilliant aristocratic conversationalists. The landscape does not greatly matter, though we hear much of the Lombardy lakes

as places of retreat, and towers certainly matter. As the author had, apparently, 170 pseudonyms, so no one takes responsibility for this invented country of pseudonymous monarchies. Nor do physical limitations hamper them, as they scurry hundreds of miles from North to south and climb and descend their fortresses.

How do characters, players, choose to act? The preferred choice is caprice, or no decision, only mood. The lack of clear motivation leads to intertwined intrigue as the courtier's occupation. Despite the freedom of physical movement, this ingrown world much resembles *The Tale of Genji*, where we also follow the scandals of the aristocratic hero, bound by conventional intercourse. You can't be misled into twisting ideals; there is no moral fiber to depend on:

Huit jours après sa visite à la forteresse, la duchesse reçut une lettre de commutation de peine, signée du prince et du ministre, avec le nom en blanc. Le prisonnier dont elle écrivait le nom devait obtenir la restitution de ses biens, et la permission d'aller passer en Amérique le reste de ses jours. La duchesse écrivit le nom de l'homme qui lui avait parlé. Par malheur cet homme se trouva un demi-coquin, une âme faible; c'était sur ses aveux que le fameux Ferrante Palla avait été condamné à mort. (Chapter six)

Clelia's oath not to see Fabrice (although embracing him in darkness is acceptable) again creates the gap, the presence not perceived. Despite the physical and emotional connection, one could say the two never connect. The oath is an old operatic convention, but here it is one more declaration of postponement, of incomplete perception. The intention can never arrive at being. Fabrice and Clelia and their child, Sandrino, are no sooner together in her husband's absence than all three die, soon after. It is as if the author is passing a Macchiavellian judgment on the personal and power politics, the game all are playing. "La politique dans une oeuvre littéraire c'est un coup de pistolet au milieu d'un concert' quelque chose de grossier et auquel pourtant il n'est pas possible de refuser son attention." (Chapter twenty-three) It's a losing game. Mosca alone remains in Parma, with Ernesto V:

Les prisons de Parme étaient vides, le comte immensément riche, Ernest V adoré de ses sujets qui comparaient son gouvernement à celui des grands-ducs de Toscane.

### **To The Happy Few (Chapter twenty-eight)**

(Note: The phrase, in English, is probably drawn from Shakespeare, Henry V: "We few, we happy few . . .") Stendhal notes that the Few are "les seuls qui sentent les arts", those who "à moins de trente-cinq ans". Antoine Adam, 702. The characters move back and forth over a limited number of spaces. Clelia in her aviary, Clelia on the point of escaping to a convent-- becomes repetitive, but these are necessary attitudes in this strategy game, chess pieces trapped in position, contemplating potential moves. Fabrice has "certain rights over her", she must "fly to the convent": even given the rules of behavior in Parma, there is again a gap between humanity and mechanical response. Could this have been a libretto for Verdi or Bellini? There is a certain joy in the cynicism and even sorrow; it's exciting; what will happen next in this merry-go-round of power plays? How many fine-sounding Italian names are spicing this gourmet dinner! Between scenes of movement there are pastoral refuges near his family home above Lake Como, The author intended another volume, but editorial pressure ended the performance.

Plusieurs barques se chargèrent de paysans retournant à Bellagio, à Menaggio et autres villages situés sur le lac; Fabrice distinguait le bruit de chaque coup de rame: ce détail si simple le ravissait en extase; sa joie actuelle se composait de tout le malheur, de toute la gêne qu'il trouvait dans la vie compliquée des cours. Qu'il eût été heureux en ce moment de faire une lieue sur ce beau lac si tranquille et qui réfléchissait si bien la profondeur des cieux! (Chapter nine)

But his tree is at Belgirate on Lake Maggiore, and his escape to Lugano is in Switzerland. He travels back frequently but his life is not there. Parma is fate. What can The Happy Few understand from this libretto? Light heartedness is the essence in approaching the world among readers and actors here.

. . . je me souviens que ce genre d'admiration commença à son retour de Waterloo. Il était encore enfant, malgré ses dix-sept ans; sa grande inquiétude était de savoir si réellement il avait assisté à la bataille et dans le cas du oui, s'il pouvait dire s'être battu lui qui n'avait marché à l'attaque d'aucune batterie ni d'aucune colonne ennemie. (Chapter sixteen)

Despite legal difficulties Fabrice is not really despairing; he's too busy inventing schemes. This is Stendhal's view of the pleasures of Italy, in contrast to the cold North: everything flows without consequence or conscience. Fabrice is caught in the dungeons of a police state; but the higher he climbs in the tower the closer he is to Clelia (as in *Pere Goriot*, the upper chambers are the more virtuous). It is an escape from seriousness; all is play.

It's a utopia, providing one doesn't attempt to link event with consequence. It is the freeplay of the signifier. The novel provides an intertext for the reader's boredom or frustration with the world. With no required connection, the imagined possibilities of action flourish. We read to be removed from prosaic responsibilities. Fabrice has a plethora of religious sinecures, archbishop, monsignore; apparently these can be had, picked at random from one's friends—and each without responsibility or tasks, whatever the faithful may think. It seems almost like academic degrees by return mail, for the most part, and no one has any compunctions or any interest in faith or ceremony. But in Bologna, after being wounded by Giletti, Fabrice throws himself on his knees,

Il se jeta à genoux, et remercia Dieu avec effusion de la protection évidente dont il était entouré depuis qu'il avait eu le malheur de tuer Giletti. . . . Fabrice demandait pardon à Dieu de beaucoup de choses, mais, ce qui est remarquable, c'est qu'il ne lui vint pas à l'esprit de compter parmi ses fautes le projet de devenir archevêque, uniquement parce que le comte Mosca était premier ministre, et trouvait cette place et la grande existence qu'elle donne convenables pour le neveu de la duchesse. . . . "C'est un miracle, Seigneur, s'écriait-il les larmes aux yeux: quand vous avez vu mon âme disposée à rentrer dans le devoir, vous m'avez sauvé. Grand Dieu! il est possible qu'un jour je sois tué dans quelque affaire: souvenez-vous au moment de ma mort de l'état où mon âme se trouve en ce moment." Ce fut avec les transports de la joie la plus vive que Fabrice récita de nouveau les sept psaumes de la pénitence. (Chapter twelve)

It is genuine for the moment, with reservations. It is what an Italian hero is supposed to do. It is a scene from *Tosca*. What an artificial country; there are no real lives here, only names. No one suffers mental anguish, Russian style. Fabrice does not reject his appointments, and the mood does not continue. Fabrice is generous to a poor person but soon has the "canaille" swarming about him. His aloofness is justified. The unconscious is absent; it would confuse the simplicity of the linguistic non-relationship of signifier and signified.

We are in and out of the court of Parma, in office and dismissed, dizzily: of course this dance of ceremonial gestures is the essence of diplomacy, which the young Beyle observed in the Napoleonic administration; the novel continues the diplomatic practice. Everyone carefully cultivates everyone else, asks favors, calls in past debts. They are all civil servants, all in the same administration in a sense. They retire, they receive pensions. However temporarily enemies, they are all fellow workers, or conspirators, putting on the show of Parma. At the end the court is happy, all pensioned, though the main characters have all died peacefully. The puppets are put back, we don't need them any more. ..

... ..  
Diplomacy is contact, but the point of diplomacy is to avoid contact, not be tied down, not held to a decision or promise. Diplomacy suggests permanence, in some future, but never provides it, to keep the recipient of contact hoping, paying. The icon never rewards with a pot of gold. "A nation has no friends, only allies", De Gaulle reminded us. So, nothing is ever settled in the *Chartreuse*. The unsettlement is the life of the enterprise; settlement, agreement is the death of the characters and the end of the narration. "A diplomat is someone hired to lie for his country" we hear. Diplomacy is the fictional argument which keeps a story going. Duchessa, Prince: they negotiate, from delicately hinted positions of power. Suspicion: no one trusts, everyone manipulates. (It sounds like a business office.) People don't explain, they bargain. There are no conversations, for the most part; there are speeches. There is advice. It is understood their words have weight, backed by money, servants, law carried in their own hands—we are still in the Middle Ages here, the unrestrained aristocracy in their baronies. The diplomacy is also internal, within the family. Little is said about the other states of Italy, or Europe, except fear that arrest by the Austrian police in Lombardo-Venetia will lead to the Spielberg. (But even that might have led Fabrice to further love affairs with a fair Bohemian.) Life is diplomacy, every move is a juggling of possibilities and dangers, and that's the attraction of this life, this book—mostly for those under thirty-five as Stendhal notes above. Fabrice is exhausted before he reaches this age limit, so he leaves the community of the Happy Few: the alternative is retirement from life; what else is there? But the lesson may be incomplete. The novel is truncated because the third volume, Fabrice in the *Chartreuse*, was discouraged by the publisher and never written. Also an introductory section providing the family background of the Del Dongos (loosely based on the Farnese family) was written but not included. We are limited; we have a snapshot of a quarreling family. We theorize upon that.

The Fausta episode, full of *bravi* and *buli* and torches: it is a show for the people of Parma. And there is a duel with Conte M..., who thinks Fabrice is the young Prince. Stendhal has been seeing Hollywood film, or Milan operas. The extras are killed without remorse. It did not happen, the action did not really take place. The servants are cardboard, pushed over as spectacle for the camera. These escapades are to be projected on a screen, they are not to be encountered on the streets by us. The words dazzle, but can't connect to a physical world. Officials, bureaucrats are also expendable, kickable. When the Conte Mosca pursues the Duchessa -- he who had commanded a division in Napoleon's Italian army -- he loses his ruthlessness, even skill. He enjoys ridiculing the official, Rassi: ". . . et si Fabrice meurt en prison, vous ne serez pas baron, mais vous serez peut-être poignardé. . . . Cela dit, Rassi s'enfuit; il en avait été quitte pour un coup de règle bien appliqué et cinq ou six coups de pied." (Chapters

seventeen, twenty) There must be a comic servant who is indispensable, a sort of Figaro. The confrontations are exaggerated, comic. If you're not a carefree aristocrat, you should leave the stage. As the leading characters look down on the others, we with Stendhal look down on them, puppets to be put back in the box, as in Thackeray. There is something of a stream of consciousness effect as we move from interior monologue to authorial comment,

“Il [the jailor Grillo] répondait aux dernières questions de celui-ci sur la sérénade, lorsqu'il eut l'étourderie d'ajouter

- On pense qu'il l'épousera bientôt.

On peut juger de l'effet de ce simple mot sur Fabrice. (Chapter twenty)

We must be guided by the author, lest we lose the effect of a phrase. Nothing should be missed of the repartee and mental set of the characters. This reflects Stendhal's earlier interest in classical theater, where each line must be carefully delivered and appreciated. Stendhal is the director. All is voiced, expanded, yet all is shrunk to the miniature of Parma.

The *Chartreuse* is huge, covering many years and much of Northern Italy; yet the concept fits in a nutshell, a classical stage. The characters dance around each other until the editor decided there was enough for several volumes. From Waterloo on we with them are at a loss if we try to find realistic meaning; we are lost on the battlefield, "Ah! m'y voilà donc enfin au feu! se dit-il. J'ai vu le feu! se répétait-il avec satisfaction. Me voici un vrai militaire.' . . . il n'y comprenait rien du tout. . . . 'Ai-je réellement assisté à une bataille?' Il lui semblait que oui, et il eût été au comble du bonheur s'il en eût été certain." (chapt 3, 4) Stendhal also looked down on the field of Bautzen in 1813 and saw only smoke. ". . . tout ce que on peut voir a une bataille, c'est-a-dire rien." (cited by Adam, 661) All is a battlefield. It is amazingly intricate, but it dissolves into smoke. The details of a world are taken apart and become play, they show the richness of language and of a society dissolved into language. What truth, what fun, and what emptiness. We are punished for not connecting mind and matter, brilliant repartee with practical accomplishment. But it is an exciting journey. It is a tour to the land of the intellectuals, the ideal courtiers. Stendhal said it would take a hundred years for his work to be appreciated, till 1930. Did it take that long for the readers to realize, accept these relationships as typical of politics or any communication? Is this the definition of human society? "Plus on admire Stendhal et plus on est intelligent." (Suarez, cited in Turnell) The author has not provided anything else, and there is nothing in his century or the following ones. Like Flaubert he demonstrates nothingness at the center of the novel. The more you write the more you demonstrate the impossibility of writing, in so far as the activity wishes to found a solution to the problem of how to beat the world at its own game. He keeps trying, but always resigns the game before mate is called. The examples ultimately reveal the world. The world is a mystery beyond writing. There can be no realism: that is the lesson. It is not Emma who commits suicide or Fabrice who resigns himself, it is the novel which self-destructs. The authors recognize it has tried to do too much. And the readers expected too much from it, as the respective heroes, all readers, demonstrate. One cannot push one's private fancy too far. The world will have its revenge, though it is more depressing than the materialism of Balzac where money is its own answer...

A generation after Napoleonic action, with Flaubert who does not mention him, commercial society has no room for dreamers. Language has no room for metaphoric indulgence. Expression and character are a joke. Frederic Moreau is a non-character, center of a *Bildungsroman* which does not build, grow. It deconstructs existence. It produces a literary nausea. After romanticism and pessimism pass, what have we? Politics? That makes us so small. Politics is a personality disorder. You can't argue with it, but you don't have to accept it. Let's stay out of the madhouse. The Flaubertian novel has decided the novel is a mistake, we have mistaken the world for the real. So the author writes not to write, cancelling the story. The message comes back to the sender, undeliverable. But it was fun creating the world labyrinth.

Prison is fun here; Fabrice invents his life. Fiction is strange because it is fiction, it doesn't fiction. The less we break through to what we imagine, the message, the meaning—it fails to describe anything real. The more novel we have, the less we find the world, which is also a fiction; and this novel, these novels prove it. Reading the novel is for us "c'est la ce que nous avons eu de meilleur", because we are distracted from our loss of an answer. Since the novel connected to nothing, the best time never existed. The novel, a social kaleidoscope, finally encourages solipsism. We retreat to a monastery as well as the hero, in our own Parma, in our own novel.

Too much action blurs, cancels itself. The exciting sequence becomes tiresome, hard to follow, and we are left with flashes of wit, language pictures. Words connect only to other words, they remain empty of content. The world disappears, there are reflex movements of the eye. What do we see—empty gestures, phantoms. The author's dispassionate control negates the reason for being of the novel. The novel ends by beginning. We accept the emptiness of communication with a date, "Le 15 mai 1796 le Général Bonaparte fit son entrée dans Milan...." But here we are in the present, crossing nothing, moving line by line to avoid boredom, our twin. Something other than we must be doing the reading, something is following the gestures. We watch the ceremony from a distance. We

are kibitzers at a poker match, guessing who will defeat the opponent. Will the hero win? the author? The reader? My guess is the author comes out best, but even he is not satisfied. Novels were invented to forget loss, a sentimental education for readers, an escape to a Chartreuse. Both the *Chartreuse* and the *Education* begin with dates, one historic and the other personal; both end with a retreat into subjectivity. Is this the effect all art attempts? An alienation from art not towards realism but towards more art, a sort of philosophic position, a sort of stoicism? Instead of providing exciting pleasures this art of stories leads us to a sort of peace. We recognize the planets revolve without our help. ... Reading is a cultural disease perhaps being phased out by the image. Jameson considers this collapse the result of the fading of the bourgeois ego: "The category of the literary 'character' is an ideological one whose function lies in reinforcing that philosophy of the subject itself – with its substantive unity as a self or ego – which is a fundamental component of bourgeois individualism." (*The Ideology of Form*), 46) These authors prepared the way by emptying out the content of the reading. We knew we should not believe what we read, so we could stop reading. The print medium and its logic fades out with the loss of individual self-sufficiency. These novels fascinate as a view into an era of the decline and fall of personal courage and action. They show the end of a kind of reading which expects meaningful conclusion. The novel had taken on the burden of moral guidance, but it now surrenders that role. The pattern turns in on itself and reminds us that these are only stories, delight around the campfire, Sheherazade postponing boredom. That limitation is an opening to the wisdom of the writer. Here we enter, sitting before him, ready for the performance.

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